

***Walanbaa warramildanha: Standing their ground:
Honouring Aboriginal standpoint to effect teachers'
professional knowledge.***

by

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Statement of Originality

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the *Copyright Act 1968*.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kevin Lowe', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Kevin Lowe

17 April 2016

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Walanbaa warramildanha

Maaru Yanaya

Yaluu Ngali Ngamilay

(go well until I see you again)

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List of Abbreviations

ACARA	Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACER	Australian Council for Educational Research
ACLO	Aboriginal Education Liaison Officer
AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
AEO	Aboriginal Education Officer
AERT	Aboriginal Education Resource Teacher
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
BoS	NSW Board of Studies
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
DEC	NSW Department of Education and Communities
DET	NSW Department of Education and Training
IYLP	Indigenous Youth Leadership Program
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NEAF	National Ethics Approval Form
SCRGSP	Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision
SERAP	State Education Research Approval Process
SES	Socio-economic Status
VAEAI	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated

Abstract

Aboriginal Student education achievement in New South Wales languishes at the same levels it has for decades and is seen as one of the greatest challenges for educational policy and practice. One element of this problem relates to the significant social and cultural disconnect between Aboriginal students, their communities and teachers. Teachers have too often been appointed to schools without the requisite professional knowledge that would allow them to make authentic learning and cultural connections to these students.

The purpose of the research is to gain an understanding of the nature and dynamics of community and school engagement in four sites with high proportions of Aboriginal students. It investigates the potential for positive interactions between Aboriginal people and schools and teachers' capacity to develop authentic pedagogic practices that is responsive to their Aboriginal students' needs and aspirations. It further investigates how these Aboriginal communities articulate their interactions with schools and teachers and how they in turn they are presented within school and teacher discourse.

The thesis unpacks Aboriginal community standpoint and the initiation of purposeful collaboration at the cultural interface. The research questions the nature of these relationships and in particular how Aboriginal stakeholders have supported teachers to build their knowledge about Aboriginal students and their community.

This research uses a critical Indigenous ethnographic methodology through interviews with Aboriginal community members, teachers and principals in four regional, rural and remote locations in NSW.

Furthermore, it was seen that in each school site, there was varying evidence of deep and authentic engagement between Aboriginal people and a number of teachers. It was seen that in these instances, there was a shift in some teachers' professional knowledge, and teacher engagement. Finally, the research identified that Aboriginal parents and community members have a strong commitment to being party to the development of authentic collaborations with schools. This research argues that teachers need to honour, understand and actively reflect on community history, contexts and aspirations to develop the skills and knowledge to address the particular socio-cultural and educational needs of Aboriginal students.

Chapter 1: Realising messages from marginal voices

1.1 Journeys into the landscape

Early in 2000, after 25 years as a classroom teacher I commenced working for the NSW Board of Studies. The twelve years that followed became the most productive of my working life, as the team managed the rewriting of curriculum, worked with school jurisdictions to support schools, and collaborated with teachers, schools and Aboriginal communities in the implementation of contextualised and responsive programs. These many activities caused me to think carefully about the nature of this partnership, of how to empower teachers to take up new pedagogic practices and to effect authentic collaborations in the fraught and contested spaces that sits between schools and Aboriginal communities.

It was the last issue that was the most challenging as it uncovered the best and worst in these relationships. Within the pervasiveness of cultural indifference exhibited by many teachers, there were a small number who were able to bring a depth of social critique and understanding to the role of change agent, mentor, collaborator and learner. The job also highlighted to many of those involved, the deep and ongoing impact of social injustice on community trauma and the endemic level of Aboriginal student disengagement. In one of the many meetings had with Aboriginal families and teachers, John, a gifted Ngiyampaa language teacher rose and spoke as a community member to the school staff. He said:

John: ...you've got to accept Aboriginal people are people who have a history - who are people who are reflections of that history, who will project that history, who are struggling to understand that history. Teachers and the school can't come here with an ideology of their understanding and then call it a true history. Instead they must listen to the Aboriginal people who have been through it, who struggle to understand it and who are looking to project some way forward into the future for themselves and their children that they send to school, because they want their kids to get a better education. (2008)

John spoke of issues that were both unique and universal to the Indigenous experiences of living as dispossessed people on their Country, and of the community struggle to live with the legacy of this history. He identified how these experiences impacted on families, shaping their views and their capacity to interact with those

whom they recognise as having little interest in these experiences. This was an evocation of his and his community's standpoint, of moving towards a critical understanding of their lived experiences and as Nakata (2007a) argued, looking for ways to decolonise their minds of the influences that generations of schooling had sought to assimilate and subjugate

1.2 Purpose of the study

John's comments could have been spoken in a hundred locations for they articulate the very issues that have driven community resistance to the structures of schooling, the substance of classroom content and pedagogic practices. Aboriginal people have waited, often too patiently, while governments have scurried to enact another plan, and then deliver it to the same schools, with the same staff and with unchanged curriculum and classroom practices. While complete within itself, this research is framed as part of a larger project, the aim of which is to rethink the delivery of education to these students in these communities.

This research has been structured around listening to Aboriginal voices, legitimating their viewpoints, and seeing their potency in being able to effect substantive institutional and professional change with those that have for too long sublimated them and their children.

The primary purpose of this research project is to assist in understanding the nature and dynamics of community and school engagement. In particular it is to seek to understand the capacity of teachers to develop authentic pedagogic practices that are simultaneously responsive to the socio-cultural needs and aspirations of Aboriginal students and support student capacity through the implementation of quality education programs (Nakata, 2007b). The study will look to:

- Exemplify the depth of socio-cultural dissonance and the lack of understanding of the ongoing impact of the colonising experiences in each community, their affect on the formation of localised standpoints and how these impact on community responses to schools.
- Demonstrate the generosity of Aboriginal people to engage and share family and community histories and cultural knowledge with those who have shown an authentic interest in seeking out such knowledge.
- Demonstrate that successful cultural engagement rests on its authenticity – in particular, in its conceptualisation, genuineness and cross-cultural support. As

such, the research seeks to exemplify how successful community and school engagement must be purposeful in its focus and be built on trust, respect, reciprocity and genuine cultural understanding.

- Establish engagement that is two-way, providing communities with a direct voice to advocate on the delivery of education to their children.
- Provide evidence that authentic engagement is built on acknowledging the standpoint positions of Aboriginal communities and that the processes embedded in reaching this understanding has in it a lasting impact on teachers' pedagogic practices.

The issues underlying the chronic underachievement of Aboriginal students are significant, with many being beyond the reach of this research. This study has as its primary purpose to identify and understand the issues that surround the gulf that is at the heart of the socio-cultural dissonance between schools and Aboriginal families. This issue has come to be one of three key elements of control that is exerted over Indigenous people. The second being this nations' refusal to acknowledge the impact of the denial of the sovereign status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, while the third is the dispossession of people from their ancestral lands and its ever-present impact on Indigenous communities (Nakata, 2007b). This research pivots on exploring the consequence of colonial blindness to cultural knowledge and its importance to Aboriginal community identity, wellbeing and resilience.

The possibilities of re-structuring the education opportunities for Aboriginal students around a culturally responsive pedagogy are key to this research. It specifically seeks to explore teachers' understanding of Aboriginal peoples' connection to culture, its impact on community wellbeing, and a resultant willingness to engage with the state (Garcia, Aris, Murri, & Serna, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Sleeter, 2012). Further, the study looks at the dynamics of community and school engagement and in particular, its broad affect on teacher understanding about the local Aboriginal communities in which they work and the potential impact this has new knowledge has on teachers' pedagogic responsiveness (R. Reynolds, 2005). The five key elements central to understanding these associated problems are:

- The significant level of socio-cultural disconnection between teachers and Aboriginal people which is manifested in a lack of knowledge, low expectations, embedded racial stereotyping and even racism (Zubrick et al., 2010)

- The level of cultural dissonance that impacts directly on the everyday decisions that teachers make about teaching their students (Gay, 2000)
- The low level of parent engagement with schools. Whilst parental involvement has been shown to positively influence student engagement in school (McInerney, 2009; Nelson & Guerra, 2014), teachers, schools and educational jurisdictions have either ignored or been unable to engage Aboriginal families. Often parental responses have been interpreted as resistance and rejection of schooling itself (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008).
- That schools need to reconceptualise the notion of collaboration such that it is based on authentic two-way engagement and not as collaborators in the delivery of programs that have little or no consideration of Aboriginal students' broader social and cultural needs (Biddulph, Biddulph, & Biddulph, 2003).
- That parents from marginalised communities are more likely to be critical, if they associate schools and /or teachers as being a primary source of their child's poor educational experiences. This is more likely when inter-generationally groups of students have experienced ongoing moments of discrimination, racism or exclusion (Barton, Drake, Perez, St. Louis, & George, 2004; J. Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011).

1.3 So there's a problem in Aboriginal education?

By 1989, national and state governments finally recognised that Indigenous students had consistently the worst educational outcomes of any group in the country and that strategies needed to be put in place to address this educational disparity (De Graaf, De Graff, & Kraaykamp, 2000; Demmert, 2011; Pewewardy & Hammer, 2003). Promises and targets flowed from the development of this and subsequent policies, commencing with the first *National Strategy 1996-2002* (Department of Education Training and Youth Affairs, 1996) which then cascaded into the *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005 – 2008* (AESOC, 2006) and finally through the *National partnership agreements and action plans* signed with states and territorial jurisdictions in 2007 (Council of Australian Governments, 2007). Whilst each iteration of these plans promised to ensure educational jurisdictions would be accountable to take action in closing the achievement gap of Aboriginal students, student assessment data continued to demonstrate that the gap in achievement remained as large as ever.

Aboriginal student achievement in NSW schools has tended to follow these national trends. Recently reported achievement in foundational literacy and numeracy in 2008 and 2014 was shown to match those found in the NSW review in 2004 on Aboriginal education. Even after the implementation of a wide range of specific learning interventions, later reviews of student literacy achievement by the NSW Auditor General in 2008 and again in 2012 found there was:

.. no evidence to support the proposition that either closing the gap or halving the gap [in literacy] is likely to be attainable.

Notwithstanding gains and losses at individual schools, there has been no significant improvement in the overall performance of Aboriginal students in national and state tests – either in terms of absolute performance, or in terms of the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. Despite efforts to close the gap, it has shown no signs of diminishing (Audit Office of New South Wales, 2012, p. 2)

The dimensions of these results are also to be found in ACARAs assessment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students NAPLAN results in 2009, when they noted:

The gaps between the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students attaining the national minimum standard for all year levels and domains ranged from 16.7 percentage points to 30.2 percentage points' (ACARA, 2009, p. 4).

Robins (2010) took up this point, when he argued that the lack of substantial change in achievement was demonstrative of a significant policy failure where increases in funding on Aboriginal education have not produced an upward trend in Aboriginal student achievement. One can only be left to argue that the inability of school systems to effect a change is as Robins suggests, a cause of policy failure and an unwillingness to consider other models of education that are responsive to students' long term socio-cultural and economic needs. These matters go beyond the implementation of one-off programs, or of laying the blame solely at the feet of pedagogically under-resourced and culturally ill-informed teachers. It is to this matter of teachers, their pedagogic practices and the education of Aboriginal students that I now briefly turn.

1.4 Significance of the study

The significance of this research is that it seeks to add to the field of knowledge about the value and purpose of community and school collaboration. The research questions are based on understanding the construct of this relationship and in particular how it could support teachers through informing and building their knowledge about their students and the wider Aboriginal community.

This is predicated on an assumption that authentic relationships have a capacity to affect teachers' assumed knowledge about Aboriginal students and their community's historical experiences of colonisation. It is suggested that this is an essential component of all schools' efforts to afford Aboriginal families a genuine role in working towards achieving educational parity with other students in schools.

A third point of its significance is that the research looks to demonstrate that Aboriginal families and communities have capacity and interest in working with schools in developing a genuine and contextual understanding of their histories and experiences. It must be understood that these narratives are conceptually entrenched in localised standpoint positions that explicitly impact parent's willingness to engage with schools. It is suggested that this understanding is critical in its capacity to affect teachers by building their knowledge about these people in these locations. Lastly, the significance of this research rests on its findings on the significance of community standpoint and of understanding the potential power vested in the cross-cultural negotiations and how these provide teachers and Aboriginal families with a capacity to construct meaningful interaction.

1.5 Research design

This research uses a critical Indigenous lens and is informed by the work of theorists such as Grande (2008, 2009), Russell Bishop (2012) and Linda Smith (2012), who have all drawn explicitly on the critical tradition when constructing an Indigenous research methodology. Similarly there are Indigenous researchers within the Australian landscape from whom I have elicited significant insight. These include Nakata (2007a, 2010), Martin (2008), Wilson (2008) and Rigney (1997) who each acknowledge the particular transformative potential of the critical paradigm in the development of their contextual and relationally situated research methodologies.

Each of these has informed my views of how this research should be undertaken. I have sought to understand the local, multilayered, complex narratives that unfold during this research. This complexity comes as a result of the manner in which their histories are understood, their experiences articulated and what emanates from their knowledge of Place, culture and language and their interaction with the teaching community (Morris, 1992).

It is the histories of the communities within each research site that provide a backdrop to my understanding of the nature and form of oppression of Aboriginal people and the actions undertaken in response. These actions were forged out of the individual and collected struggles of people as they laboured to maintain their dignity, identity and sense of being. Consequently these views, formed through a lived experience, provide both a focus and insight into what has been commonly referred to as the 'Aboriginal problem'. Pohlhaus (2002) suggests that these insights are not a product of mere observation or disinterested perspective on the world but are achieved by understanding one's experience through reflexive critique of the social order that has created these outcomes.

The elements of this methodology and methods are more fully explored in chapters 3 and 4. However in summary, this Critical Indigenous methodology has employed Critical Ethnography to provide an understanding of the people within these sites and their responses to both the external and internal forces that impact their lives. Linda Smith (2000, p. 228) described this Critical Indigenous methodology as a 'Localised Critical Theory where notions of critique, resistance, struggle and emancipation' can be discussed. This methodology has four distinct intersecting principles. These are

- That the research is of and about the Indigenous experience, and fundamentally grounded in community understanding of the colonised space they inhabit (Porsanger, 2004).
- That the methodology rests on a relational epistemology that emanates from an encompassing Indigenous ontology through which Aboriginal people view the world they inhabit and know (Chilisa, 2012; Shawn Wilson, 2001).
- That it rests on researcher responsibility and the interpersonal links that the researcher has with participant communities and families. Community endorsed protocols that facilitates these interactions (Saunders & Hill, 2007) underpins the research.

- That the research is critical in its intent to not only explain the nature of the concerns that exists between schools and Aboriginal families but also looks to find solutions that will empower stakeholders to meet the broad education needs of Aboriginal students.

The adoption of the Critical Indigenous methodology also has particular ramifications in the way in which the research data was to be analysed. Briefly these were that:

- The initial analysis of the research data used a critical framework is derived from Australian and international Indigenous and other critical literature on issues including colonialism, oppression, agency and resistance, Indigenous education, community engagement and teacher knowledge and change. An analysis of this material identified five broad themes that captured the nature of the oppression and the acts of agency and resistance in challenging colonial authority. Within these sites, the schooling of Aboriginal students was identified as a particular site of oppression. This broad framework was instrumental in developing the overarching structure for the thesis.
- Once the data was coded to these five themes, a grounded approach was applied within each discrete theme to develop a nuanced and unique framework from which to investigate the data within each chapter. This two-staged analysis ensured that the overall investigation was cognisant of both the wider socio-political environment that facilitated the development and maintenance of the hegemonic relationships between the state and these Aboriginal communities. It then enabled a second, highly contextualised analysis that now also examines the socio-cultural experiences of these diverse communities.

The research took place in four sites in western NSW with (4) school principals, (7) teachers, (10) Aboriginal educators and community members and (2) 'Other' non-Aboriginal staff. In total 23 participants were interviewed three times each over Terms 2 – 4 in 2012. The data were analysed using a critical framework developed out of the broader critical and Indigenous research literature and analysed using a coding matrix within NVivo

1.6 Research questions

The following questions are constructed to constrain the research to the particular issues at hand, focusing on understanding these Aboriginal communities and families, their perceptions of the schools that serve the educative needs of their children, the

interactions with teachers as agents of that system and the impact of these interactions on teachers' professional understanding. The primary question of this research is then:

- How do Aboriginal communities and schools establish and sustain authentic collaborative programs that address the long-term social, cultural and educational aspirations of Aboriginal people?

And three related sub-questions:

- What are the educational, social, cultural and educational aspirations of Aboriginal parents and communities for Aboriginal students?
- What are the critical elements that underpin the establishment and sustainability of successful Aboriginal parent and community, and school partnerships?
- What is the impact of authentic Aboriginal parent and community engagement with schools on teachers' professional knowledge?

These guiding sub-questions were developed to facilitate understanding of the deeply embedded disjuncture between schools, teachers and Aboriginal parents. Each of these sub-questions provides a point of analysis of elements embedded within this historically constructed relationship. In essence, the research focuses on this relationship, its elements and attributes and the affect that this relationship has had on teacher attitudes, beliefs and knowledge about Aboriginal students.

1.7 The road map

The following chapters are structured to progressively unfold the historical and contemporary experiences of these four Aboriginal communities of colonisation, dispossession and socio-economic and political marginalisation. These themes progressively unfold in this critical ethnographic study. Chapter 2 frames the study by providing a link between the key issues underpinning this research and the broader literature. This chapter discusses the complexities of an Indigenous community standpoint and its potential in staking out the challenges of these discursive landscapes. It then moves through an exploration of the theoretical underpinnings of school and community engagement; the establishment and impact of teachers' professional knowledge and its effect on teacher engagement and pedagogic practice; and finally to the issues of teacher change.

Chapter 3 provides an overview of the critical Indigenous research methodology and the positioning of the researcher within the methodology with reference to the relational interactions between the researcher and the three participant groups of principals, teachers and members of the Aboriginal community. This then leads to Chapter 4, which lays out the elements of a critical ethnographic study within a discussion of the research methods.

Chapter 5 is the first of five chapters that draw directly on the qualitative data. These chapters orientate the reader into each of the four discursive environments of these communities, sketching out their understanding and responses to the histories of colonisation, the politics of subversion, their acts of agency resistance and the interplay of the personalities of those who live out their lives in these location. Chapters 5 to 7 take the reader on a journey that traverses the lived experiences of these Aboriginal communities and how they have come to understand those policies of the state used to subjugate and/or assimilate them. The journey then moves to provide an understanding of how these communities have looked to first avoid and then challenge these efforts. In particular, Chapter 6 furnishes an insight into their own discursive responses of resistance and agency and also an emerging understanding of their discrete community standpoint positions.

Chapter 7 is structured to facilitate discussions on each of these four standpoint positions as they have emerged out of their histories, and how these are enacted within the cultural interface. It is then in Chapters 8 and 9 that we are able to view more closely how these four unique communities sought to construct their relationships with schools. At this point the messy environments of schools and community interaction can now be understood from each community perspective. What these chapters demonstrate is that despite previous histories of exclusion and disadvantage, communities have sought and sometimes found teachers who have genuinely endeavoured to relate with and learn from Aboriginal families. These relationships are put under the spotlight and through the conjoint narratives of teachers and community members that discuss these interactions often as turning points in their establishment and their impact. These are narratives that are powerful in themselves as evocations of authentic inter-personal relations, but even more so when seen in the light of parallel narratives of disingenuous or non-existent interaction.

Chapter 10 draws these four journeys together so as to enable an informed insight into the formation of community and school engagement and its capacity to inform teachers' professional knowledge about Aboriginal students, their families and wider community.

1.8 Overarching findings

This research has sought to better understand the dynamics of community and school engagement in schools with Aboriginal students. There was already a body of research that has previously provided a demonstration of the impacts of such interaction on student achievement and increased parental engagement. This research however, inverts the focus from discourses of community and student in capacity, to those that investigate teachers' limited understanding of the communities and the socio-cultural contexts in which they work.

These findings extend the literature by offering a detailed reading of standpoint as it pertains to understanding the establishment and articulation of an Aboriginal standpoint within the environments of these four research sites. The findings also further extend the understanding of community and school engagement by shifting the discourse from community capacity building to one that demonstrates that far from community incapacity, it is often the undercurrent of an unwillingness and / or lack of knowledge within school systems that needs challenging and building (Lowe, 2008a, 2011b). This debate explores from within the feminist proposition of relational standpoint and the particular insights and understanding that this brings to understanding the mechanisms of oppressive actions. Hill Collins' (1990) suggests that these actions are deeply embedded in the interlocking systems and structures of schooling, its policies, and the beliefs and values of those entrusted to manage these organisations.

Consequently, it is suggested that there are four key findings that have emerged out this research. These fall into five broad themes.

- That the unique histories and experiences Aboriginal community have deeply impacted on their understanding and experiences of schools and schooling. It is argued that community capacity to successfully negotiate their engagement with schools is clearly linked to their own conceptualised standpoint position. The research further highlighted that Aboriginal people have an acute appreciation of how agencies such as schools have exercised power and authority over them.

Memories and resistance to these events may affect responses to attempts to engage them in school (Brayboy, Castagno, & Maughan, 2007).

- That there were a small number of teachers identified from within the research narratives as having affected close relationships with Aboriginal communities. It was found that these teachers had also developed a strong two-way relationship with Aboriginal people, and that these relationships had significant influence on these teachers' knowledge and understanding of the communities in which they worked (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). These interactions are prized within Aboriginal communities as they provide a two-way conduit and advocacy for families and students (Santoro, 2013). These relationships have been shown to be instructive in unpacking the dynamics of these relationships and their impact on teacher knowledge and practice (Munns, Martin, & Craven, 2008).
- A third finding focuses on the paucity of teacher knowledge about Aboriginal communities, their histories and their cultural knowledge. Evidence from other colonised locations such as Aotearoa New Zealand (B. Harrison, 2005), Canada (T. S. Lee, 2015) and Australia (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2012; Marmion, Obata, & Troy, 2014), points to the importance of this knowledge on student engagement and teachers' pedagogic practices. Yet, the research clearly highlights a level of fear and /or indifference of teachers in seeking to culturally understand those people in whose community they moved.
- A fourth key finding was the importance of schools being able to genuinely deliver quality local language and cultural programs that lead to real and sustainable cultural outcomes for students. The findings demonstrated that schools who had genuinely implemented programs that directly linked to student learning and engagement appeared to have strong community and school partnerships in place (Board of Studies NSW, 2008; Lowe, 2011a)

This was the journey of participants' experiences that was once hidden but now here to be viewed. Their standpoints have been constructed with reference to their histories, both positive and negative, and were specific to the unique experiences that they have had in these townships. These communities have stood the test and can be seen to be resolute in voicing their concerns for their children and demonstrating the potential of their generosity in supporting those teachers who want to engage with them. The participants all spoke of wanting to effect change and

to help equip those teachers willing to work with them in delivering high quality education. This is the genesis of the thesis title.

‘Walanbaa warramildanha’¹: Standing their ground: Honouring Aboriginal standpoint to effect teachers’ professional knowledge.

¹ Gamilaraay ‘literally translated as *‘They stood their ground, and looked out’* (Provided by Br. John Giacon 1 November 2015) *A full rendition of the title in Gamilaraay could be:*
Walanbaa warramildanha: Mariguwaay ngamila, maarubala dhirraldaygu
‘They have stood their ground, and in honouring their histories and their ways, they sought to influence teachers’ work.

Chapter 2: The field of community and school engagement

2.1 Introduction

To comprehend the nature of the dynamic of relational engagement, it is important to grasp the parameters within which to scope an understanding of the contested nature of schooling for Aboriginal students (R. Reynolds, 2005, 2009). This review of the broader literature will provide an understanding of both the context specific and wider challenges that sit at the heart of attempts to positively affect the educational outcomes of students from marginalised communities. Four interconnected areas broadly scope the ground traversed within this research on community and school engagement. The first strand is Aboriginal community standpoint position, its complexity and capacity in staking out the discursive landscape of the cultural interface from which it emerges. The second examines the literature on school and community engagement, with a particular focus on interaction between schools and Indigenous communities. A third strand focuses on the issues that relate to teachers' professional knowledge, with particular reference to how teachers' underpinning beliefs and attitudes construct the learning experiences for students, while a fourth area of investigation is that of teacher change. This review will assist in constructing the overarching field in which the research is undertaken and shed light on how these four strands interact and come into play as teachers and Aboriginal families work to construct authentic educative relationships.

These four strands of knowledge and investigation are themselves important sites of activity and investigation in schools. However within this research they come together within rich sites at the cultural interface – the point of engagement between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people where knowledge is negotiated and constructed as an outcome of their interaction (Nakata, 2007a). Within this engagement, teachers' knowledge about both the Aboriginal students in their classrooms and the wider community in which they live is tested and challenged as parents look to affect a change in the quality of education that their children receive.

2.2 Indigenous standpoint and the act of engagement at the cultural interface

Kovach (2009), in her text on Indigenous research methodologies opens with a disarmingly simple, but loaded question, 'What knowledge is to be privilege?' This question reveals some of the underpinning issues that relate to both the apparent and real

differences that sit between the epistemic positioning of Indigenous peoples, and the political discourse that looks to construct a research apparatus of relationships that positions each player as either a 'knower' or 'knowing.' The following discussion opens this review of the key issues underpinning this research, with particular reference to the elements of engagement between Aboriginal communities and the state.

Nakata's (2007b) relational concept of the 'cultural interface' seeks to examine the interactional space of engagement which he poses as being at the intersection of competing trajectories of Indigenous peoples' knowledge with that of the colonial state and its agents. As an explanatory model, the cultural interface provides a framework with which to explore the multidimensional dynamics of these interactions, with particular reference to understanding how Indigenous subjectivities are reconstituted within and through each community's habitual interactions with a state that in turn has used every opportunity to enact its hegemonic power over them (McGoan, 2009).

Whilst the notion of the cultural interface is rich, in that it looks to understand the highly contested activity of two-way interaction, engagement between Aboriginal people and settler colonists has usually only ever been a one-sided affair. This brief review looks to provide insight into the dynamics of this relationship and advance a particular insight into the localised acts of agentic action that underpins community standpoint. In this, I will look at three inter-related issues that are critical to our understanding of the cultural interface: knowledge contestation; knowledge understanding, and Indigenous standpoint. I will highlight how these three elements shed light on how Aboriginal people are seen as "other", as well as how they represent themselves within the epistemic dialogues when interaction takes place between these competing ontological forces of post colonial sovereignty.

Indigenous knowledge has been variously described as the sum of knowledge that circulates across all domains and represents the ways of being, knowing and behaving such that they are uniquely particular to Indigenous people and the Place to which these people belong (D. Foley, 2006). There is a consensus among Indigenous scholars of the salient features that constitute Indigenous peoples' knowledge. It is commonly agreed that this knowledge makes particular sense of the world, or more particularly, the space and place in which they now are forced to co-inhabit with those who have sought to supplant an Indigenous presence with a colonial one (Durie, 2005; Grieves, 2009; Nakata, 2010). Grieves (2009), among many other Aboriginal, Māori and First Nations commentators (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste, 2002), recognises an Indigenous perspective, in

which knowledge emanates from and in turn makes sense of the intimate landscape of discrete Indigenous groups. Dennis Foley, (2006) and others (Grieves, 2009; King, 2003b) are mindful of the colonial project and so have argued that it is this knowledge, even in disrupted forms continues to inform the lived experiences and so construct the identities of Aboriginal people.

Implicit within this act, holding onto the memory and practices of this epistemic knowledge, is each community's opposition to the coloniser state and their explicit and ongoing efforts to expunge the sovereign legitimacy of Indigenous people (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005). Gary Foley (2000, 2001, 2010), in a series of articles on the rise of the Australian Black Power movement, wrote of these interactions being steeped in past community experiences of dispossession and dispersal, their impact on levels of socio-economic and political marginalisation and the ever-present threat of ontological assimilation. For Gary Foley, the question of survival turns on how Aboriginal people could withstand the inexorable pressures of marginalisation while they held to their independent sovereign status. He argued that while Aboriginal people needed to be the prime protagonists in fighting for their own survival they also need to look at forging powerful coalitions with non-Aboriginal people in support of championing the cause of Aboriginal self-determination. In this, Gary Foley opens the door to a discussion of how these relationships would authentically honour Aboriginal knowledge and thus supports the socio-political aspirations of Aboriginal people.

From the late 1990s Nakata (2007a, 2007b) has sought to provide an insight into how the every day micro-interactions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are constructed and can potentially forge new understandings and knowledge across the black-white divide. Nakata used the social metaphor of the cultural interface to describe both the complexity and the discursive realities of contested knowledge, ideas, beliefs and aspirations as these coalesced at the point of interaction with non-Indigenous people. He explains:

In this contested space between the two knowledge systems, the cultural interface (Nakata, 1998), things are not clearly black or white, Indigenous or Western. In this space are histories, politics, economics, multiple and interconnected discourses, social practices and knowledge technologies which condition how we all come to look at the world, how we come to know and understand our changing realities in the everyday and how and what knowledge we operationalise in our daily lives (Nakata, 2007a, p. 9).

Given the explicitly contested nature of this notion, it is little wonder that the cultural interface is seen as intellectually messy, complex and multilayered. It represents the localised experiences of Aboriginal people, their subjectivities that are born out of historical experiences and nurtured within those institutions whose role it has been to govern the marginalised lives of Aboriginal peoples (Blackman, Cromby, Hook, Papadopoulos, & Walkerdine, 2008). These articulations, which are representative of the localised assertions of Indigenous identity, can be captured within the socio-cultural discourses that play out in the cultural interface. Acknowledging one's Aboriginality in this country implicitly necessitates having to experience and know the realities of colonialism and having to constantly negotiate this identity with colonial agents with whom they are forced to interact.

Grievés (2009), in her review of Nakata's thesis, challenges his conceptualisation of the term, instead seeing it as a description of a postcolonial intercourse that she argues Nakata mistakenly sees as occurring between equals. She argues that Nakata's concept is an:

... historical notion of the frontier, the frontier being a space where notionally competing cultures, epistemologies and ontologies are brought together within the colonial project, interacting, reacting, providing agency and choice, developing new and 'hybrid' ways of proceeding. The notion of an ongoing and shifting frontier as a continuing space of opportunity for Indigenous people living within a colonial regime (Grievés, 2009, p. 201)

While Grievés acknowledges that although Nakata makes no such explicit claim, she argues that the notion of the cultural interface is little more than a post-colonial thesis that has the effect of both 'homogenising [the] colonial experiences or of Indigenous cultures' while also embedding an unequal power relationship between the coloniser and Indigenous peoples (Grievés, 2009, p. 201). This critique however, misrepresents Nakata's concept for he explicitly argues that these contested discourses within the cultural interface occur not in an overarching political environment, but within the day-to-day micro interactions of communities. McGinty and Yunkaporta's (2009) review of Nakata's 2007 book *Disciplining the savages: Savaging the disciplines* argue that the cultural interface is an enabling interactional framework from which local communities have been able to explore their own realities and experiences, challenge non-Indigenous systems and knowledge and consequently empower themselves. They explain:

The Cultural Interface is used throughout the text as a framework for exploring the dialogical exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous systems, as well as situating the life worlds of contemporary islanders in the dynamic space between ancestral and Western realities (McGinty & Yunkaporta, 2009, p. 432)

Within this understanding of two-way interactions, the concept of the cultural interface opens us to the dynamic arrangements that constantly need to be negotiated by Aboriginal families as they advocate with agencies such as schools for their own and their children's future. However, what is left to explain is how these negotiations occur and what Aboriginal families are willing or able to bring to the table, given their experience of the history of underachievement, expulsion and exclusion (Munns et al., 2008; Munns, Martin, & Craven, 2006; NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004).

Though Nakata argues that one of the primary sources of the contemporary conflict between Aboriginal communities and government agencies is the level of cultural dissonance, he also acknowledges that these are intertwined with the full range of socio-political issues that have underpinned this contestation. Both Bond (2010) and Downing et al. (2011) have shown how fraught and complex this space has been as communities have sought to negotiate fairer outcomes for themselves and their families. Further to this, Altman and Hunter (2003) and other more recent reports (Price-Robertson, 2011) detail the tragic impact of socio-economic disadvantage on many Aboriginal families. Martin (2005) has suggested the impact of this is debilitating in its effects on families' willingness and/or capacity to engage with the wider social environment. Instead of moving towards a positive engagement with the state, the disparity in socio-economic resources, employment and health (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010a) is evidence of the deep ambiguity in Australia's relationship with its Indigenous peoples (P. Campbell, Kelly, & Harrison, 2012) and in part explains the high levels of social resistance by Aboriginal people to the efforts of the state to control them (Cunneen, 2005). It is little wonder that given these discourses of resistance, much of what happens at the cultural interface is challenging and often unrewarding. However, as Morton-Robinson identified, Aboriginal agency is both constrained and formed out of this resistance. Resistance in itself is a powerful tool in both exposing and then understanding those structures of power exerted over the lives of Aboriginal communities (Moreton-Robinson, 2004). It is from this understanding of Aboriginal agency and resistance that I next turn to inform the development and contextual manifestations of an Aboriginal standpoint within these negotiations at the cultural interface.

At the end of his critical text on the pervasive impact of the anthropological interpretation of Torres Strait Islander knowledge, Nakata (2007b) seeks to provide a way forward for Indigenous communities to understand the complexities of their experiences at the cultural interface. Drawing on the work of an earlier generation of feminist theorists (Haraway, 1988; Harding, 2004) Nakata among other scholars (Au, 2012; Friedal, 1999) describes a critical framework that gives meaning to the expression of an Indigenous standpoint. The concept of criticality is key to Nakata's idea of standpoint as he argues that the standpoint of people's everyday experience is not just the aggregation of stories of experiences. Drawing on Pohlhaus' (2002, p. 287) earlier work on feminist standpoint epistemology, Nakata (2007a, p. 11) highlights the critical nature of struggle in underpinning the political as well as cultural elements of standpoint when he writes 'objective knowledge is not a product of mere observation, but is achieved through the struggle of bringing these experiences into the critical space where social order and knowledge is produced'

An Indigenous standpoint has to be produced, for it is not a mere reflection of experience, but a distinct form of knowledge that is born out of the epistemic and ontological differences that represent the essence of Indigenous being (Au, 2012). Both Au and Nakata define standpoint as originating out of this conflict and the differential power relationships that have explicitly sought to affect the ways Indigenous people are enabled to imagine their own world.

It is this capacity of understanding the power of an Indigenous standpoint that can only be achieved when their community is empowered through its opposition to this oppression. Through this resistance, a community comes to understand how this imposed social order has sought to position Indigenous people within colonial discourses of their authority and legitimacy over Indigenous sovereignty. Au, citing Harding (2012, p. 53) states: 'that standpoint theory builds on the basic understanding that power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined, such that "they co-constitute and co-maintain each other"'. Within the cultural interface, standpoint is the reflective tool by which Indigenous People can interrogate their lived experiences of being oppressed (Crasnow, 2009) and gain an insight into those structures, power and knowledge that powers their continued marginalisation (Deliofsky, 2010).

The following sections in this review look more closely at how these issues of knowledge contestation occur during the schooling of Aboriginal students and the attempts made by

schools and Aboriginal families to reach an accord in the provision of educational opportunities for their students.

2.3 Education – schools and community engagement

Educational jurisdictions such as the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) have been increasingly forced to publically acknowledge the significant levels of systemic underperformance of Aboriginal students (Audit Office of New South Wales, 2012; NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004; SCRGSP, 2014). At the same time as school jurisdictions have had these failures exposed, Mills and Gale (2004) have also reported on the high level of teacher concerns about their ability to better engage in the education of Aboriginal students. Research by the likes of Partington (1998), Munns (1998), Vass (2015) and Ford (2012) evidenced how Aboriginal students continue to be adversely affected by poorly focused, taught and resourced programs, that demonstratively fail to meet the learning needs of Aboriginal students. Further, research by Andrew Martin (2006) and recent reviews of the Stronger Smarter program on the teachers of Aboriginal students (Luke et al., 2013; Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014) have identified the negative impact of low teacher expectations on Aboriginal students' self efficacy as learners. It is argued that teacher attitudes about Aboriginal students are deeply entrenched in an unpreparedness to either accommodate the diversity of community cultures, or in understanding the particular educational needs that have arisen out of generations of educational neglect (Biddulph et al., 2003; Fang, 1996; Luke, 2009). Timperley and Robinson (2002) argue that these views about students' educational capacity and/or interest in their education ensures that most teachers are ill-prepared to interrogate the impact of their own pedagogic practices on student achievement. These deficit discourses that underpin many teachers' discourse on disadvantaged students have remained largely unchallenged, even though the extraordinary levels of educational inequality continues to impact the educational experiences by Aboriginal students.

Increasingly policy development has sought to develop community capacity so it is enabled to more effectively engage with schools in order to improve student outcomes (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2010; VAEAI & Victorian Department of Education and Training, 2001). These policies come from two quite different propositions. Governments drawing on international research have seen these partnerships as a means to harness parent support thereby reducing the level of student resistance to schooling (Goos, 2004). This argument suggests that schools have seen parent participation as a potential tool to corral students in support of the work of teachers in lifting the level of students' outcomes.

However, a corollary to this is that Aboriginal communities see their participation as providing an important vehicle through which they are able to directly interject themselves into a dialogue with teachers on what they need to know and do in better understanding the educational needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people (Biddulph et al., 2003).

While governments have sought to garner parental involvement in school to address student educational underachievement, these efforts are marred by a failure to acknowledge that issues of engagement and underachievement are affected by pedagogic practices that directly impact on Indigenous students' sense of place, identity and engagement (Bishop, 2003). Bishop asserted that education is a first tier arm of government in exerting power over Māori students through schooling structures, mandated curriculum and the systemic supported pedagogic practices that assail the cultures, histories and languages of colonised students. Dehyle (1995) also contended that these instruments of control were underpinned by a history of racism that had been deeply embedded within current educational structures. She conjectured that within these environments, schools are best understood when seen as being part of a more encompassing and ongoing socio-political conflict between the coloniser and colonised. Grande (2009) and Fleras (1999) have argued that central to this conflict has been a refusal to acknowledge the paradigmatic differences between the experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. Grande (2008) claims that this post-colonial discourse has seen the melding of a unified neo-colonial modern state that has objectified the 'native' whilst assimilating the Indigene. Curthoys (1999) suggests that within this model the coloniser has positioned its culture, language and political and legal structures over all else. Within this context, schools have been a critical tool of the state – ensuring the wider population is wedded to its efforts to expunge either a de facto or de jure recognition of the Indigenous peoples' sovereignty (Fleras, 1999) through the control of curriculum and pedagogic practices that situate the legal and moral legitimacy and values of the imposed state above all else (Yazzie, 1999).

While it appears the power of the state has successfully sublimated the struggle to control Indigenous aspirations, there is evidence of small but significant countervailing efforts of a small number of teachers to subvert these colonial discourses (R. Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Kincheloe (2007) has argued that the adoption of a critical pedagogy is dependent on schools' capacity to dynamically challenge the practices of schooling for oppressed minorities. Grande (2007, 2009), in a number of key articles on the development of an

authentic Indigenous critical theory, has argued these discourses of education are dependent on teachers and students developing a profound understanding of the interconnectedness of power, control and knowledge. She has argued that these have been employed to construct the over-layering of colonial discourse over the macro world of the states' own legitimacy verses that of Indigenous sovereignty and the micro world of the lives of Indigenous students and their families.

The need to adopt such a critical perspective has been advanced by Bishop and Berryman (2006) and again later by Russell Bishop, O'Sullivan and Berryman (2010) when they have highlighted the level of cultural disconnection underpinning the dysfunctional relationship with Māori students, parents and teachers in Aotearoa (New Zealand). Bishop and colleagues have written extensively on the impact of low teacher expectations of students and communities, evidenced by a view among teachers of the deficiency of Māori culture. Russell Bishop, O'Sullivan and Berryman (2010) suggest the solution to the marginalisation of Māori students does not lay in further centring the colonial culture that seeks to marginalise their culture. Rather they argue solutions require systemic resolution to the issues of power and control–initiation, representation and legitimisation, which are embedded in current educational theory and practice. Russell Bishop (2003) had earlier argued that central to the realignment of power is an insistence that relationships between schools and communities be established on an explicit understanding of Indigenous peoples' aspirations and how schools can enact them. Russell Bishop (2003) contended that the active participation of parents and the broader Māori community was essential in providing a critical point of challenge to school and teacher practices, while also supporting active student engagement and learning.

The cogency of much of this research has been that it has either directly emanated, or been strongly influenced by, coherent, longitudinal and systematic programs that have focused on whole-school change to affect long-term improvement in Māori education (R. Bishop & Berryman, 2006, 2010; R. Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2009; R. Bishop, Ladwig, & Berryman, 2014; R. Bishop et al., 2010). The Australian educational environment is yet to see a similarly influenced movement within the higher education sector in supporting such long-term change. Although to date this level of research has not been undertaken in Australia, work led by Yunkaporta (2009a, 2009b, 2009c; 2011; 2007, 2009) on the implementation of culturally responsive school based curriculum has shown that teachers are capable of developing pedagogic practices that are culturally responsive;

are underpinned by Aboriginal epistemologies; and that engage parents and community in a child's schooling.

School – community partnerships

A growing body of research (Edvantia, 2005; Epstein & Sheldon, 2006; Jeynes, 2010) has suggested that the active participation of parents with schools in the education of their children makes a significant difference in both the quality of the educational experiences and the level of student outcomes. The impetus for this research has been varied, as parental participation in schools has become a central policy lynchpin of supporters from widely diverse social, religious and economic backgrounds. It has been suggested active parental engagement would allay concerns raised by Putnam (1995) of the perceived loss of traditional social values and sense of community. Shirlow and Murtagh (2004) have argued social partnerships have been shown to substantially improve both the levels of social cohesion and student engagement.

There are also reported benefits for students who have experienced the positive impact of direct family and/or community involvement with their child's schooling in the course of their education (Edvantia, 2005; Jeynes, 2012). These research findings have influenced the inclusion of school-community policies and strategies in the U.S such as the 'No Child Left Behind Act' of 2001 and within Australia, the Rudd Government's National Partnerships initiative (SCRGSP, 2014), subsequently continued by the Liberal government.

Data collected on these school/community partnerships has indicated that parental involvement does appear to have a positive impact on improving the educational achievement of students across all socio-economic groups and locations (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002). Jeynes' (2003, 2005, 2012) extensive meta-analysis of research findings across all socio-economic (SES) levels has identified the substantial academic improvements made by students when their parents are directly involved in the school. He said:

Finally, the finding that parental involvement programs were effective for urban students is particularly encouraging because studies have indicated how low SES, urban parents are generally less educationally supportive than most other parents (2005, p. 261).

He noted that the significance of this finding was that it was achieved against a background negative trend of educational outcomes for other ethnic and racial minority students.

Jeynes' (2003) analysis also touched on other issues such as teacher expectations and perceptions of student interest and ability to complete schooling. This research found that both students and parents reported that high teacher expectations had a direct effect of improving the participation rates of parents in school. Additionally, research by Henderson and Mapp (2002) suggested increased levels of parental participation afforded students an additional protective level and resilience to external pressures.

Of particular interest to those working with disadvantaged students is research that demonstrates parental involvement positively influences student achievement across all racial groups (Edvantia, 2005) and that the effects of this involvement are inversely proportional to the level of social disadvantage (Gutman & McLoyd, 2000). This finding is also noted in the Edvantia (2005) analysis, which indicates that this type of parental engagement makes a significant difference to student outcomes. It shows that parent and community involvement directly linked to school activities that support student learning is more likely to improve student achievement than more general forms of involvement. Research by Shumow and Miller (2000) has indicated this support could either be centred in the home, or through direct parental contact with the school. Edventia research also indicated that within certain parameters parental involvement was shown to improve school attendance and retention. Gordon and Louis (2009) demonstrated the effect of school leadership on the level and type of parental involvement, a point taken up by Russell Bishop (2003) when he noted the key role of school leadership, arguing that collaboration is essentially about the sharing of power and real decision-making. While the school participation research has reported the potential for positive student outcomes, Gordon and Lewis (2009) have argued that there is a countervailing propensity in many schools to undermine interventions designed to establish parental programs. They argued that teachers see parents as a challenge to their position and authority and hold concerns about the privileging of the home over teachers by those families who are able to exercise influence in the school. Though teachers may assert this as a reason to resist parental engagement Gordon and Louis' (2009) research contended that in fact schools were more likely to promote the interests of those parents who were seen to support the actions and attitudes of teachers and schools against those who challenge those privileged positions. It was little wonder therefore that Lareau and colleagues (1999; 2003) have argued that

African American parents are seen by many school administrators as troublesome due to their criticism of their children's schooling. Research by Abrams and Gibbs (2002) and Mills and Gale (2004) also supported these findings when they noted that Indigenous and other families from low SES backgrounds voiced concerns about their alienation from their children's schooling by schools. The consequence of this climate of school and teacher resistance to the establishment of genuine partnerships demonstrates the need for strong and purposeful school leadership in directing programs to overcome the levels of staff resistance (R. Bishop et al., 2010; Michelle Lonsdale, 2008; Makuwira, 2007).

Partnerships and Indigenous communities

The potential to initiate school and parent partnerships is more likely to be successful when a level of cultural synergy is developed between stakeholders around shared educational goals (Christenson, 2002). The challenge for parents whose histories and cultures are significantly different from that of the schools is whether the school system is prepared, let alone enabled, to encourage constructive dialogue (Goos, 2004). Instead of providing a culturally safe place for all students, minority communities have historically seen schools as active instruments of colonialism, refusing to enrol children (Fletcher, 1989b) and actively participating with other agencies to limit their students' access and success at school (Cadzow, 2008; Cadzow & Maynard, 2011). This is supported by Brayboy, Castagno and Maughan's (2007) review of Indigenous education in the U.S. which identified how education has been developed around redistributive policies that have structurally embedded unequal outcomes for disadvantaged communities. They and others (Lester, 2012; Tripcony, 2000), have argued that central to these policies are deeply embedded issues of race and racism which has had the effect of further ensuring the racialised privileging of the social and cultural capital of the elite (George J Sefa Dei, Karumanchery, & Karumanchery-Luik, 2004).

Indigenous educators have echoed these views, with Morton-Robinson (2004), Paradies et al. (2009) and Grande (2009) all having contended that racially based policies have been embedded within the processes of school and government. Rose's (2005, 2006) research with teachers on the implementation of new literacy methodologies has shown the current theories and practices underpinning the teaching of English literacy is as much informed by multilayered social, educational and colonial discourses as it is by literacy theory. Rose argues that the consequence of which has ensured the ongoing disproportionate failure of Indigenous students to achieve basic literacy skills. There is now a mounting body of research that suggests that for schools to achieve equality of educational outcomes, they

must establish high quality affirmative action policies for Indigenous students (Ladson-Billings, 2014), pedagogic practices that challenge teacher beliefs and attitudes (Biddulph et al., 2003) and be open to meaningful long-term engagement with whole communities if there is to be a sustainable turn around in the outcomes for these students (Epstein, 1995).

The long-term outcome of such an approach is to establish a holistic education for students that empowers them to challenge the ongoing socio-political effects of colonisation on their lives. As Grande (Grande, 2000) and Battiste (2000) have argued, a failure by education authorities to simultaneously address these issues continues to condemn many students to generational low levels of educational achievement.

2.4 Teachers' professional knowledge and change

Current studies of teacher education have highlighted the difficulty in changing the tacit beliefs and understandings that lie buried in a person's being, with these deeply seated cognitions and beliefs driving everyday classroom practice (Fang, 1996). A number of crucial questions have emerged on the capacity of school programs to affect a cognitive change in teacher beliefs and practices. Olsen (as cited in Richardson & Placier, 2001) found that teacher education students did not substantively change their beliefs and assumptions about their conception of what constituted 'good teaching' even when exposed to specific instructions on effective pedagogic and student management practices.

The impact of these findings is exacerbated by the practices of education systems in appointing inexperienced teachers to remote and difficult-to-staff locations. Richardson and Placier (2001) argued that early career teachers placed in unfamiliar environments often retreat to a position of pedagogic comfort by adopting conservative, negative and ill-informed views and beliefs about student cultures, values and their educational capacity. These findings are supported by Luke (2009) and Brandon (2003), who also noted that newly appointed teachers demonstrated limited capacity in addressing the learning needs of students for whom they had little cultural connection or little understanding.

While Richardson and Placier have identified the difficulties of initiating substantial professional change in early scheme teachers, Winestein, Madison and Kuklinski's (1995) research on raising the expectations of teachers for students at risk identified the conditions under which significant professional change was possible. The researchers reported that over time teachers admitted greater responsibility for student achievement when their initial beliefs about student capacity were challenged and they were confronted with the impact of school policies and classroom practices on student access to

learning. Weinstein, Madison and Kuklinski (1995) concluded that preventive action must move beyond the teacher–student dyad to include an understanding of the context in which the expectations of students, teachers and schooling are considered. This view is supported by Timperley and Alton-Lee (2008) who argue that effective implementation of new teaching strategies is linked to productive professional engagement when embedded in quality pedagogic models and professional support. Weinstein and colleagues (1995) also suggested that the transformation of teacher’s pedagogical practices can only be achieved with a heightened awareness of the contextualised needs of students and when teachers are aware of students’ family histories and community cultures. The evidence suggests that the level of socio-cultural disconnect between teachers and many Indigenous students is such that teachers will remain challenged in gaining such an insight unless schools are able to broker extensive support from those who hold this specific knowledge.

2.5 Teacher professional change

Using a framework established by Chin and Benne, Richardson and Placier, (as cited 2001, p. 905) have described three types of planned change strategies that support teacher professional change: empirical–rational; normative–re-educative; and power–coercive. Chin and Benne define the empirical–rational approach as using a model of change that is based on utopian goals and a rational approach to achieving them. In this approach, research guides school and teacher reflection and new teaching strategies. The second method to teacher change is known as the normative–re-educative approach. This is characterised by being naturalistic, in that it focuses on providing teacher autonomy for cultivating professional growth through collaboration with colleagues. A third model, the power–coercive approach is seen as potentially the most transformative, in that it seeks to effect change through collective action strategies that involve the use of direct pressure on political institutions to achieve political and legal change. This form of change, which involves significant social and political tension with those in power, is underpinned by an essential re-alignment of the socio-political power held by the elites. As such, this form of change is used with greatest effect by pressure groups that are able to apply significant pressure through the ballot box, or apply such moral persuasion that they are able to initiate changes within the broader system (Richardson & Placier, 2001).

Recent research literature on teacher change has shifted towards a model (as cited in Richardson & Placier, 2001, p. 907) where teacher change is enhanced through the teacher’s personal reflection on beliefs and practices. This change process entails developing an understanding of personal beliefs and assumed knowledge determining

whether or how to change them through professional dialogue between colleagues, school management and/or external change agents. This collaboration underpins one of the critical differences between the first two models of change; in the empirical-rational approach, the agency defines and directs the change process, in the normative-re-educative approach, the direction, pace and expected outcomes are established by those individuals involved in the process, in this case from the teachers themselves in collaboration with other teachers or professional staff (Richardson & Placier, 2001). While efforts to effect change have looked to this second model to engage teachers in their own professional development, schools are still pressured to impose systemically developed change models, even though this has been shown to be the least effective in shaping teacher behaviour. The research would question the efficacy and efficiency of current strategies used to implement systems policies within state education jurisdictions as these models of change fail to afford teachers the opportunity to engage deeply with either the theory and practices needed to effect change, or to work with those most effected by current practice.

There are two other concepts that have received considerable attention in the research on teacher change centre on reflective practices and teacher beliefs. The possible impact of teacher reflective practices was advanced in Schön's (1983) seminal text on the reflective practitioner. Another construct of teacher change advanced by Richardson (1990) centres on teacher beliefs and their capacity to either inhibit or promote the adoption of new ideas into everyday activities. Richardson concluded that the implementation of educational programs is affected by core teacher beliefs about how students learn and what they individually and/or collectively know. Smylie's (1988) study which looked at the relationship between the organisational contexts of schools and changes in individual teacher practices, concluded that teacher perceptions and beliefs are the most significant predictors of individual change. The importance of this finding is critical for the success of establishing an environment for transformative programs that engage students with histories of underachievement. Alton-Lee (2003) and Howard and Perry (2007) have shown that deep and enduring change in teacher beliefs and attitudes about how to be effective teachers of all students is essential to the success of programs that are responsive to students needs. An insight into the need for such transformative change underpins the efforts of those teachers who have sought to make a substantive difference to the educational outcomes of all students in their classrooms.

Effecting change with teachers from ethnic and racial minority groups

Quality teaching practices have been identified as a key influence on quality outcomes for the diverse range of students found in the majority of schools. Evidence from the New Zealand review of teaching on improving the learning outcomes of minority students (Alton-Lee, 2003) revealed that up to 59 percent of the variance in student performance was due to the quality of the learning environment, while school level effects account for no more than 21 percent of the variance in performance. The Best Evidence Synthesis of education research by Alton-Lee (2003) identified 10 characteristics of quality teaching that underpin the effective social and educational engagement of students in their learning. These characteristics significantly overlap with those identified in Hollins and Guzman's (2005) analysis of the support needed to develop pre-service teachers' engagement with students from diverse environments. Though the pre-service teachers identified as being open to the proposition of cultural diversity being represented in their classrooms, the researchers reported on the trainees' lack of confidence in their ability to be effective teachers of these students. Research on the preparation of pre-service teachers has reported that programs that sought to address these teachers' concerns had instead identified an undercurrent of racism and low expectations of student achievement. Hollins and Guzman (2005) suggested that in the short term, the propensity of teachers is to overlook or ignore the detrimental impact that prejudice has had on students' social and educational development. Hollins and Guzman (2005) further argued that teachers' resistance to change was due in some respects to the level of social and cultural disconnect between teachers and the students from cultural and social minorities. These results would suggest that counter resistance strategies that incorporate dialogue on meta-cognition and reflectivity are essential to help pre-service teachers overcome resistance in teaching within complex multicultural environments.

The history of modern education has shown that substantive school and teacher change has been difficult to achieve or sustain (van den Berg, Vandenberghe, & Slegers, 1999). Dissatisfaction with the level of success has seen calls for new approaches that focus on developing a school culture of purposeful and managed change (R. Bishop et al., 2010; Timperley & Robinson, 2002). Timperley and Robinson (2002) and Sachs (2001) have identified the importance of schools developing a clear and unambiguous culture of success for all students. Sachs (2001) argued that while considerable advances have been made in identifying the influences of culture on the success of school improvement, little was written about the micro-processes within schools that affect teachers involved in

changing the assumptions which underpin a particular culture, such as that which exists in schools. Timperley and Robinson (2002) demonstrated the need for such an analysis in their discussion on the learning and behavioural outcomes for 'at risk' students. They concluded that this discussion about the educational needs of these students is externalised beyond the school by focusing on the socio-economic deprivations of family and community cultures with little attention paid to school-based factors.

Paechter (2003) has argued that within the realm of school curriculum, an inter-connection has been established between the representation within curriculum of key dominant notions of power, knowledge and culture and how knowledge is constructed and valued within the western academy. The construct of a hierarchy of school curriculum closely mirrors that found in the higher education academy from which it has been derived. Apple (1993) argued that school curriculum is not a culturally neutral construct of knowledge, but part of a highly selected tradition that elevates abstracted knowledge over contextualised and local knowledge. This conceptualises dominant cultural standpoints as natural official knowledge and elevates it over other knowledge systems (Swartz, 1992). The assimilatory practice of schools elevates prized Eurocentric knowledge above all else, while characterising Indigenous knowledge as experiential and contextual and lacking in broader applicability and theoretical perspective (Rains, Archibold, & Deyhle, 2000). The theorising of western knowledge, with its capacity for theoretical abstraction, legitimates it within the academy and implicitly provides it with the intellectual and cultural capital prized in educational institutions. As noted by Lareau and Weininger (2003) Indigenous knowledge is yoked within the academy to a lesser oppositional position to that established by western scholarship. This understanding of the order of western knowledge and its implicit and explicit positioning into a superior space is essential in appreciating how schools engage with and represent Indigenous knowledge within the curriculum. Indigenous knowledge, especially that associated with culture and language is consistently marginalised by both mainstream curriculum and pedagogic practice, as it is seen to be under theorised and lacking in its capacity to engender higher order knowledge production. Paechter (2003) argues that the value placed on knowledge is measured proportionately to the power invested in its possession and what is seen to flow from it. Pinar (1993) and McCarthy et al. (2005) argue while the state denies the legitimacy of Indigenous people it is unlikely it would provide intellectual space for an alternative knowledge system to challenge the essentialised canons embedded in school curriculum.

This review of the broader literature has scanned a range of issues that will unfold throughout this thesis. Each will flow through upcoming chapters, whether as a major topic of investigation such as Indigenous Standpoint Theory, or as subthemes played out in participant discussions about teacher knowledge and the potential impact of teacher change. This review has scoped out the background issues, and puts into context the real world experiences of these teachers and Aboriginal families.

The following chapter reports on the key elements of the critical Indigenous methodology that underpins this research. In particular, issues surrounding Indigenous standpoint and the conceptual construct of the cultural interface are contextualised to this research in the contested space of schooling for Aboriginal students.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter reports on how an Indigenous research methodology was implemented to achieve insight into the complex and often highly contested environment in which schools interact with Aboriginal families and communities. These socio-cultural interactions between the parents and families of Aboriginal students and teachers and other school staff were viewed through the lens of research informants in four communities across western NSW, using a multisite critical ethnography that sat inside an overarching Indigenous methodology.

The theoretical paradigm built around this project draws on the complementary research methodologies of critical ethnography and Indigenous research methodology, to present a unified critical Indigenous research methodology first described by Māori researchers in the early 1990s (R. Bishop, 1994; G. H. Smith, 1992). This theoretical paradigm has provided an overarching framework to understand the impact of hegemonic colonisation on Aboriginal communities and the distinctive and highly contextualised responses of Aboriginal families and communities. This project was undertaken within a broader socio-political environment where control is continually exerted over the lives of Aboriginal communities. While this background environment has both constructed and underpinned each Aboriginal community's standpoint relationships with non-Aboriginal Australia, the framework must also facilitate our understanding of the moments of socio-cultural interactions that occur within the cultural interface between teachers and Aboriginal people (Nakata, 2007a).

This chapter begins with positioning myself as an Aboriginal researcher, educator and community advocate within this research and with each of the collaborating participants. It then moves to a broad description of this research methodology and its appropriateness to this investigation and how it links to critical theory. Following this will be a discussion of three key attributes of this methodology – Indigenous knowledge, centring each community within the research, and a discussion of the principal guiding principles of this critical Indigenous methodology. This then leads to the articulation of five guiding criteria for conducting research using a critical Indigenous research methodology. The chapter concludes with an articulated model that positions this research within the methodology.

3.1 Traversing dangerous ground

In accordance with Aboriginal tradition, I claim a cultural space, first to greet those who hear my words, and then to comment on those things that were said and done throughout this research.

As is appropriate, I want to acknowledge those who have come before me, and trodden these pathways through this Country. My Elders – familial and others, who have steadied my journey, given freely of their advice and have pointed out which would otherwise have remained hidden. My right to speak emanates from my mother’s mother’s father, born of Gubbi Gubbi Country, and whose Dreaming I carry forward into this project.

Yaama ngindaay, yaama ngindaay ganu.
Winanga-y waanda गया -
Wayamaa, guuguu, dhawun nhalay
Bamba nhama winanga-y-la-nha गया.
Wayamaa ngay, dhiyaan ngay biruu-ga-
ban.gaan ngarri-y-la-nha.
Bamba ganugu nginaaynya yaamaba-lda-nha,
Giirr gayaa गया nguwalay warra-y-la-ndaay,
milan-da maliyaa-ga.
Giirr ngiyani-luu dhaay dhurra-y yaluu garay
ngiyaningu walanbaa bunma-li-gu,
Yalagiirrma yaluu nhama garay bamba guwaa-
lda-y mari-dhu ngiyaningu,
Yalagiirrma dhugay ngiyani garay guuguu-gu
winanga-lda-y.
Yalagiirmawu gayaa-bala gi-gi-la-y ngiyani.
Giirr gayaa गया nguwalay warra-y-la-ndaay.
Yana-ya Baayami-baraay.²

I would like to commence by acknowledging the traditional owners of your Country, and to pay my respects to your elders both past and present.

I bring greetings to you from far away, from my Elders and kinfolk, and on their behalf; I would like to thank you for your attention, hospitality and friendship.

Restoring language, culture and dignity to our communities is the purpose of this discussion. I thank you for honouring me by listening to our journey and for being part of the great task ahead of us all.

For this, I want to thank our collective Elders and ancestral Dreaming beings that have walked the land before us, and that make this task possible.

The simplicity of its message masks both its epistemic complexity and the interwoven ontological nuances of belonging to Place (Battiste, 2012; B. Harrison, 2005), and while it appears to be a simple act, it gives voice to a central tenet of decolonisation, where speaking these words are in themselves a statement of sovereignty, and a challenge to the state in which we have been forced to live (George J. Sefa Dei, 2000).

My central purpose here is to report on the value of applying a critical Indigenous ethnographic methodology to help understand the particular contextual environments within which these points of engagement occur, whilst also illuminating the links between these unique manifestations of authentic and productive engagement and the broader world beyond each site. I open this discussion by drawing on elements from two published interviews I undertook several years ago; the first by the South Australian Department of Education and Community Services (DECS) – in

² I acknowledge the support of Br. John Giacon for assisting in translating this acknowledgement

2008, and a second with staff from the Victorian Corporation for Aboriginal Languages (VACL) in 2014. These biographical notes are included to position myself as both the author and as an Aboriginal person within the research. These published interviews (Lowe 2008; 2014) lay out a sample of experiences that were formative in fashioning the person I have become, and those beliefs that have been seminal in both orientating and positioning me as an Aboriginal person, teacher, scholar/activist and advocate.

In this, I draw on the works of other Indigenous scholars whose claim for legitimacy rests on centring themselves directly into the shared space with their community collaborators. The veracity of this methodology rests on its inherent subjective nature, its flexibility and its ethical positioning. Methodologically I situate myself as an Indigenous activist and researcher in my own life's journey and then within the localised and highly contested contexts of this critical Indigenous ethnography.

I commenced my interview with DECS by outlining my experiences as an Aboriginal person, my family background and their struggles to assert a political voice, of positioning myself within the broader socio-historical experiences of Aboriginal people, and to provide an explanation for the views that were seminal to my historical understanding. I said:

Kevin: I commenced school in in the mid 1950s in a school on the outer western suburbs of Sydney. My grandmother had built a house nearby after she came back to Sydney from an extended stay in London after World War II. My mother had a small 3-room fibro house, and we lived there with her dad. Before commencing school, I was taken from my mum, and placed in foster care, memories of which still unexpectedly terrorise my memories of this period of my childhood. We later moved, when I was about 7 with my mother, after she was appointed to work in the Technical College [TAFE] in Gunnedah - a bustling agricultural and mining township in central New South Wales. Later, my mother saved enough money and somehow managed to send me back to Sydney to attend a church run boarding school. I'm not sure what she thought this was going to do, but I remember it being one of the most miserable periods of my childhood. These constant changes, which strained my relationship with my mother, were never resolved before she passed at 42, the year I became a parent myself (Lowe, 2008b, pp. 37-38).

Later in this interview I spoke of my connection to the two great traditions that sit within this thesis; political activism and social commentary, and their connection to my family's defining experiences of socio-economic depravation, war, militancy and critical engagement in socio-

political change.

Kevin: I came from a very political household. Both grandparents on my mother's side were leading members of the left trade union movement and active members of the Communist party and far-left Labor politics. My grandmother's family come from Winton in central Queensland. My great-grandmother married William Eatock, an Aboriginal farm labourer who had travelled from Gympie [to Springshore] in the late 1890s. They had eight children while they fled further into the western inland of Queensland's interior and then into the far west of NSW. My great-grandmother had come to the notice of the police when she was involved in the shearers' strikes in the 1890s, and later through her political militancy that was born out of the political turmoil of post WWI.

The family's political activism originated with my great-grandmother who had been singled out by the police during the period leading up to the great depression and in the period right through to the commencement of World War II. All of her children were actively involved in the trade unions and left politics. They were particularly active with the unemployed workers union in the 1930s. For this she and her children was singled out for "special" attention because of being acknowledged as Aboriginal and communists, with two of the sons being shot by the police, others jailed, including my grandfather, and the murder of one of her sons while he conducted union business with shearers in western New South Wales (Lowe, 2008b, pp. 39-40).

Politics was the staple of a family that was socially and culturally isolated from its Aboriginal Country north of Brisbane, which had occurred as a consequence of having to flee further west from Gympie to avoid the police and those who sought to separate Aboriginal families. My grandmother was born in Winton, and her younger siblings came as they lived on remote properties, or in a tent along side the banks of the Darling River (Eatock, 2013).

These activities deeply affected this family, with sons being shot, murdered, the aging matriarch beaten by police, while others were imprisoned for their role in protecting families from eviction (Greenland, 1998, 2005). The pressure and violence was never far away, and the family fractured under its weight. In the post World War II period, a new generation of activism saw my grandmother and mother working for the recognition of women's rights, equal pay and social representation; while other cousins went on to be active in the Aboriginal movement from the 1960s and onwards, particularly in and around the establishment of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy

and the subsequent campaigns for land rights, recognition the development of a Treaty and a raft of social policy campaigns from 1972 to today (S. Robinson, 1994).

These events were central to our existence, with everybody seemingly involved in a range of social action and union activities and political discussions being the staple of everyday conversations. In turn, these underpinned my own political and cultural activities starting from active opposition to the Vietnam War as a conscientious objector. More recently I became active in initiating the formation of organisations like *First Languages Australia* (FLA) that seeks to represent Aboriginal communities in reclaiming traditional languages. From the late 1980s through to my retirement from the NSW Board of Studies, I was involved in the activities of peak Aboriginal organisations and local Aboriginal communities as they fought for better and more responsive access to education, and to the greater involvement of parents and the wider community in the schooling of their children.

It was as part of these efforts that I was involved in collaborating with schools across NSW in the establishment of learning partnerships between schools, teachers and communities. This decade long project had a deep impact on my thoughts of the nature of community agency and empowerment, and the capacity or lack thereof, in teachers' understanding and commitment to improving school practices, shifting curriculum and interrogating pedagogic practices. It appeared at times that the very construct of schooling was at the heart of this contestation, with its control over the schooling experiences of Aboriginal students, and community resistance to what they saw as affecting students' experiences and the educational outcomes. Yet within almost every school, there were pockets of genuine engagement, with examples of focused and informed school and community leadership, productive interaction between parents and teachers, and the development of responsive educational programs that elicited significant positive student response. It was these moments that became of interest to me as I sought to understand what underpinned their establishment and their capacity to shift teacher understanding of the Aboriginal students in their classroom.

In the book *Interviews from the meeting point project* (Lowe, 2014), I commented on the collaborative development of educational initiatives needed to support the implementation of education programs between schools and Aboriginal communities. The following comments reflect how I saw these matters at the time:

Kevin: It was in establishing the programs we found that schools were quite good at what they call partnerships. But (what) they are not good at is developing relationships that provide access to parents and community, to the school's core business of teaching and

learning. A lot of what schools already do in the formal, partnership arena space – and do well; space is focused on special days of commemorations, projects that recognise Aboriginal week, you know. And while I don't put that down, because in itself it's not bad, it does need to happen, and it can be fantastic at supporting other projects. But more than often, that is as far as it goes. Teachers in schools don't want to encourage direct parent involvement in the real business of schools, which is the development of delivery of teaching and learning (Lowe, 2014, pp. 135-136).

The efficacy of these collaboratively established programs required schools to work closely with parents, members of the community, and other specialists, to pool their discrete skills to construct relationships that underpinned the effective delivery of quality educational programs. It was clear that the capacity of these programs was dependent on a range of factors beyond the management capacity of most schools. At their heart, they required establishing an authentic leadership shared beyond the school (Auerbach, 2012) that encouraged the exercise of community agency to articulate and co-develop educationally responsive programs that work to assist all teachers to shift their thinking about teaching marginalised students (Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins, 2008). Too often, these key relationships were seen to be largely ephemeral to the school's core business which teachers were allowed to largely ignore. Indeed, my observations were that the single biggest factor in establishing an effective learning environment for Aboriginal parents proved not to be the program itself, but the establishment of encompassing collaborative structures that challenged existing systems, and advocated for educational change (Cousins, Mickelson, Williams, & Velasco, 2008; Griffiths, 2000). I prosecuted this view a little later when I said:

Kevin: The development of such a relationship is challenging, but rewarding for both the teachers and the community. It is by far one of the most exciting things that happened out of these projects. And while it wasn't in itself an outcome that we set out to develop, it has been, in a sense the most essential element in the successful establishment of a language program. Without it, a school program dies (Lowe, 2014, p. 139).

These experiences provided insights into the inherent power of multilayered genuine participation, its capacity to impact on student engagement and its potential to underpin strategies to address the systemic failure of Indigenous education in Australia.

This introduction focuses on my history and experiences and how these have informed a worldview that was considerably sharpened as a consequence of the experiences of walking the epistemic tightrope between schools and Aboriginal communities. This in turn impacts on the design, implementation and analysis of the research.

3.2 Establishing a critical Indigenous research methodology

Indigenous research methodology is fundamentally grounded in the oppositional consciousness that at its heart seeks to question and/or reject the neo-colonial project that fundamentally seeks to control and assimilate the lives of Indigenous people. At its core, this methodology's epistemological, ontological and axiological beliefs centre on strategies of resistance and are committed to providing clarity and understanding of Indigenous peoples worldviews. At its centre it gives precedence to the rights of Indigenous people, the knowledge contained within their traditions, cultures and languages and their overarching view of the world. However an Indigenous research methodology goes beyond cultural positioning: within contemporary environments it is also anti-colonial with acts of resistance at its core. Consequently this methodology addresses issues of social justice, equality, neo-colonial nationalism and Indigenous sovereignty and the uniqueness of Indigenous communities (K. Martin, 2008; Stewart-Harawira, 2013).

The aspirations, beliefs and feelings of Indigenous people are what characterise a methodology that is undertaken by and with Indigenous people. It provides a space that is legitimated by these beliefs and connections to challenge past legacies and practices and to build a coherent framework to conduct research with other Indigenous people. This is what is called an Indigenous research paradigm (K. Martin, 2008). Within this paradigm Indigenous research has as its goal the empowerment of Indigenous people whereby they enable the production of knowledge and control over their own lives.

Consensus within the literature has identified the following essential elements of Indigenous research methodology. These are the interconnectedness of Indigenous people to the environment and to each other; the foundational nature of their lived experiences and the sacredness of the responsibility to people, culture and Country. By its nature this methodology is transformative in that it substantively addresses community concerns finds solutions and effects change.

Linda Smith (2000), Russell Bishop (2005) and Grande (2004) and a small but influential body of Australian Indigenous scholars (C. Anderson, 2009; Moreton-Robinson, 2009) have looked to extend the understanding of an Indigenous methodology to one that is cognisant of the wider socio-political oppression experienced by Indigenous people. It is for this reason that Linda Smith (2000, p. 228) characterises the 'Kaupapa Māori' methodology as 'localised critical theory'. This critical focus facilitates an investigation of issues including colonialism, oppression, agency and resistance as they interact and fashion our understanding of what occurs in schools. This critical lens facilitates a critique of issues like schooling structures, teacher knowledge, curriculum and pedagogic change as potential sites of colonial oppression and where the acts of agency and resistance are seen as localised actions that challenge the state's authority over them. The

transformative capacity of research in marginalised communities has also been strongly supported by other scholars. Michelle Fine's (1994) critical framework of qualitative research also advanced this view of the transformative power of critical ethnography and its capacity for:

...researchers [to] fix themselves self-consciously as participatory activists. Their work seeks to unearth, disrupt, and transform existing ideological and/or institutional arrangements. Here, the researcher's stance frames the texts produced and carves out the space in which intellectual surprises surface (1994, p. 17).

Here is an alignment of a critical ethnographic methodology with a critical Indigenous methodology (L. T. Smith, 2000) within the field of a multi-site ethnographic study.

Linda Smith (2000) and others (Kovach, 2009; Shawn Wilson, 2001) claim that a critical Indigenous research methodology is characterised by a number of unique attributes. Firstly, the understanding of Indigenous people comes via an appreciation of their unique worldview and epistemic knowledge. Secondly, the purpose and function of research must emanate from Indigenous communities and is to be conducted by and for them. Thirdly it is a relational methodology that impacts on the role and the place of the researcher. Each of these attributes is discussed in detail as they impact on developing a deeper understanding of this methodology and used to define guiding principles for research.

Indigenous knowledge

Within a positivist scientific research paradigm, valid knowledge production is said to occur as the result of a research inquiry methodology that is culturally neutral and elicited from valid 'facts,' derived from research (Langton, 2004) and is widely or even universally applicable (Banks, 2006). While research in the social sciences has largely moved to a post-positivist environment in which these once-held intellectual absolutes of knowledge and truth have been renounced (Lather, 1988), it remains the contention of Indigenous scholars such as Grande (2008) that this does not shed clarity on the lived experiences of Indigenous communities.

Morton-Robinson and Walter (2009), along with other Indigenous Australian scholars (Fredericks, 2008; K. Martin & Mirraboopa, 2003; Rigney, 1997) have illustrated that while there is a growing diversity in the approaches and descriptions of an Indigenous research methodology, they all remain centrally informed by clear underpinning propositions that ensure an authenticity to the research. Central to this overarching paradigm are philosophical schemas that aid understanding of the worlds they inhabit and that situate a moral perspective of how to relate with those worldviews. Sefa Dei (2000) speaks of Indigenous knowledge as being contextually situated by place and of being inter-generationally refined such that it intimately describes the locality from which it is

revealed through embedded knowledge in language, relationships, dance, song, dreaming narratives and artistic endeavour. This is the essence of an Indigenous methodology that draws together encompassing relational notions of Country, space, Dreaming, and kinship.

These propositions rest on understanding and applying an Indigenous ontology or way of understanding the nature of reality and being; our epistemologies of thinking or knowing; and our axiology and the moral and ethical positions that supports the search for knowledge (Shawn Wilson, 2008). Porsanger (2004) suggests that an Indigenous methodology framed by these moral, epistemic and ontological perspectives makes visible what is meaningful and logical in the understanding of ourselves as Indigenous people, and the wider world.

Chilisa's (2012, pp. 99-127) text on Indigenous Methodology looks to the commonalities across the Indigenous landscapes of Africa, Canada and Australia. This relationally based framework provides a structure to articulate a compatible understanding of how a relationally situated ontology, epistemology and axiology form the essential keystones to understanding how the Indigenous methodology provides a comprehensive meaning and understanding.

This sense of being rests on a relational epistemology where knowledge is socially constructed within the unique environment of Country, and is shared through communicating shared experiences, cultural expressions of dance, song and narrative, and the very act of social participation. It is this knowledge that emboldens Indigenous people, and makes them indivisible from their Country and kin. This epistemology governs each community's relationships and in turn is orientated by it as evidenced in recent scholarship on the impact of language reclamation within Indigenous communities on community connectedness (McCarty, 2003; McCarty, Romero, & Zepeda, 2006).

The further element of this interconnecting framework relates to those ethical and moral guidelines that guide actions and talk to the question of relational authenticity. This is set in place through a reflexive interrogation of our relationships with the communities of participants, noting the extent of reciprocity, their representation and the researcher's accountability to each community. These issues must be taken up in the developmental structure of the research, in how the research protocols are enacted, focus questions developed and asked, and the respect afforded to those engaged in the research.

The central aim of such research is to move beyond the assimilative experiences that have long dogged Indigenous peoples' experiences of western scientific and anthropological investigation and categorisation. The assumed epistemic certainties of these paradigms have challenged communities characterised as the 'other'.

Centring community within the research

Central to any discussion of an Indigenous research paradigm, is the community. It is from and for the community that this research was undertaken, and it is their voice (Norman. Denzin, 2005) that must be preeminent in any investigation that draws on their knowledge, worldviews and experiences (Rigney, 1997). While this notion of community may at times be inclusive of the collective polis of Indigenous peoples who held sovereign socio-cultural status within the now colonised state, it is a term that for the most part, is representative of each unique group who inhabited their Country, and who

... empathically lived with their epistemologies and perspectives within their environment, [who live beside] other species, and engage in the moral ecology and cultural and commercial activities undertaken on Country' (Bradley, 2012, p. 26).

The sense of community is an encompassing term that requires an acceptance of a relationship that goes beyond the notion of 'legal sovereignty', to understanding that all is born and belongs within this space and has equal worth and rights (D. B. Rose, 1996). It is this sense of connectedness that forms a central platform of this methodology.

The position of the Aboriginal researcher is made more complex as it requires the researcher to be cognisant of community aspirations and the historically informed standpoint positions that have challenged the intrusive nature of research, its attempts to know and then speak for Indigenous people, and then its continuous impact on policy development (Rigney, 1997; L. T. Smith, 2012). Community resistance had been an ever-present feature of engagement with the state, and the development of an Indigenous driven, counter-investigative paradigm. This served the community's socio-cultural, political, and epistemic needs (Shawn Wilson, 2008) and was itself a further reminder of localised challenge and resistance. Though there has been considerable variation by Indigenous scholars in their descriptions of what an Indigenous research methodology entails, all have centred on their own community's needs to justify the establishment of a unique intellectual research paradigm, to centre their ethical realities (Castellano, 2014) and be the arbiter of its authenticity (R. Bishop, 1999; L. T. Smith, 2012; West, 2000).

Russell Bishop (2005), drawing widely on the work of other First Nations researchers such as Swisher (1986), anchored the centrality of community when he argued that for Indigenous research to be legitimate, authentic and gainful, it must expressly address the issue of decolonisation. This is about the self-determination of communities to challenge the constancy of assimilatory practices and be aspirational in providing both an understanding of the world in which Aboriginal people inhabit as well as providing evidence-based knowledge through which Aboriginal

communities are enabled to challenge those programs and policies that adversely impact upon their lives.

Guiding principles for a critical Indigenous research methodology

There are two matters that need to be addressed within a discussion of the role of the researcher within discussions of how to view the issues of legitimacy and authenticity as they are developed within the competing discourses of school and community engagement. Fredericks (2008) in speaking of the identity conundrum, of legitimacy and voice among Aboriginal scholars, posits that one of the lingering artefacts of the colonisation of the Indigenous intellect relates to academic self-doubt, where Indigenous people are forced to evaluate themselves against the measures set by an academy that itself continues to be party to the colonising processes. Linda Smith (2012) in her text on Indigenous research methodology identified the ongoing impact of colonial investigation on Indigenous peoples, and its inextricable link to the unfinished project of colonising the minds of Indigenous peoples. Central to these activities has been the distancing of Indigenous peoples worldwide from their own socio-cultural contexts, their communities of knowers and their languages. This is an assignment that has known no bounds and has as a consequence expunged Indigenous presence.

Starting with the unique attributes of critical Indigenous research methodology identified above, I have synthesised the relevant literature and distilled this to define these overarching guiding principles:

- Linda Smith (2012) has argued that the research undertaken in, and/or about Indigenous people must be grounded in the notion of being socially responsible and be centred on community - healing, spirituality and recovery. Smith had earlier commented that if the research focused on these constructs, then it would move towards decolonising the lives of first peoples by developing an Indigenous frame of reference with which to view the actions of the coloniser. Both Russell Bishop (2005) and Porsanger (2004) argued that this frame is fundamentally located within an Indigenous world view, founded on cultural processes, and acknowledges their ontological standpoints.
- Russell Bishop (2005) and Porsanger (2004) have posited the importance of relationships between the community and researcher. Indigenous protocols are critical to the establishment and maintenance of this relationship, so that the inherent unequal power dynamic rooted within the research paradigm is challenged.
- Linda Smith (2012), Saunders and Hill (2007) and Porsanger (2004) highlight the importance of researcher responsibility in ensuring culturally safe space within which to work. This must be predicated on the researcher having a deep understanding of the community and its

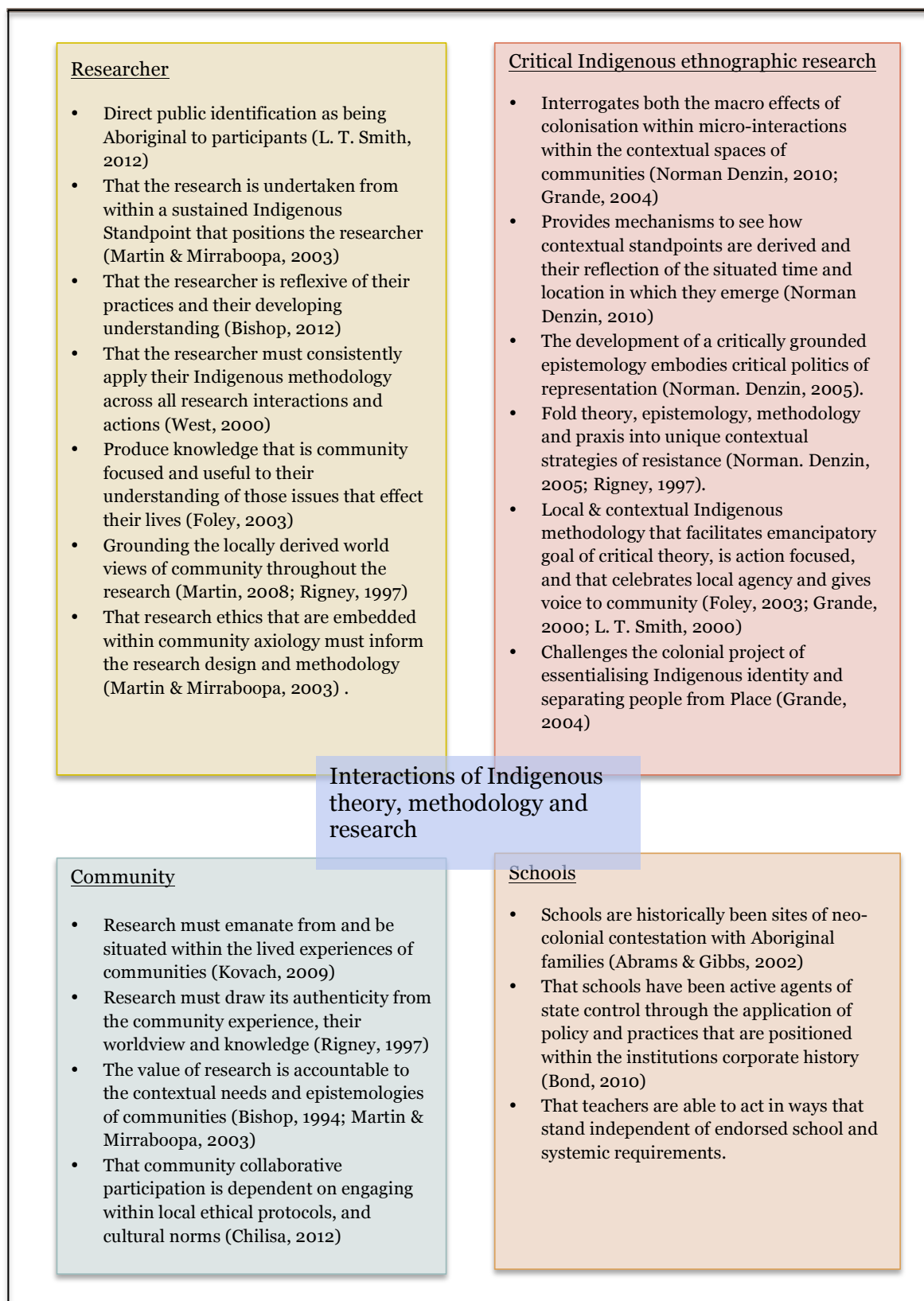
ontological foundations and the researcher taking responsibility to protect the community and mitigate against the possibility of negative outcomes that could result from research activity. This is important when research is undertaken in situations in which community participants are but one of the groups with which the research is conducted.

- Issues of researcher accountability are critically linked to the research protocols that require the researcher to keep those Indigenous community / persons who have shared their knowledge to be fully informed (Porsanger, 2004) through the use of culturally appropriate channels (R. Bishop, 2005), language (Porsanger, 2004) and in a form that is respectful to the intent of the person/s who shared it with the researcher (Saunders & Hill, 2007).
- It is critical that the researcher ensures that the intention and outcome of the research advances the overall interests of the community at large (R. Bishop, 2005; Saunders & Hill, 2007).

Summaries of these foundational principles that have informed this research are listed below in Table 3 1: Interactions of Indigenous theory, methodology and research.

How these principles inform the specific research methods is the focus of the following chapter in which this critical Indigenous ethnography is fashioned into a clearly articulated method.

Figure 3.1: Interactions of Indigenous theory, methodology and research



Chapter 4: A research method for critical Indigenous ethnographic case studies

4.1 Introduction

This research was undertaken and analysed using a critical ethnographic multisite investigation of the impact of Aboriginal parent and community participation on teachers' attitudes and beliefs about Aboriginal students and their communities. The method used in this study of schools and teachers, with Aboriginal parents, community members and educators is informed by a critical Indigenous ethnographic methodology, as outlined in Chapter 3. This iteration of an Indigenous research methodology looks to interrogate both the macro and microenvironments in which Indigenous communities have to engage with the state, its policies and practices, within the context of schools and their agents. The interactions occur at two levels, the first with the inner jurisdictions of government where policies are developed and implemented. Secondly, interactions occur within the local environment where these policies are enacted in ways that provide the local mechanisms of control over Aboriginal people and impact on localised policies and practices that underpin social and educational disadvantage.

The methods applied to this research will be explicated within five interlocking topics. The first will unpack the critical elements of a qualitative multisite ethnography as it is situated within a critical Indigenous research methodology. Secondly, there is a description of the selection of sites, broadly outlining the methods used to identify their selection. Thirdly, the research procedures to engage each of three participant groups will be outlined and fourthly, there is a description of how the research was analysed and in particular, how in proceeding through this analysis, it shifted from a broad critical framework, to a nuanced and contextualised analysis. Lastly there is an initial descriptive overview of each site. Additional more specific and contextualised detail is added in later chapters.

4.2 A multisite ethnographic research design in Aboriginal communities

This research has been undertaken as a multisite case study within a critical ethnographic methodology. In this initial section, the focus ranges across those issues impacting on the research design. A discussion on the data analysis will follow, providing detail on the development of a critical framework used to code and analyse interview and documentary material.

While scholars such as Stake (2003) and Guba and Lincoln (1994) have argued that case study methodology almost belongs to a post positivist tradition, White, Drew and Hay (2009) among many others (Falzon, 2012; Marcus, 1995), have argued more recently that ethnography has significantly shifted from its colonial investigative phase, and is now able to claim a more radical heritage of reflexive investigation. Willis (2007) highlights this shift towards collaborative ethnography in his discussion on case studies and their significance in ethnographic research on social phenomena. He argues that reflexive practices, critical understanding and a robust analysis are required in cases where there is significant socio-cultural diversity between the groups of participants and a history of interactional dissonance between the key participant groups.

bell hooks (2014) saw the political potential of a critical ethnography in the hands of researchers operating at the socio-cultural margins. She wrote that ethnographic research is a transformative methodology that challenges the traditional practices of researchers by seeking to understand the lives of those at the borders of society. She claimed that these studies not only give a voice to those previously silenced, but they also have an acute insight into both their own world and that inhabited by those who have been privileged by their subjugation. hooks (2014) declared that this was one of the unique values of critical ethnography as it provides clarity in identifying and understanding the contextual manifestations of social marginalisation from the perspective of those who are marginalised. This methodology's focus on critical insight, critique and change that arms those paralysed by their marginalisation with a capacity to challenge the socio-racial status quo that is axiomatically privileged by their exclusion (Gramsci & Buttigieg, 2002).

Within this ethnographic study I undertook a multisite case study, where communities of Aboriginal families coexisted within the same spaces as the teachers and other non-Aboriginal families. While each of these sites are unique they are also typical of the many towns and villages scattered across this region (P. Bishop, 2010). These sites are populated with communities of Aboriginal people who have struggled to be heard and teachers who have been charged with the task of educating the children of these families. White, Drew and Hay (2009) posit that to understand the experiences of those embroiled within these often highly contested interactions requires an inductive reasoning. This provides evidence from within and across the sites to illuminate the unknown and in doing so, draws the reader into understanding the general phenomenon under study.

Sturman (1994) has argued that case study research has now moved from being an anthropological tool used to investigate particular elements of one site, to looking at ways

to establish general patterns in phenomena through observations across a multiple number of sites. He states that multisite investigations give the researcher the possibility of elucidating meaning by distilling a broader understanding through identifying the various manifestations of phenomena within diverse sites. The ability to see patterns form and understand their relationship to the phenomena within these real life experiences of people sits at the heart of a multisite case study analysis (Yin, 2012).

A purposefully selected multisite method (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007) is significant if the study seeks to understand the unique as well as common experiences and responses within each Aboriginal communities on matters such as their dispersal, dislocation, assimilation, and socio-economic disadvantage. This study looks to understand both the particular and broader responses of participants in these communities as they have engaged with schools in the contested environment that surrounds the education of their children. Within this particular regard, the research seeks to uncover that which is contextual, and that which provides insight beyond these four locations. These matters go to the heart of the validity of this research, and the capacity of this analysis to shed light on Aboriginal peoples' experiences of schooling and their relationships with school.

Indigenous ethnographic case study: Initial matters of validity

It is critical to position this work as being undertaken from within an Indigenous epistemological construct that links the researcher firmly to the four communities and its participants. My own position as an Aboriginal man familiar to the contexts of the four case sites provides an insight into the contexts of contested discourses between Aboriginal people and schools and the standpoint from which their resistance and agency are exercised.

This research pivots on the authority of the unique locational and experiential standpoints of the four Aboriginal communities in this multisite case study. As such, this work operates within a collaborative Indigenous ontological framework from which the very enterprise of Indigenous research rests on the sovereign nature of the communities. From this space local connections to Country and the act of reciprocal enterprise between the researcher and research disciplines are established and kept in equilibrium through relational interactions and respect for elders, local knowledge and above all, to Country (L. T. Smith, 2012).

A second level of authority comes with each community participant who has positioned his/her participation and the sharing of knowledge and experience from within his/her standpoint position. The act of sharing these narratives springs from within a well of collective experiences and their telling which is often cathartic for both the speaker and listener, facilitating a broader understanding of these experiences, their aspirations and knowledge (White et al., 2009). It also ensures that the research participants alone are the arbiters of their epistemic authority to speak from a position of connectedness to their families and their community and their ontological authority which emanates from their connectedness to their place and space (D. B. Rose, 1996). In elevating the centrality of these community standpoint positions, the research critically frames the potential for the observer to gain an insight into the unique historical experiences of each community and to make sense of participants' various responses to them.

Thirdly, this research positions and merges participant voices alongside our dialogically constructed conversations that moved between narrative, explanation and critique, and where my own understanding emerged through listening to their recital. As Wilson has noted, Indigenous research such as this is ceremony (2008). Within this methodology, the capacity to construct common meaning-making was a reflection of the collective subjectivity and reflexivity of researcher and participant, where the telling is reiterated through an ongoing continuous dialogue throughout the period of research (Chilisa, 2012). These relationally centred responsibilities that sit at the heart of an Indigenous ethical protocol bind us to the act of reciprocity that acknowledges the researcher's responsibilities to represent that which has been recounted as personal and collective memory and knowledge.

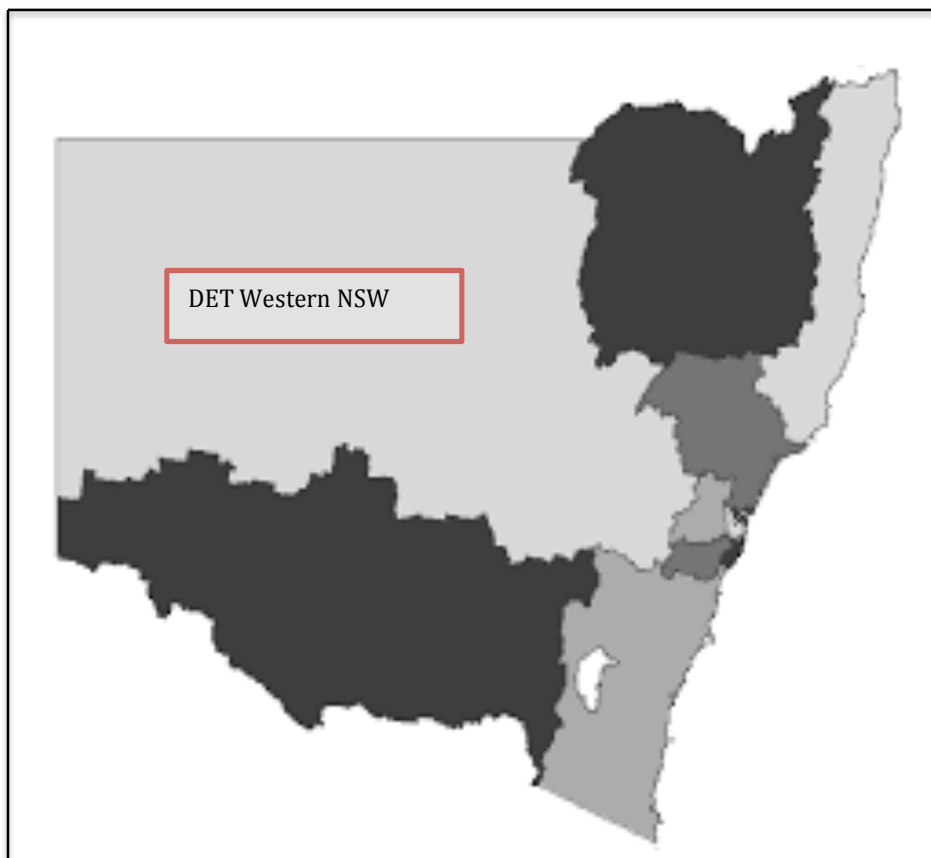
While the sites selected are unique, they also have commonly experienced the impact of socio-cultural marginalisation and economic deprivation. It is posited that these collective experiences are reflected in the acts of control exerted over them and their local manifestations. It is this variability and yet commonality across these different environments in reaction to these events that have formed the basis of this research. Consequently their selection sheds light on the broader 'Indigenous' experiences, and provides an understanding and a context of their local efforts to decolonise their communities (Nakata, Nakata, Keech, & Bolt, 2012). The purpose of the site selections was to draw deeply into the lived experiences of four communities, citing the development and application of their unique standpoint positions (Nakata, 2007a) as they challenged policies that structured the educational experiences of their children. It was for this reason

that an explicit critical Indigenous method was adopted (Carspecken, 1996; L. T. Smith, 2000), as it facilitated seeing into the heart of these 'typical' sites in western NSW and viewing how through these acts of agency altered the educational outcomes for their children.

Site and research participant selection

Four sites were selected to take part in this research. The schools and communities were selected on the basis of advice from key community and departmental support staff, in keeping with Aboriginal protocols. This advice included site location, Aboriginal student enrolment and a known history of school and community engagement. The final four sites were all situated in the Western Region of the New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (Figure 4.1: Western DEC region). The process used for their selection is listed below.

Figure 4.1: Western DET region



1. Consultation: On completion of the National Ethics Approval Form (NEAF) research ethics approval, and the N.S.W. State Education Research Approval Process (SERAP),

the project received University Ethics Committee approval. I then met and outlined the research project with the NSW State Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG). In October 2011 I sought guidance on the research protocols and issues affecting the location for the research.

2. I embarked on consultation with Aboriginal staff in the Western Region of the Department of Education and Communities (DEC) and Regional and local Presidents of the AECG covering this region. These discussions provided advice on these schools, their demonstrated history of commitment to Aboriginal education and their engagement with parents. A central criterion for consideration was the school's history of supporting community involvement with staff. I was interested in being able to view how direct experiences of gainful community interactions informed knowledge on teachers' beliefs, attitudes and professional knowledge. Denzin (2002) suggests that the use of case exemplars provides the researcher with the ability to interrogate the claims of engagement against the participants' actual experiences and their critical consciousness and standpoint.
3. This initial process shortlisted five schools. The criteria for selection now rested on; the representational nature of the sites selected; their type, location, size and percentage of Aboriginal students; and the exemplar nature of the sites as identified through community and their preparedness to be part of the research (Moriceau, 2010; Punch & Oancea, 2014). The following issues were used to locate the research sites:
 - a. Schools that I had worked closely with in the implementation of a range of curriculum projects. In this regard, I was seeking to engage schools with whom I had an ongoing relationship (R. Bishop, 2012)
 - b. Representative of a range of school types (Public School; High School; Central School and Senior College) found in the region (Punch & Oancea, 2014).
 - c. Schools representative of a range of demographic profiles of Aboriginal students representative of the region (Sharp et al., 2011).
4. After considering these criteria, four school and community sites were identified to be approach. These four sites, using pseudonyms to protect their identity, were Karrajong Public School; Mayanbri High School; Tabbagah College; and Wurtindelly Central School. The details of these four schools and geographical sites are included below in Table 4.1: Research school sites and participants. This

details each site, its location, type, student population, and participant details, and the number of final participants (see Total used by group column).

Participants

In the first instance there were 36 participants that took part in this research. School based participants were selected on the basis of their self-nominated willingness to be involved in the research. The initial participants fell into three groups, principals (4), teachers (14) and Aboriginal community members (15). The latter group was then disaggregated into Aboriginal teachers, Aboriginal Education Officers (AEO) and, parents and community. At the completion of the interviews in December 2014, it was decided to restrict the volume of data, by reducing the number of participants from 36 to 23 (see Table 4.1: Research school sites and participants).

Table 4.1: Research school sites and participants

Sites	Location & type	School type	Student population	Aboriginal student % of total	Research Participants *							
					P (1)	T (2)	Ab.T (3)	Ab.Ed (4)	C (5)	O (6)	Total Inter	Total Used by group
Karrajong Public School	Small Regional	Primary School K - 6	320	25%	1	5	-	-	3	-	9	1 (1)
												2 (2)
												4 (1)
												5 (1)
Mayanbri High School	Rural	High School 7—12	360	30%	1	3	-	3	1	-	8	1 (1)
												2 (2)
												4 (2)
												5 (1)
Tubbagah College	Regional	Senior High School 11 - 12	550	25%	1	2	1	3	-	2	9	1 (1)
												2 (1)
												3 (1)
												4 (1)
										6 (2)		
Wurtindelly Central School	Remote	Central School K - 12	140	98%	1	4	1	2	1	1	10	1 (1)
												2 (2)
												4 (2)
												5 (1)
Total Participants:					4	14	2	8	5	3	36	23

* **Participant Groups:** [P: Principal (1); T: Teacher (2); Ab. T: Aboriginal teacher (3); Ab. Ed: Aboriginal Education Officer (AEO) (4); C: Community (5); O: Other; #1 (6); **Total Inter:** Total number participants interviewed; **Total Used:** Total participants data used by Group and number ()]

This maintained the range and percentage of participant groups whilst retaining key informants from the four sites. Russell Bishop (2010) noted the pitfall of having too much data, especially when data saturation has occurred and the same events are being retold

with little more detail being elucidated. Triangulation of the data sets was achieved by the collection of a wide range of documentary evidence including state and national TV reports and documentaries, school and community generated reports and reviews, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data and locally published historical texts. This data proved invaluable in confirming participants' perspectives and experiences (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000, p. 314).

- Principals: The choice to interview the four principals was based on their key leadership and management functions. Principals were specifically targeted within the Department's School and Community Partnership Policy (2010) as having a key role in facilitating community engagement with the school. Staffing demographics saw mainly young and less experienced staff appointed and a high percentage of staff turnover. Principals had a key role in building staff capacity, setting school tone, policy implementation, resourcing programs, managing staff and policy compliance.
- Teachers: The teaching staff are the backbone of a school's educational programs, and were primarily responsible for the teaching programs and the facilitation of parental participation in the classroom (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2010).
- Aboriginal Education Officers (AEO) and other Aboriginal school staff: Three of the schools had funded AEO positions to facilitate community engagement with the school, work with teachers in the classroom, and support students. Their work is considered invaluable in being a conduit between the home and school.
- Other: There were a small number of other participants who were employed to run externally funded programs. These included managing a school homework centre, a school to work transition program, student retention initiatives and literacy programs. Their insights were significant given their whole school focus and their contacts with external agencies.

Ethnographic research is dependent on being able to sustain dialogue between the researcher and the participant where experiential narratives provide insights into how understanding is achieved and shared across the community (Patel, Doku, & Tennakoon, 2003). In particular, this element of collegiality and shared understanding between the researcher and community/participant is central to an Indigenous research methodology that rests on a shared understanding of the socio-political environments in which this engagement is undertaken (Cardinal, 2001; Kovach, 2009). Not only was I connected to these experiences but I also knew many of the families in each community and many teachers with whom I had worked.

This issue of connectedness and accountability to each community and the teaching staff rested on a relationally situated ethical framework that underpinned an assurance that their voices were faithfully heard (Chilisa, 2012; Louis, 2007). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000, p. 141) argue that critical ethnographic researchers must live in the world of their participants, know them and where possible, advocate for them and their communities. Being acknowledged, having a strong relational commitment to the participants and seeking collaborating evidence that demonstrated the efficacy of participants concerns, views and social understanding all assisted in allaying perceptions of bias and misrepresentation. I also looked to triangulate the data when contentious issues were presented such that I could better understand the contending positions and how colliding views could be best represented. I also further sought to get agreement from all participants to the critical framework that supported the coding of the data. This was sent for comment and I responded by making changes when these were suggested. This was important as it formed the way that I looked to engage with their data, and how later I would critique these events.

Discussions with Aboriginal staff and community members and teachers took place prior to participant self-selection. School principals in each site had invited me to speak to both teaching and Aboriginal staff. I also held meetings or had phone conversations with the Presidents of each local AECG, and gained their approval to work in these community sites. At each meeting I outlined the research, potential participation expectations and the ethical considerations, and expected project outcomes. I provided staff with an outline of the project including ethical issues related to their role, anonymity and research protocols. It was on the basis of these discussions, that all participants approached me willing to participate. Initially there were thirty-six participants across the four sites (note details in Table 4.1 above), which all took part in the cycle of interviews in 2012.

4.3 Interview schedule

The development of the interview questions was completed after a critical analysis of overarching inquiry themes which were teased out from the literature. The interviews were designed as semi-structured discussions to initiate discursive dialogue with participants (Chilisa, 2012). The level of prior contact not only underpinned the engagement with participants, it also assisted in the close dialogic intimacy during the interviews. This facilitated engagement in both the formal interviews and within general

conversations. The open-ended interview questions were designed for each group of participants. Broad themes were drawn from the extant literature on Aboriginal experiences of schooling; school and community partnerships; culturally responsive schooling; teacher professional knowledge, and teacher change.

Each interview took the form of a semi-structured interview so that it facilitated narratives (Blix, Harmran, & Normann, 2013; Lowe & O'Connell, 2014; Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2011) in which issues were conjointly related, tested for meaning and critiqued all participants through free flowing dialogue.

This form of engagement in dialogue is a key element of Indigenous methodology allowing for the iterative generation of knowledge, both inside each interview and across the three school terms of the project (Chilisa, 2012). This facilitated narratives of discursive participant journeys where life stories were told, community standpoint positions explained, and people and events positioned within family and community histories. This process of knowledge building with participants could only be developed from within an environment of trust and collaboratively constructed meaning-making (Chilisa, 2012).

A small change was made to the second round interviews in Term 3, with four of the scheduled interviews (one in each school) being conducted with two participants who had previously identified a close working relationship. These interviews were either between a teacher and an AEO; teacher and Aboriginal language teacher, or an Aboriginal liaison teacher and parent. These conversations provided an opportunity to jointly discuss the range of issues affecting the establishment of genuine collaborations (McCurdy, Spradley, & Shandy, 2005). These four interviews proved rich sites for understanding these extraordinary associations.

4.4 Ethics and Indigenous research protocols

Ethical considerations were an essential component of the approval process that underpinned the project and affected the selection of sites and participants, the conduct of the interviews and all general interactions. It was clear that the research could only proceed when participants could choose their own participation, were clearly informed about the conduct of the research, and discuss their expectations and the mechanisms of protection and confidentiality (Punch & Oancea, 2014). These ethical issues were deeply rooted in the axiological relationships between the researcher and collaborating participants, (Shawn Wilson, 2008). This relationship sat at the heart of my broader responsibilities to the whole community within which this research was being conducted,

and on whose behalf people shared their stories to explain community knowledge and position (McGrath & Phillips, 2008). The research could not proceed until such time as participants gave written consent.

While these ethical processes met the indemnity requirements of the University and the DEC, I also needed to attend to the potential of conflict or resistance between participants. The education of Aboriginal students has often been a site of considerable contestability between the very groups of participants I had asked to collaborate in this investigation. One issue was managing this while a second related to being seen to use the data ethically by ensuring that the analysis was situated and constructed as critique and not criticism. In this, I ensured that my 'ethical antennae' (Cohen et al., 2000, p. 67) were attuned to potential misrepresentation, while exercising my methodology of critique, such that contested views were represented within this analysis.

Ethics approvals were received from the peak community advisory body (NSW AECG State Council); the University through the NEAF ethics application, and the DEC to undertake research in NSW public schools (SERAP).

The following outlines the efforts taken to ensure that the research was implemented and analysed in an ethical manner. This was done by:

- Protecting participants' interest by implementing the ethics consent processes
- Reiterating research procedures and responsibilities at the commencement of each interview. This included the right for participants to withdraw from the project
- Ensuring the anonymity and confidentiality of all data collected from participants and schools
- Communicating regularly with participants during the data collection phase, answering questions, and negotiating the progress and timing of interviews
- Maintaining a close working relationship with each community by assisting in the development and implementation of educational and linguistic programs.

4.5 Data

Data collected over the course of the research fell into two broad categories. The first included historical, statistical, website reports, multimedia, including TV documentaries and news reports, and school ephemera. The second constituted the data collected through a series of formal interviews with each participant three times over the course of 31 weeks in 2012. Additional unstructured and un-recorded conversations occurred

throughout 2012 and many of these were recorded in an expansive body of field notes adding to the rich store of understanding of the participants, schools and notable events (Merrill & West, 2009). In addition to their content they represent the ongoing interactions that occurred, and the relationships that were constructed in a sense of trust and reciprocity (Cohen et al., 2000).

Data Transcription

All interviews were transcribed verbatim as they became available within each of the three phases of interviews and sent back to participants for checking and alteration. While aware that transcribing interview data has been seen as problematic, especially if it is seen to remove the 'smell and taste' of the interview (Davidson, 2009; Given, 2008, p. 884), the decision to send all participants their interviews required all 108 interviews to be transcribed and sent for checking and verification. Where participants requested changes, these were made to the text. All of the interviews were coded, along with field notes, and detailed interview summaries and commentary done immediately after returning from each phase of interviews.

Data analysis

The analysis of data followed a sequence of actions that stemmed from the adoption of the explicit critical methodology outlined in Chapter 3. All research collected and used in this analysis and coded in this framework developed out of the extensive literature on Indigenous methodology, school and community collaboration, teacher change, cultural interface theory, and Indigenous standpoint theory. This framework was then teased out to allow smaller elements of each coded theme to be identified and coded into NVivo.

NVivo is a computer aided research database and data management tool used extensively in qualitative research (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). It facilitated the integrity of the research by being able to manage the complexity of data, the coding scheme applied, and aided in managing the breadth of ideas within this field of knowledge. Its robust analytical functions, including complex code matrix investigations proved to be highly beneficial in constructing the analysis, identifying cross-site comparisons and theory testing (Bazeley, 2009; Given, 2008).

What follows is an outline of process used to analyse this body of data, through the development of a critical coding structure used to analyse the material. It was this

structure that ensured a robust method of coding material, and linking it to this critical ethnographic methodology.

4.6 Collection and analysis of data

The following chronological outline articulates the stages of data analysis.

- Term 1 2012: Establish interview schedule. This included the development of interview questions guided by the literature and the research questions (Boeije, 2010). Questions were developed sequentially to facilitate deeper understanding of participant's understanding and engagement.
- Terms 2 – 4 2012: Conduct interviews across four sites. These were conducted in widely separated locations across the Western Region of NSW (Punch & Oancea, 2014). Collection of ephemeral school developed documentation and other documents including historical and documentary evidence, and statistical data from the ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a).
- Term 2 – 4 2012: Ephemeral observations were recorded as field notes and commentary on school and participants typed up each day (Cohen et al., 2000).
- Terms 2 – 4 2012: Interviews were listened to twice, with key ideas detailed in a summary of each interview. These extensive notes and analytical memos later became the basis of the detailed coding of transcripts and the analysis of emerging commonalities and differences across the sites (Cohen et al., 2000).
- Term 3 – 4 2012: Verbatim transcription of interviews (Given, 2008). Davidson (2009) suggests that these 'denaturalized transcriptions' make it possible to identify the manner in which participants engage in constructing their own discourse.
- Term 2 – 4 2012: Transcribed interviews sent to participants for checking for data validity of the interviews (Davidson, 2009). Participants invited to make changes, and if suggested, these were as made as per instructions.
- Term 3 2012 – Term 2 2013: Coded transcripts and all collected documents (including TV documentaries) coded to NVivo, revisiting the documents on many occasions to facilitate deeper understanding and allow for themes to emerge (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013) Used Matrix coding to construct a richer web of cross-thematic analysis

Coding and analysis

A review of key literature on the role of government oppressive policies and practices of colonial government generated an initial thematic map of critical events and processes.

Carspecken (1996) and Averill (2006) both suggest that a critical ethnography must commence from a position of deep understanding of the broad socio-cultural and political environments that influence the world in which this investigation is undertaken. Consequently, a keen understanding of these initial thematic structures of oppression of Aboriginal communities was essential in informing the broad development of questions and later the coding structure that facilitated the analysis (Given, 2008, p. 88).

A theoretical framework (Figure 4.2) was developed from the meta-analysis of the critical pedagogy, Indigenous education and culturally responsive schooling literature. The following five meta-themes emerged from this analysis:

Figure 4.2: Critical theoretical framework

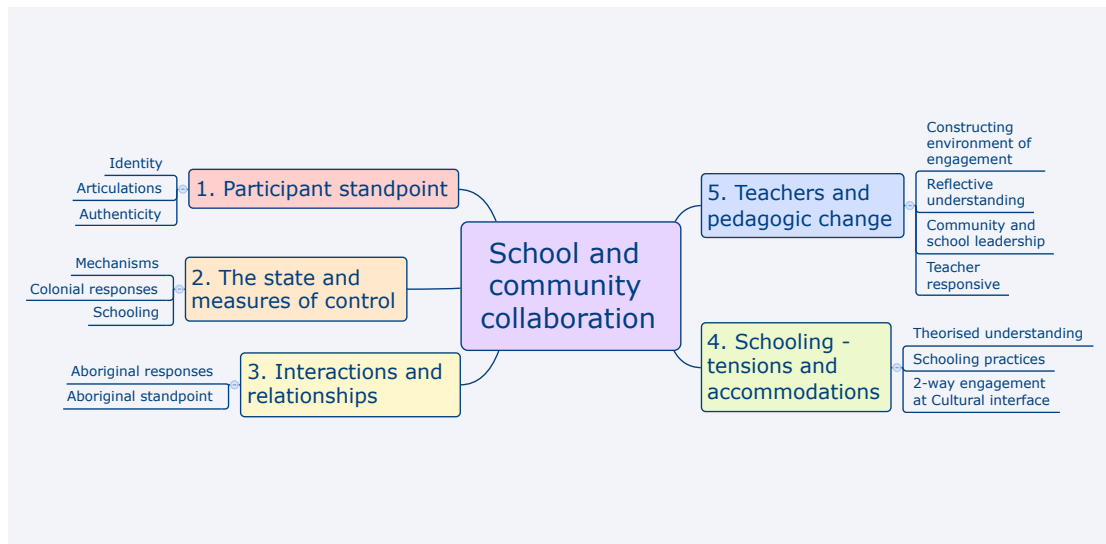


Figure 4.2: Theoretical framework is a thematic concept map developed from the meta-analysis of the critical pedagogy, Indigenous education and culturally responsive schooling literature. The following five meta-themes emerged from this analysis. Each theme has been further exemplified through a number of sub-themes. Data was later coded to these themes and sub-themes. There were major five themes in total

1. Participant standpoint;
2. The state and measures of control;
3. Interactions and relationships;
4. Teachers and pedagogic change: were identified.
5. Schooling: tensions and accommodations, and,

- Each of these themes was underpinned by the literature from which it was explicitly grounded.
- These meta-themes formed the basis of the critical thematic coding structure (Ayres, 2008; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012) applied to the research data. These codes identify the interconnections between the meta-theme, the sub themes and the elements.
- Figure 4.2 identifies the inter-relationship between the themes, as aggregated from the broad literature review and the coding of data in NVivo. These five meta-themes facilitated the development of a range of sub-themes. Each theme and sub-theme was discretely defined using concepts that originated from the literature and then from within the research data. These definitions formed the basis of the subsequent coding of data, and aided in assuring that data were appropriately coded.

What now follows is an initial discussion of contextualised information on each of the four sites. This takes the form of a brief description of each of the four sites. These descriptions are an introduction to what will be a rich understanding of these sites; their histories, connectedness to community and Country; their resilience and capacity to challenge the actions of government control; and their interest in interaction at the cultural interface (Yunkaporta, 2009c).

4.7 Research Sites

Site 1: Karrajong

This school is situated in a mid-size regional town in the mid west of NSW. The town was established as a consequence of its proximity to gold, discovered in the area in the late 1850s. There had been encroachments of settlers much earlier to the township's east, as squatters moved beyond the earliest settlements west of the Great Dividing Range in the decades leading to the discovery of gold in 1850s. The town is one of the few in western NSW not established with its own permanent access to water. This played a major impact on its development until the location of a reliable water source was found. This unreliability of water has had the effect of limiting its growth as an agricultural centre.

The historical records of early 'settlers', has had the effect of convincing many in the township to believe the claims that the local Aboriginal people had no obvious settlement in the area (Hutton, 2012). This record, oft repeated in local news reports until more recent times (Chappel, 1989) used this lack of a permanent water source, as 'evidence' of Wiradjuri peoples' lack of connection to this country thereby supporting the assertion that the land was settled as vacant possession. This is despite a raft of historical evidence of occupation with tool sharpening along nearby creeks, scar-trees, and tools and weapons held in the town's historical museum, and the memory of some of the more established families in the district who have cited the discovery of Aboriginal tools and grinding sites along ephemeral water courses (Nash, 2015).

The town had initially developed along the hillside that formed boundary with the two major roads into the town. One with a north-south orientation links the town to one of the larger regional cities while the other ambles less directly towards the east picking up small villages that developed along the ephemeral creeks and billabongs that eventually feed into the one major river system to the south. The shopping strip hugs the old highway, which until recent times took all of the north-south traffic through the town. Here one can find the requisite paper shops, cafes, old-fashioned country cake shops, Chinese restaurants, and a sprinkling of old hotels with their protruding verandas reaching out to the road's edge.

There are several public primary schools, a regional high school, and an assortment of Catholic and Independent private schools. The school site has approximately 30 per cent of its student enrolment identified as Aboriginal, a figure that has steadily grown over the last decade. Many of the families have close ties with nearby towns, two of which (approx.

40kms north and south of the town) were the sites of Aboriginal missions that remained open well into the 20th century.

The school, which is situated several kilometres from the hub of the town, was built in the early 1950s to meet the growing demand set off by the post WWII baby boom. It was sited in the least well-off corner of the town near swampy ground. Low cost homes were built to accommodate returned soldiers and Aboriginal families who came to the district after nearby missions were progressively closed in the late 1940s and '50s. These events, along with post war migration, saw the need to build a new school to accommodate the dramatic rise in the post war population. The school soon attracted a reputation of serving the needs of low SES and Aboriginal families who moved to this part of town in the following decades. This reputation had taken a firm hold both in the school's and wider town's consciousness. One of the underpinning causes of this status was due to the increased enrolment of Aboriginal students it has attracted. The current principal and staff sought to challenge these community perceptions through a range of programs that would better enable the school to meet the learning needs of these students.

The school had, over the last seven years, introduced a range of focused programs that established a Wiradjuri language and cultural program taught to all students in the school. The school further reached out to the wider community through its facilitation of a community language project that underpinned community and teacher training. This became the mainstay for initiating the creation of a local language program that supported the burgeoning town-wide schools' language program. Early contact with the school indicated a high level of interest among the Aboriginal staff, parents and teachers in being involved in the research.

Site 2: Tubbagah

This town is established along both sides of one of the few permanently flowing rivers in the central west of the state. The town itself abounds with widespread evidence of occupation by local Aboriginal people of the Wiradjuri nation. Colonial interest in the agricultural wealth of the region began after early 'explorers' arrived in the late 1820s. Closer settlement occurred slowly with squatters taking up large land holdings and the fencing off their 'sheep run'. The township was gazetted in 1849, and steadily grew in significance with the railway line to Bourke passing through the town in 1881. The township has a population of over 40,000, and is strategically placed both on the river, and at the crossing of two major inland highways (Dormer, 1981, 1988).

Over the years it has drawn in a large number of Aboriginal families that have come from western communities. This shift was the cause of significant social and economic problems for these families, and many local Aboriginal families were pushed to housing commission estates on the fringes of the town. The development of these poorly serviced ghetto communities saw a large number of social problems and consequent negative interactions with the police. During the late 1990s and 2000s, these problems became so severe that after several major confrontations the government moved many of the families out of the estate, and sold the vacant homes. The significant Aboriginal population in Tubbagah (upwards of 25 per cent of the town population of 40,000) has seen the government allocate a wide range of services and resources to facilitate the better integration of Aboriginal people, and the better delivery of government services and improved employment opportunities.

As the town grew, there was an ever-greater need for schools. The last major overhaul of public education was the reorganisation of secondary education when the existing schools were made into junior high schools and a new senior school was built in the early 2000s. The new school, which was built further away from the heart of the old city centre, became an important part of an education complex that includes a large regional TAFE college and a University campus. These were all located on separate sites with an emerging level of interaction between them. In 2012, the senior school had a student enrolment of 330, of which 25 per cent, or approximately 80 students, had identified as being Aboriginal. Enrolment at the school was for Years 11- 12 students, drawn primarily from Tubbagah, with a small number of students coming from outlying towns.

One of the reasons given for the establishment of the senior campus in Tubbagah was to facilitate higher retention rates for Aboriginal students from Year 10 through to the completion of the HSC. Prior to this development, the high schools had a poor history in retaining Aboriginal students beyond Year 10. Many students were enrolled in a high school that had had a long history of low retention and poor academic results. The structure of the new senior school allowed for an economy of scale in the development of a wide range of vocational programs, as well as the development of support programs for Aboriginal students. The large number of Aboriginal students and concerns over schooling success led to the school investing in programs such as a well resourced and full-time

Learning Centre, and transition programs that aided the move from school to employment or higher education.

The school has been able to garner significant support for this model of schooling for Aboriginal students. One of those was the AECG President who strongly backed the school's commitment to supporting Aboriginal students and their support of the AECG in addressing issues of student engagement and school retention. She, with several of the principals, was instrumental in establishing the 'Learning Centre' that provided teachers to assist students manage the heavy workload needed to complete school-based assessments. These commonwealth funded programs allowed the school to move from program models that had invested in the additional employment of teachers and Aboriginal support staff, or in some cases an investment in bricks and mortar which had been shown to have little or no long-term benefit in addressing the issues affecting student retention and achievement (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004). The evidence is mounting that such expenditure is wasteful and has done little to affect the substantial underpinning causes of underachievement (Purdie & Buckley, 2010; SCRGSP, 2014). Programs such as the Learning Centre and the various retention and transition programs appeared to be far more effective in providing targeted support to students and were a significant part of the school's success in retaining students through to the completion of school.

This is not to say there wasn't significant teacher resistance to these programs and to the perception that Aboriginal students were being provided with resources that were denied to others. These views are more fully explored through the commentary of many of the participants from the school.

Site 3: Mayanbri

The township of Mayanbri is situated some 70kms north of Tubbagah on the highway that eventually leads to Brisbane. It was settled slightly after the arrival of squatters in the 1830s. These squatters took up land along the less than reliable river which ran northwest before it joined the Barwon River. This period of land acquisition saw squatters and free settlers run into bands of Gamalaraay, Walywan and Ngiyampaa peoples, many of who opposed the forced and often illegal sequestration of their lands. Indeed, the first of many recorded massacres took place on the Liverpool plains with exaggerated responses by

settlers and police exacting a punishing toll on any Aboriginal resistance (Christison, 2009; Milliss, 1992).

The history of interactions between Aboriginal people and settlers was similar to other areas in this region with forced removal of people, death by diseases, and later terrorising remnant communities to move onto missions (Christison, 2009; Milliss, 1992; Morris, 1992; W. Smith & Smith, 1964). Later, after the floods in 1955, the mission was closed, and the remnant families moved to either the Pines, a location several kilometres south of the township, or to a spot almost 20kms south. These sites are significant to the history of black segregation, but also Aboriginal resistance (Mayanbri Shire Council, 2012).

The possibility of undertaking research at Mayanbri was something that had played on my mind prior to the commencement of the project. I had come to know this school over the previous decade, when I had initially supported it in developing a four-year numeracy/mathematics project to implement the New 7 – 10 Maths syllabus in my capacity as a Board Inspector with the NSW Board of Studies (BoS). I had approached the school when a new principal, with whom I had worked in the early 1990s, was appointed in 2004. His teaching was a mix of a no-nonsense approach to classroom management, with a liberal dose of self-effacing humour that was attractive to these students. He articulated high aspirations for student learning to both staff and parents along with a fierce advocacy for quality education in country schools, and so he jumped at the opportunity to have the Board's input into curriculum renewal at this critical stage. As a consequence of the success of this project the school initiated two additional curriculum projects that brought Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal parents into the school in support of this innovative contextual Maths program. The principal forged a strong working relationship with the Aboriginal educators (AEOs), who in turn became strong advocates for the school in their work with students and parents.

As a result of the success of these programs, the school gained a level of wide public and systemic acknowledgement of the quality of this program work, as did the Mathematics head teacher who undertook a series of presentations for Mathematics teachers across the country. He was still at the school, and he facilitated his own and other staff's participation. His life-long relationships with Aboriginal families played a significant role in facilitating these innovative programs as well as more broadly supporting parent participation and advocacy within the school. He spoke at the end of his first interview of his new position as

mentor to early scheme teachers and on the need for teachers to reach out and create learning partnerships between themselves and parents in support of student engagement and academic progress.

After the school had achieved a level of success in the early to mid 2000s, there was a hiatus in curriculum innovation and community collaboration as the school coasted along under the stewardship of several short-term principals. The last of these had made his name in being seen to support Aboriginal education but behind the scenes, according to local impressions, there was little to show for these efforts. However a number of key things had been either put in place or were in the early stages of being initiated. One of those was the signing of the school and community partnership agreement and the second was that the school was selected as a national partnership school. A significant demographic change had been underway over the last decade. By 2012 the percentage of Aboriginal students had risen from 15 to 25 per cent. Many of the nearby towns had seen Aboriginal families move into their communities as a result of the drought, loss of town services and employment, and cheap rent.

It was the appointment of a new principal at the commencement of 2012 that appeared to herald a shift in the mood for change with some staff questioning past directions and Aboriginal parents and workers at the school appearing to be chaffing at the bit to move the agenda along.

Site 4: Wurtindelly

Wurtindelly sits at the juncture of where the tar meets the endless dirt road that heads off into the distant west of the never-never – away from the river on which it sits, and which once had brought great wealth to the white settler families who moved into the marginal agricultural land in western NSW. They had carved out huge sheep and cattle stations from the land of the Paakantyi nation whose ancestral Country stretches from Bourke, in the north of the state, to Wentworth on the Victorian/South Australian boarder, to the last hills of the Barrier Ranges in the west and north, and east towards Cobar. Central to this Country, its stories and ancestral visitors, is the mighty Darling River or 'Paaka' the name which gave these people their identity. Unlike other nearby communities, the township has a vibrancy and inner strength that is beguiling to visitors and a source of community pride.

The township that was established on the river at Wurtindelly was to play a major role in supporting the opening up of these western lands, as it was a site from which 'explorers' of the likes of Bourke and Wills left on their fateful journey, and later was a major river town that assisted in the movement of produce down the river to Adelaide (Morphett & Cleary, 1960). The closing of this trade after the advent of the rail link to Sydney from both Bourke and Broken Hill saw this once flourishing trade end. The township now appears to survive on passing tourist trade to the Wurtindelly Lakes and the large irrigated agricultural ventures that have been developed along the nearby river.

Like in so many other similar townships, the school, along with the Shire Council and police services, provides the far largest source of employment to people in the community and plays an important role in keeping the small range of local shops afloat. While the numbers fluctuate, the school enrolment was 140 in early 2012. Informants suggested that there had been a major demographic shift in the town over the last twenty years with many of the elderly white families who had moved off the family properties dying or moving further east, while Aboriginal families moved in looking for housing or employment on the huge properties along the banks of the river. The town changed from having a frontier persona to a settlement location for Aboriginal families who had moved as a consequence of the loss of employment and increased levels of social disharmony in nearby Aboriginal communities.

That said, the town has a reputation of voicing its educational aspirations for its children along with dissatisfaction with past policy implementation. A new principal was appointed to the school after the very public resignation of the previous incumbent who had run foul of community leaders. This had occurred after many in the community bitterly complained about racist comments made publically on local radio. Fortuitously for the community, the new principal's arrival coincided with a major policy shift in funding with the local community being invited to be actively involved in setting the broad educational agenda for the school. This opportunity facilitated the community to raise issues such as local employment opportunities for Aboriginal teachers to be appointed to the school, low teacher expectations, and for the school to develop a Paakantyi language program for students and the wider community.

The school's Aboriginal student population of almost 100% sharpened the immediacy of the school needing to respond to the level of community dissatisfaction. Several years

following these changes in 2007 the retention rates from Year 10 to the completion of Year 12 increased from less than 30 to 55 per cent, strong Aboriginal candidates had been appointed to senior positions in the school executive and Aboriginal specific language and cultural programs had been implemented. The school had invested in establishing music and art programs that proved popular with students, and these had a wider impact on community participation. Collaboration with a women's choir, elders and senior women, gave school staff an ideal platform upon which to build positive links between themselves and the wider community.

Of major concern to many parents was the impending retirement of this principal who, now approaching 70, was making clear his intention to leave the school. So many of these hard won gains had been established after considerable effort and they had seen previous gains lost with new principals changing policies without reference to history or need. Community leaders acknowledged that although this relationship had rested on an 'accommodation' with key members of the community, they now asserted that the school rightfully belonged to them and that its programs must reflect the realities of the student enrolment at the school. History both here and elsewhere had clearly demonstrated that gains were often largely ephemeral and that the relationships forged between the school and the community required vigilance if they were to move forward with their plans to graduate more students and maintain the established language program.

While each of the four sites internally represented the uniqueness of each Aboriginal community, their histories, connectedness to Country, and interactions with government and its agencies, they also represented the innumerable commonalities of the Aboriginal experience of colonialism across the diverse contexts and locations in which the schools were sited. These similarities and differences of history, community agency and resistance and standpoint is explored across the following chapters such that we are able to observe how their narratives enable us to identify recurrent points of similarities, and assist in making generalised observations about the impact of school engagement on teachers' beliefs and knowledge.

Chapter 5: Interrogating the 'native' - acts of epistemic misappropriation

5.1 Introduction

This chapter looks at understanding issues that impact upon the capacity of Aboriginal communities to relate and interact with non-Aboriginal people. It is my purpose to consider those aspects of dispossession that adversely impact on Aboriginal people and in particular their socio-political dislocation from the broader politic of the state. As the title suggests, the chapter investigates the complexities of the conflict between settlers and Indigenous people. This is a relationship that is fraught with deep socio-political and cultural contestations that go to the heart of such issues as national moral legitimacy, Indigenous sovereignty and social justice. The research framework within this study is used to assist in explicating the contending positions of the impacts of colonisation on both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia.

This chapter opens the door to two interlocking themes; the epistemic misappropriation of both Indigenous peoples' knowledge and presence, and the critical role that schools have played in the appropriation and re-construction of Indigenous knowledge. Reyhner and Singh (2015) argued that through these processes of knowledge assimilation and reconstruction, non-Indigenous 'experts' have asserted that in its re-telling, they are able to 'know' the lives and thoughts of Indigenous people.

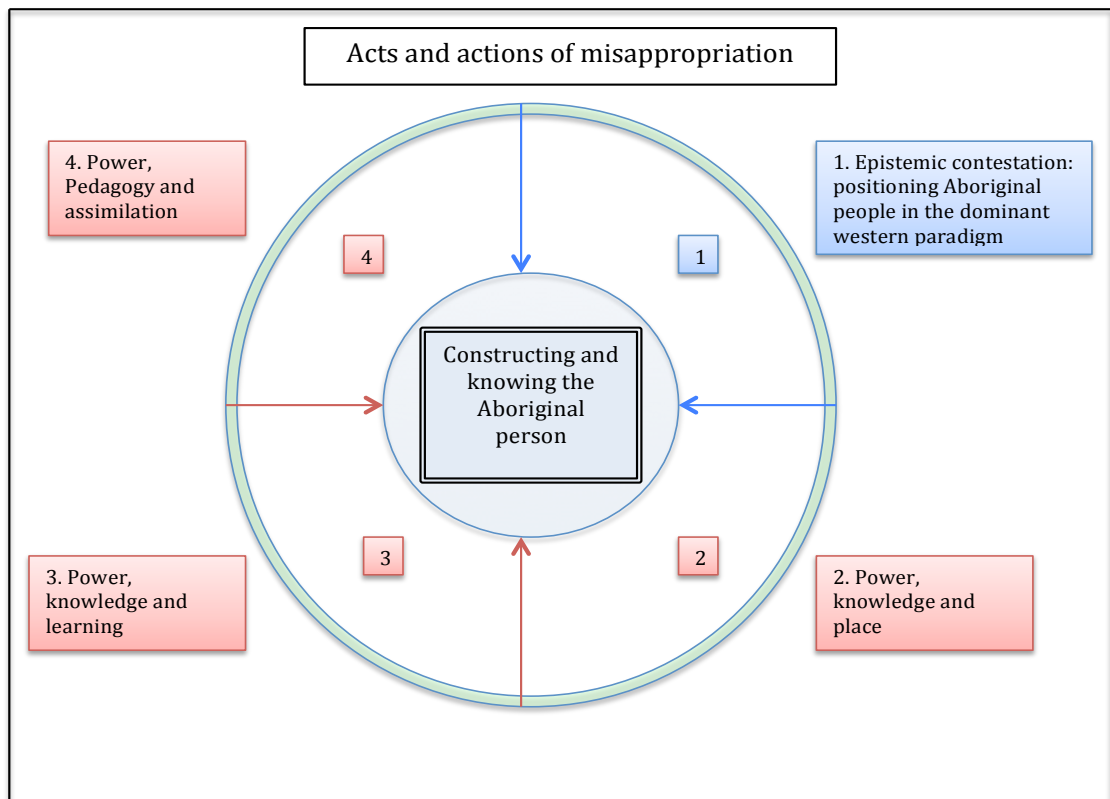
This analysis focuses on the experiences and responses of Aboriginal people in the four sites with particular attention to their understanding of, and responses to, their historical and current interactions with teachers and schools. These responses are examined for how they have forged each community's view of the state with reference to themselves and the role of the school in fostering the assimilation of Aboriginal people. This leads into Chapter Six, which reviews Indigenous agentic responses in resisting these encroachments into the personal, spiritual and epistemic lives of Aboriginal communities (Bond, 2010; Nakata, 2007a; Nakata et al., 2012). This discussion concludes in Chapter Seven and its exploration of how each of the four communities developed localised and developed nuanced Indigenous Standpoint positions that emanated from their families' extraordinary experiences of resistance and survival. To this end, these discussions frame the exposition of these relationships between Aboriginal communities with schools and their impact on

teacher understanding of the aspirations and learning needs of the Aboriginal students in their care.

Figure 4.2 schematically represents the socio-political realm from within which this research is undertaken. It provides a sense of the magnitude of these conflicts and the encompassing range of social, cultural, legal and economic issues that Aboriginal resistance occurred (Shahjahan, 2005). Within this context it is important to note that resistance is defined as each community's deliberate action to protect its social, political and epistemic self-interests.

The manner and consequence in which Aboriginal people have been epistemically and ontologically repositioned by the state will be discussed through three inter-connected themes. Each theme is initially discussed through the lens of Aboriginal participants and then counterpointed with commentary from teacher participants across the four sites. These themes describe how knowledge of and about Aboriginal people has been appropriated and changed such that it misrepresents their ontological essence. Figure 5.1 maps four key themes where the exercise of this power is exerted on communities.

Figure 5.1: Epistemic misappropriation of Aboriginal people



The first: 'Collecting artefacts', focuses on the acts and means of knowledge misappropriation. The remaining three themes: Power, knowledge and place; Power, knowledge and learning, and Power, pedagogy and assimilation, identify the diverse pedagogical sites within schools where these contested discourses occur.

These juxtaposed themes, which have emanated from the initial critical analysis, will facilitate our understanding of the various means that the state has employed to delegitimize Aboriginal people's presence and in particular, how schools have constrained the Aboriginal imagination of their own sovereign presence over the continent.

There are several key findings that emanate from this discursive analysis of the misappropriation of Indigenous knowledge and the ontological violence perpetrated in its retelling within the structures of school. The first of these findings is that the misappropriation of Indigenous thought, knowledge and ontological positioning within schools can be seen to be linked to a lack of teacher knowledge that in turn has been drawn into supporting the larger national discourse on the moral and legal realities of the dispossession of Aboriginal people. A second finding is that the misappropriation of Aboriginal knowledge was seen to have been reconceptualised within schools as cultural artefacts that in turn have become powerful mechanisms to control and subvert Aboriginal identity within the Australian landscape.

5.2 Epistemic contestation: Positioning Aboriginal people in the dominant western paradigm

The purpose of this investigation is to identify the various interconnected methods by which the state and its agents have sought to understand, control and subvert the minds and bodies of Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal people have consistently claimed that they are victims of the efforts of colonial governments and the academy to research Indigenous peoples and communities. They assert that this process of filtering and interpreting recontextualises the nature and meaning of their knowledge. This new reconstructed knowledge is then used by the academy to claim expertise over Aboriginal people's knowledge and their ways of thinking (Rigney, 1997; West, 2000). Experience in Australia (Blair, 2008; Nakata et al., 2012; D. B. Rose, 2003) and other settler locations (Battiste, 2002; R. Bishop, 2005; George J. Sefa Dei, 2000) have shown how government agencies have been emboldened by their unrestrained 'access', to mine, interpret and then read back that knowledge to

communities. Over time, colonial understanding of Indigenous standpoint and axiology has been constantly recontextualised as 'known' and understood anthropological certainties about Indigenous peoples, their social structures, spiritual beliefs, cultural practices and their capacity to engage in and with the first world of the colonisers. Often these certainties were nefariously derived, through research that academically misappropriated knowledge (Nakata & Langton, 2005) through cultural theft (L. T. Smith, 2012). This has had the unsettling impact of being read back to communities as facts of their past, with the consequence of unsettling or altering Indigenous ways of thinking through their re-interpretation by observers who were ignorant of the meaning of things they had no way of understanding (D. B. Rose, 1996).

More than a century of western investigations of Indigenous people has given a false confidence to the colonial state that has sought to impose a western, socio-political construct over Indigenous epistemology (D. Foley, 2003). These interpretations in turn have filtered broadly through the academy, giving sustenance to misinform the understanding of Indigenous 'knowledge' as reified and aggregated facts within curriculum (Battiste, 2012; Lowe, Backhaus, Yunkaporta, Brown, & Loynes, 2014). As such it lacks context and ontological legitimacy (Bradley, 2012; Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013). Yet, on the back of these limitations, schools continue to make decisions about both the particular needs of Aboriginal students and the inclusion of curriculum based on contrived and essentialised knowledge about the Aboriginal experience. The unquestioned manner in which schools have positioned themselves as purveyors of such knowledge sees them being complicit in both co-authoring and proselytising a national narrative of benign colonisation and settlement with two centuries of 'shared histories' and socio-cultural progress (Attwood, 2005; H. Goodall, 1996).

It is from within these highly contested environments where Aboriginal knowledge, especially that which situates them as legitimate beings in their own Country, is openly ignored within schools. Within education there have emerged two parallel discourses which directly implicate teachers in their role of controlling and punishing acts of Aboriginal resistance, while at the same time being in the front line of the assimilation of Aboriginal students (Hare & Pidgeon, 2011).

Assimilation has been a particular practice of Euro – cultural encounters with Indigenous populations. The practice of 'assimilation' was intimately linked to the imperial challenge

of saving the godless savage by bringing them to civilisation through God (Carroll, 2009). This moral purpose saw the coloniser look to justify both the physical and ontological removal of Indigenous peoples from the landscape (Boisen, 2013). Within the contemporary educational environment these two discourses merged within the classroom with teachers given the task of being trading nation building at the expense of the continual assimilation of the Aboriginal child (Byrd, 2011).

While teachers may plead ignorance to these practices, they are in fact deeply implicated as they have embedded these events in the everyday classroom practices that have underpinned the linguicide of Aboriginal languages (Ghilad Zuckermann & Walsh, 2011), the uncritical teaching of colonial histories, and the unquestioning elevation of canonical Euro-western thought and religion over all others (Cross-Townsend, 2011). However, Aboriginal communities are aware of the impact of these practices and how these discourses have devalued Indigenous culture, languages and their epistemologies (Brayboy et al., 2007).

It is little wonder then that the initiation of school programs containing this 'acquired' knowledge is met with resistance from some teachers, Aboriginal communities and students alike (Giroux, 1983b; Riecken, Conibear, Michel, & Lyall, 2006). Aboriginal communities have complained that this 'knowledge' is incomplete, incorrect and/or decontextualised both from its source and to where it is being taught. Within this environment there is little chance that such school programs will provide students with an authentic understanding about Aboriginal peoples' lives and ways of viewing the world (Bradley, 2012).

The following conversation between Nikki, the Year 6 teacher and acting assistant principal and Eddy, the effervescent Wiradjuri language tutor at Karrajong P.S. Nikki had been the one key member of staff who had been unwavering in her support of the local language and cultural programs - participating in the community's adult language workshops and supporting the implementation of these programs in the school. Eddy and Nikki discussed many of the staff's indifference to the proposal to establish the whole school language program:

Nikki: Initially I think that was a fear from the teachers as well because they were not educated themselves, and they were fearful that they would have to learn the language, or worse, to teach it. It was just going to be another job that they had

to do. But because we had Eddy and Finn who were actually coming in to teach it for us, that sort of took a lot of the pressure away....

Eddy: I don't believe I've ever had any teacher come up to me and say 'Eddy you're wasting your time. These kids aren't gonna be learning Wiradjuri.' [but] I will admit, sometimes some of the other teachers, [and] I won't mention names, but from some of the other teachers I'd like to get some appreciation of what we are doing. I see it, especially on days that are very, very important for Aboriginal people. It's like they haven't taken anything away from our assemblies, our conversations in the staffroom, or what has happened in the classroom. I'm always having to feel that I need to explain myself to them (Karrajong Term 3 2012).

The interview occurred immediately after watching a team teaching lesson that integrated local history, science and language in a Year 6 lesson. In its unfolding, the lesson had highlighted a pedagogical flaw in the school's current model for language delivery. Without formal training, Eddy was forced to draw on distant memories from his own school experiences to develop year appropriate strategies on how to teach the program,. Nikki was unable to assist because her own training had not included training in these types of programs. Several teachers had a concern about Eddy's limited pedagogical repertoire and questioned the efficacy of the overall program, even questioning its educational legitimacy and 'usefulness' to students. Nikki and Eddy however, had raised a very different view on this potentially thorny issue, by focusing on the lack of genuine teacher interest or engagement in supporting an improvement in his practices. His concern vacillated between his sense of 'shame' at his lack of training, the teachers' lack of respect for him and his efforts and their limited knowledge about the cultural significance of what he and Finn were doing with students.

Glen, the Aboriginal Student Support Officer for the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP) at the Tubbagah Senior College, had the task of working with teachers and parents to fortify student attendance to meet the school attendance rules. Glen had become increasingly disillusioned about teaching staff and he identified an indifference that for some staff, bordered on racism. He explained:

Glen ...not all Aboriginal kids are the same. You know? Their life is as hard as it gets, and so it's hard to comprehend that in the year 2012 it's still going on, there's teachers out there that simply shy away from Indigenous kids simply because

they're Indigenous kids. They're not looking at 'em as students; they're looking at 'em as black kids. And, 'if I say something to upset this Indigenous student, am I going to be targeted a racist?' So the unspoken word is the better word, they [teachers] just do and don't say. (Tubbagah: Term 3, 2012).

Glen launched a wider critique of teachers' limited social empathy or historical understanding of the issues that had created this intergenerational underclass of racially situated disadvantaged within Tubbagah. The realities of Aboriginal socio-economic exclusion as a result of historical factors had irked Glen as he encountered instances of teacher blindness to the circumstances of economic deprivation suffered by many students, as an indictment that was symbolic of the broader relationships between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginal people in the city.

Teacher indifference and resistance was also a topic in Wurtindelly. Lara who was the co-teacher with Colin in the language and culture program and a community elder, was well equipped to comment on the meagreness of the relationship and the lack of understanding of many of the staff appointed to the school. In describing recent 'Sorry Business'³ within the town, she reported:

Lara: You know everyone's in mourning and the kids you know they miss some school for a while but that's how we was all brought up like that. Don't you know kids stay home from school and yet know to be quiet and stuff? I think a lot of teachers don't understand it. They think the parents are just keeping the kids home and the first thing that usually comes into their head is: 'oh they must have been all drunk last night, must have had a bit party; can't get the kids to school; the kids must be all tired you know; or still in bed, because you know, they just don't know the real reason. A lot of them just portray us as being lazy. Won't send the kids to school. So that's what a lot of the [problems stem from]... (Wurtindelly, Term 2, 2012).

Lara's comments came on the back of a discussion on the success of an end of term performance and the difficulties that she had encountered in attempting to maximise student participation. She talked about the staff's indifference to the community's protocols and what she described as a cultural disconnect between their views and that of the parents. While on the surface this might have appeared to be a discussion about

³ "Sorry Business" is a term used by Indigenous Australians to refer to the death of a family or community member and the mourning process.

teachers attempting to regulate student absenteeism, Lara saw it as an attempt by staff to limit students' participation in this significant cultural event. While on the one hand staff in the school had articulated their recognition of the importance of the community's events, there appeared to be little evidence that the school's policies or teacher attitudes actually supported the community's aspiration to maintain a strong link to traditional cultural practices.

European imperialism not only sought land and markets in the New World but also saw to colonise, assimilate or supplant the knowledge systems of Indigenous peoples on lands that they conquered, settled or traded with. The axiological, ontological and epistemic conflict lasted long after of the physical conflict had ended and indeed has remained at the heart of the bitter contestation between the western and Aboriginal worldviews (Kapyrka & Dockstator, 2012).

Lara and Glen knew that their ways of understanding the world they inhabited were defined by their inner sense of identity that was rooted not in some sense of Pan-Aboriginality, but as Wiradjuri or Paakantyi people. Neither of them were prepared to surrender that which made them and their community's uniqueness to satisfy the voyeurism of western bureaucracy (W. Atkinson, 2006).

Eddy's commentary similarly raises the issue of genuine understanding of the importance of the work that he and Finn did and its significance to the students at the school. Eddy's efforts to bring his acquired knowledge to the students had positioned him in opposition to some on the staff. He and Nikki both acknowledged that there was a level of teacher opposition and that this had early on diminished the program's impact on students. Lowe (2011b), Makuwira (2007), and Vass (2013), among many, have identified that deficit thinking has proven to be pervasive and a powerful weapon of socio-cultural control as it works to diminish or threaten those who hold to their separate identity. The undermining was subtle but effective and in the case of Karrajong, it took several years before Eddy could carve out a legitimated space within the school.

Glen speaks of the teacher's unwillingness to understand the vastly different perceptions that many Aboriginal students bring to the classroom. He, like Russell Bishop (2005), understood that schools were sites of cultural resistance, especially when teachers positioned themselves as champions of reified western epistemology and language and had a role in creating social order through the process of knowledge reproduction (Nakata, 2007a). This had the purpose of subduing the Aboriginal child through constructing an

education that assimilated the student through their constant enculturation with western knowledge and language. These views, which appeared to underpin the intercultural beliefs of many non-Aboriginal educators (Austin & Hickey, 2007; Schech & Haggis, 2000), became the focal point for those students who opposed their cultural marginalisation (R. Bishop & Berryman, 2006). Glen comments that it was their colour and identity that set them apart and differentiated teacher's engagement.

Eddy also understood the impact of indifference that once established within educational discourse, was nourished by its pre-eminent status, its ability to inform pedagogic practice, and its capacity to reproduce itself across the generations of teachers. The impact of ignorance was keenly felt as these students' ontological authenticity is challenged on a daily basis within the classroom, school's organisation and the very name by which they are separated from others in the school. There is little in most schools that forces teachers to challenge systemic ignorance and tokenistic engagement, especially as it is represented in curriculum content. This has been shown to act as a regulatory device that has the capacity to align teachers work inexorably towards the elevation of western values knowledge and understanding of the world through one set of eyes (R. Bishop, 2005; Synott, 2003).

5.3 Power, knowledge and place

Rigney (1997), Sefa Dei (2000), and Battiste (2012) identified the level of teacher and institutional unwillingness to engage students from within an equity and rights critique of education. Within colonised environments such as in Australia and New Zealand one could argue that while schooling has sought to include content about Indigenous epistemologies within curriculum, it has failed to link these detached illuminations of knowledge to a broader systematic understanding of Aboriginal people's ontological beliefs (Austin & Hickey, 2011), nor the realities of colonisation and dispossession. It has been argued that this refusal relates to those postcolonial states like Australia being unwilling to facilitate any examination of its own sovereign legitimacy as the consequential inheritor of the invasion and dispossession of Indigenous lands (D. Foley, 2000; Havemann, 2005).

Armed with the knowledge to interrogate the means of control, Indigenous educators and their communities have moved to adopt a pedagogic methodology that challenges key ontological and epistemological assumptions that are embedded within the tenets of western educational curriculum and teaching practices. Some Indigenous communities in other settler states such as Canada and Aotearoa, have pushed back against educational

jurisdictions (Tully, 2000). There is a demand for the establishment of inclusive curriculum models (Ministry of Education N.Z., 2007) and culturally inclusive pedagogies that fortify Indigenous students' connectedness to their traditions, languages and sense of being (Battiste, 2002; Pihama, Smith, Taki, & Lee, 2004; Williams, 2011). The positive impact of these changes have been vindicated by research that has highlighted the importance of family and school relationships in underpinning learning gains made by Māori students (R. Bishop et al., 2014).

The same cannot be said of Australia, with attempts to construct similarly responsive pedagogic platforms not being taken seriously by education jurisdictions. Instead attempts to initiate these discussions with curriculum agencies and school systems have foundered on systemic obfuscation, or the implementation of policies that speak of inclusion and recognition but fail to deliver substantive change (Luke, 2009; May & Aikman, 2003). The imperative for establishing these policies was intended to placate concerns about such matters as chronic student underachievement and school engagement, poor service delivery of ancillary programs and training, and low levels of engagement with parents (FAHCSIA, 2012). However in place of programs that were responsive to Indigenous community concerns about their epistemic exclusion many agencies have opted to establish programs that substituted form over substance, giving a sense of change but doing little to give effect to improving student engagement (Sanders, 2013) or the actual acquisition of skills and knowledge that facilitate successful educational performance (Audit Office of New South Wales, 2012).

In place of effective educational strategies agencies have been inevitably swayed towards policies that take the line of least resistance, refusing to initiate change that would question narratives of nation building, the inclusion of Indigenous ontological beliefs and knowledge, or pedagogical practices that are culturally and educationally appropriate to Indigenous students (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013; Yunkaporta, 2009b). (2011). Glen, in his capacity of Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP) coordinator in Tubbagah, discussed the ways Aboriginal cultural symbols and motifs are used to elicit a cultural link to the Aboriginal student. Glen looked at the strategic placement of several artistic posters from major Central Australian artists that had been placed on the wall in the room where we were talking. He said:

Glen: I think a lot of it's token stuff. They need to show there's a big difference between being culturally aware and culturally educated. What I mean by that is if someone walked into this room they'd have a look around and see these Indigenous paintings. This is our counsellor's room. Our counsellors are non indigenous. They've got these on the wall. They're beautiful paintings. That means our counsellors are culturally aware. We have indigenous aspects at this school. To be culturally educated, that counsellor that's sitting there with that wonderful picture on that wall should be able to tell me what that picture's all about because they took the time to ask the artist. And if not the artist, to find out someone that says, tell me what that picture's all about so that then when they're in here trying to console or working with an indigenous kid they might even be able to relate it to that painting and say you know what's going on in your life right now, that's what that painting's talking about. You know? That's Indigenous education not indigenous awareness, cultural education or cultural awareness. (Tubbagah, Term 3, 2012)

To Glen, it was the falsity in tokenising the intrinsic value of these artworks that annoyed him as he reflected on how such images are used. In this case he saw it as a false statement of the schools' commitment to understand and to be seen to acknowledge that they were 'culturally aware' and 'empathetic' to Aboriginal people, and their beliefs and place (Coleman, 2005; Povinelli, 2002). Battiste (2000) has written on the nature of colonial power to essentialise its own intellectual superiority by idealising itself, within the canonical texts that venerate its own national beliefs and identity. Morton-Robertson (2004) takes up this point in a critique of Aboriginal epistemology when she questions the limits to which the state and its agents ever know the extent of Aboriginal being. She posits that western scientific enquiry has impacted on Aboriginal peoples' struggle to preserve an authentic Aboriginal epistemology free of colonial interference or interpretation. Glen took up these two connecting points when he challenged the authenticity of teacher understanding of the spiritual essence of the images that he saw being glibly pinned to the walls of classrooms. He claimed it was a ruse, a show, which displayed a tokenistic empathy that sought to exploit the students as well as the images true ontological meaning. In our last meeting in Term 4, Glen raised a further question about recognition – not just a presence but also an acknowledgement of Aboriginal existence. He explained that he saw teachers' unwillingness to 'see', let alone understand the presence of Aboriginal people in the town:

Glen: Well I guess from the perspective of the ideas of it and me believing in the ideas of why this needs to be done, is because it exposes people to show them that Indigenous people do exist in our community. Indigenous people do have their own set of values and beliefs, regardless of what others think. They are still in touch with their culture whether that Indigenous person realises it or not and that's just simply through the kinship and the connection with home and all that kind of stuff. (Tubbagah, Term 4, 2012)

Wayne Au and Michael Apple (2009) argued that within the neo-colonial environment, schools have masqueraded their 'care' of all students by imagining that they are being culturally neutral, or even affirming of other cultures, while in reality universalising western ideology and through this sleight of hand stripping away legitimacy from Indigenous ontology and epistemologies. A common complaint was that a school's attempts to acknowledge local communities were largely tokenistic without understanding. Evidence of Aboriginal occupation was even now palpable within the landscape but as Glen knew, non-Aboriginal Australians were often myopic if not blind to it and were comfortable in their constructed history that disassociated them from the means of Aboriginal dispossession. Instead he said it rendered a sanguine history of hope and discovery which scarcely acknowledged the enormity of the transition from sovereign Indigenous nations to a colonised state.

Nikki, who grew up in Karrajong, had entered teaching with a strong sense of social justice. In particular, she had an interest in working to address the learning and cultural needs of the Aboriginal students at the school. She worked with Eddy and Finn in establishing the Wiradjuri language program in four schools in the town. She had also induced another similarly interested teacher to work with Eddy in establishing the Wiradjuri Club with the Year 4 to 6 students, giving them a regular place in the school assembly. Nikki's commitment and broad popularity with students and colleagues facilitated the broader acceptance of the schools' Wiradjuri program and Eddy's employment to teach the Wiradjuri language and culture. She spoke of witnessing the positive impact on Aboriginal students' self-concept and the wider influence of these programs on student engagement. She explains it this way:

Nikki: ... the children, yes, they identify, but it's no longer an embarrassment to be Aboriginal. A lot of our children and a lot of our families don't identify to get benefits. They identify because they're proud of their culture and they want to

share it with other people. So I think that's the big change is because they're sharing it with other people, other people are valuing them, other people are saying look you're no different to us, you can do this, you can go to university...
(Karrajong, Term 2, 2012)

Nikki talks of the recent past when students were reticent in identifying themselves as Aboriginal. On the surface this comment focuses on the changes wrought by the school through its adoption of these programs. She and Finn spoke about the positive attitudinal changes, the support within the staff and student body and an apparent disappearance of racism within the school. Finn – a Karrajong elder wrote in a paper published in 2010:

The language has turned out to be a wonderful thing in Karrajong. And, with the school children in Karrajong East Public School speaking some language, we have a school boasting zero racism. The parents have accepted the language and we find that it's breaking down the invisible wall of racism within the community (G. Anderson, 2010).

Finn's words resonated with the knowledge that the school had worked with them to establish a genuine shared leadership that established with staff and students the groundwork for the school's moral purpose (Fullan, 2002), that subsequently shared with parents (Leithwood et al., 2008) and facilitated the work of these local advocates and champions. Finn knew that it was this that would drive schools to challenge their own histories and make a difference in the lives of students.

Finn's positive take on the impact of the establishment of the school cultural programs is tantalizing, opening possibilities for a different experience from that so bleakly painted by Glen. Finn speaks of programs that beckon the prospect of positive student self-concept reinforced through an ontological bond that is forged in the weekly language classes and the authority of that knowledge that comes with Eddy's physical presence in the school. Glen's world, only 100kms north of Karrajong, is on a different cultural trajectory. It still lives in the shadow of the missions, drawing Aboriginal families from smaller towns to its west, deepening their socio-economic ghettoization and its consequent effects on social harmony between Aboriginal families and the wider non-Aboriginal community. Here two possibilities have emerged – one in which being Aboriginal is seen positively by the staff and the wider community, while the other verged on the bleak house of disenfranchisement, resistance and social conflict.

The following discussion examines the various manifestations of these conflicts between schools and Aboriginal people and identifies the discursive possibilities for meaningful engagement from the experiences with the four research sites. In particular it focuses on the schools' attempts to exert an ontological control over Indigenous people's sense of being and the impact of these efforts on schools and Aboriginal people alike as issues are contended and new possibilities explored.

5.4 Power knowledge and learning

In a recent book on the history of Australian schooling, Campbell and Proctor (2014), noted the significant role that schools and their agents have played as primary sites of social, cultural and educational control of Indigenous students. This is not a peculiar phenomenon to Australia for in all of the colonised settler states, schools have played a leading role, either excluding Aboriginal students or more recently, being party to the social and cultural assimilation of Indigenous students (Friedal, 1999; Reyhner, 2001). This has occurred through a range of nuanced and not so subtle means, including the denial of a real presence within curriculum and the maintenance of practices that have been identified as underpinning student underachievement (Fettes, 1999; Marie, Fergusson, & Boden, 2008; SCRGSP, 2011).

The schooling of Aboriginal students has been underpinned with a purpose that goes beyond their 'schooling.' Overlaying this educative role is a deeper socio-political process in which schools have been expected to 'school' Aboriginal and other students from cultural minorities into the adopted colonial discourse on the occupancy of and subsequent decolonisation of Australia as an independent nation. Alternative discourses of invasion and colonisation are disputed⁴, and there is little opportunity to provide an alternative narrative to this articulation of nationhood.

A second associated moral purpose of schooling within the colonial landscape has been for schools to ensure that students saw that the 'replacement' of Aboriginal people was moral, natural, legitimate and largely benign (Boisen, 2013). This discourse sits at the heart of attempts by the state to ensure that its own moral and axiological legitimacy is essentialised and where being 'Australian' is to implicitly accept its European tradition.

⁴ Note the Howard government initiated counter educative discourse of colonial invasion, frontier warfare and the stolen generations, to name but a few of recent efforts of government to 'balance' investigation and the emerging counter colonial discourses of the occupancy of Australia (Read, 2002; H. Reynolds, 2006).

This has been a major point of localised contestation between Aboriginal communities and schools. From this we can now turn to investigate how these broad historical, legal and socio-cultural matters have played out within the local contexts of the four sites and show the degree to which they have shifted these discourses of educational contestability in schools.

Within these broad discussions, there are two key interlocking concepts, which inform how schools have become a prime location of contestation between the state and its agents, with Aboriginal people. Schools have sought ways to give effect to the wider social construct of Aboriginal people, their place within the state and how their knowledge about Aboriginal people is reconstructed within classroom pedagogic discourse. The first section focuses on teacher's self-described motivation in looking to understand and engage with families and communities. The second focuses on the construct of Indigenous epistemic knowledge and how teachers have understood this knowledge - and subsequently recontextualised it within the classroom.

As a general rule the level of classroom experience of staff is in inverse proportion to the distance travelled from a major city or regional centre. In many cases large numbers of inexperienced teachers are appointed to commence their teaching careers in hard to staff schools in small or remote locations. The constant turnover of staff in these schools does not go unnoticed amongst parents who lament the impact of the constancy in the transfer of key staff. Parents have expressed a concern about teachers' understanding and attitudes and their alignment with the skills needed to support students' educational success. This section focuses on how teachers articulated their understanding of their role as teachers in these schools and how these roles are aligned with the views of Aboriginal parents views about teacher capacity to work productively with those students in their care.

Aaron and Jesse were two of the school principals within the research sites of Wurtindelly and Mayanbri respectively. They both reflected on their own and the staff's perception of teaching, their understanding of the locations into which they were appointed and the needs of the students within their care. Jesse, whose own education in the 1950s and 60s in a strict Catholic environment spoke of the conservative social moral position that had underpinned his own education. Now nearing the end of his meritorious career, he drew on elements of this education along with his experiences of being a principal, regional

consultant and middle manager, to discuss what he saw as a central function of teaching. He said:

Jesse: You know the moral purpose of being a school teacher or the moral purpose of doing any good in society has to be about I guess making a difference and doing something for young people that they wouldn't be able to get anywhere else. For me that's a moral purpose. That's very important. So we talk about the things that impact about them, that's big. You can actually overcome that but you need to be able to provide them with a safe environment. (Mayanbri, Term 3, 2012)

Jesse spoke to the question of the moral purpose of teaching and whether teachers were adequately equipped to provide such compassion to students. This was not a conversation about right or wrong behaviour or spiritual leadership. Issues raised here echoed views of Michael Fullan (2002), who wrote on the moral purpose of teaching. As an educational leader and working in schools with significant Aboriginal enrolments, Jesse understood the moral purpose of teaching as being to improve the level of student engagement, to work purposefully to close the learning gap and to transform the working and learning conditions of teachers and students to assist in affecting these changes. Fullan had made the point that while the moral purpose of education must be underpinned by a teacher's mastery of teaching skills, its primary function was to support purposeful change in the educational outcomes of students who to date had not achieved that success. Christopher, a teacher in Tubbagah, had also graduated from a religious school in Brisbane but unlike Jesse, had stayed close to the church, working in remote communities and being actively involved in social and missionary activities of the church. He spoke of his understanding of this broader moral imperative of teaching:

Christopher: Look I came into teaching at a later age. I mention that because that influences why I teach in public education because ... I understand why people send their kids to private schools and Christian schools and things like that, but I see in them probably the elitism that never really appealed to me...

I guess I want to set out, yes I want to influence kids and I think ultimately the answers to problems in society are my faith, but I know that in the public school context I am not as free to express that and I'm not going to force that on anyone. And I ... so I like to think I want to teach kids to think for themselves and to reason and to have some logic and in the context of schooling as a whole. (Tubbagah, Term 2, 2012)

Christopher had come to teaching through his earlier missionary work in western New South Wales and his beliefs that teaching was an extension of the moral position of doing 'good work'; where faith and charity created opportunities for purposeful and productive interactions with the community. On one level, Christopher's comments were an articulation of a covert project of proselytizing to students but he was also driven by other inner beliefs about social justice and the impact teachers can have on affecting students' positive engagement in the classroom. These views were similar to those of Sanger and Osguthorpe (2011) whose analysis on teachers' sense of the moral worth had noted the positive significance of the expression of the teacher's moral purpose of teaching and its capacity to strongly centre them as positive agents of change. Christopher appeared to measure his effectiveness more vicariously, as he saw success in training students to be critical thinkers and empowering them to see that they could challenge those conventional beliefs that constrained their capacity for educational success. On arrival at the school he had gravitated to working closely with George and Vivienne, the AEOs, and to the many Aboriginal students who took his classes. He commented:

Christopher: [I] was teaching the Certificate 4 in Christian studies ... but I guess I had a lot to do with different Aboriginal people in those areas and I guess my upbringing of school had thought I knew a lot [about Aboriginal people] so when I came into teaching I really wanted to teach in a country town ... and to work with students missing out on opportunities afforded to others (Tubbagah, Term 2, 2012)

Both Jesse and Christopher spoke more intimately of their sense of a higher purpose, both based on their morality, teacher beliefs and the social good of teaching. Aaron, the activist principal in Wurtindelly who was nearing the end of his final year of work, was being more than brutal in his assessment of some of his staff. While he too saw the potential of teacher beliefs to effect change, he spoke despairing of his lack of capacity to engender and /or provide the support needed to impact on teachers' negative beliefs and attitudes about the town and its students. In speaking about this, he said:

Aaron: We really do need to challenge the beliefs of people who come here otherwise they'll come here and go and not change very much. They'll still have their racist thing because the racist thing always comes out. ... (Wurtindelly, Term 4, 2012)

Aaron's comments are underpinned by a more significant but internalised conversation about intrinsic teacher beliefs that effect teacher action. He was concerned about teachers' attitudes and an unwillingness to professionally 'own' the learning environment of their

classrooms. Aaron's comment mirrors the research findings of both Solomon, Battistich and Hom (1998) and Rose (D. Rose, 2004, 2005, 2006) who found that teachers tended to embed teaching practices that failed to engage or support Aboriginal and other students from low SES communities. They argued that teachers often differentiated classroom practices based on a failure to develop quality-learning experiences that were culturally situated to build high learning expectations and use explicit and scaffolded learning (Carbines, Wyatt, & Robb, 2005). Aaron's concerns echoed those from the Aboriginal participants across each of the sites. It is often thought that many teachers working in rural and remote schools, especially those in schools with high Aboriginal enrolments, underpinned their teaching with a layering of deficit based pedagogic practices and low expectations of student capacity that have historically ensured students failed to acquire the core learning necessary for schooling success (SCRGSP, 2009).

Bob is a young Aboriginal man employed by the school in Wurtindelly to manage a boy's education strategy. He had lived and was schooled in both remote and urban areas. He spoke from experience about being taught by teachers who appeared to him to have little commitment or professional investment in the education of Aboriginal students. Over the course of 2012, Bob had expressed his disappointment about teachers' dedication and commitment to the town, the school, its students and teaching itself. These views were far from unique, though not so publically expressed. Bond's (2004) research with the Mornington Island Elders on their views on education had also noted the high level of interest among parents and the Elders in being involved in their children's education. In particular, Bond noted the level of their concerns, in particular that teachers seldom took advice, failed to listen to the community's educational aspirations, or sought to establish relationships between themselves and the community. Bob was brutal in his assessment, when he said:

Bob: ... the problem with small... communities, lower SES communities and that we get teachers ... we get three types of teachers that comes to small communities. You get your misfits, your mercenaries and your missionaries. You know? And to be honest we don't want any of them here. We want ones that are here to teach.
(Wurtindelly, Term 2, 2012)

If nothing else Bob was direct – he echoes a view heard often within this and other communities, one born in the frequent transfer of staff, an all too apparent lack of understanding and, from his perspective, questionable motivations in taking up a teaching appointment in schools' remote locations. Each of the stereotypical figures in this

comment is representative of teachers past and present appointed to the school. They were seen to have come with an agenda that was not the community's when what were being sought were teachers with experience, capacity and passion.

Glen, the Indigenous Youth Leadership Program (IYLP) coordinator in Tubbagah, parent, part-time university student and one time local rugby league star, found that he was increasingly disillusioned as he came up against a level of staff indifference to the histories and needs of the Aboriginal students. His studies had given him a confidence to articulate a critique of his experiences and the embedded practices that disadvantaged Aboriginal students and their capacity to complete their schooling. He was quoted as saying:

Glen ... they're not looking at 'em as students; they're looking at 'em as black kids. And. "if I say something to upset this Indigenous student, am I going to be targeted a racist? So the unspoken word is the better word. So rather than try and teach this kid something, fuck it.. I'm not gonna say anything to him". That's covered me. No one can ever call me a racist. You know? And that's not again all teachers, but you know, and like gee. Earlier on in the piece when I was working in this education game I'd sit at some of the campuses and I was unknown to a lot of people. They didn't know me from a slice of bread ... but to hear teachers talking about students the way that some teachers talk about students and then start making assumptions about how that student must live and how his parents must be and that, that's wrong mate. (Tubbagah, Term 3, 2012)

Glen's comments on these three inter-related issues; teacher racism, stereotyping and disinterest – was that they had historically underpinned the failures in Aboriginal education (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004). Harrison (2012) noted not only their pervasiveness and debilitating impact on students and parents, but also that they were a primary source of conflict between Aboriginal students and parents and teachers. Glen went further, hinting at the pervasiveness of systemic racism that has masked the systematic underachievement of students throughout their schooling. He said:

Glen: ... it's happening right now. Our Year 11 and Year 12 half yearly exams are on. We have kids in Year 12 that have readers and writers sitting next to them because they can't understand the concept of what they're reading and writing. A young person doesn't start high school and start Year 12 and forget how to read and write. Somewhere from where that person's journey started in kindergarten to Year 12, and I hear that these students that somehow fall

through the gaps, ... how can that happen? How can you be sitting in a room teaching students, marking their reports and then all of a sudden there's a student that learnt nothing after 12 years of education. That's just not right. So that's failure to the kid through the system and again that's not blaming teachers as such, it's blaming the system. (Tubbagah, Term 3, 2012)

These comments point to an issue that few wish to speak of, which is a systemic form of racism that has seen Aboriginal students in all jurisdictions and states underachieve at levels not seen in any other group of students (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004). Dunn et al. (2010; 2011) and Paradies et al (2007) have demonstrated both the underreporting yet pervasiveness of racism, both personal and systemic within Australia and its effects on those to whom it is directed. What Glen identified was an unequivocal link between the functional illiteracy of many Aboriginal students and the indifference and / or ineffectiveness of teachers that has allowed or condoned student underachievement to be normalised.

The difference in the views of teachers and Aboriginal participants were stark and divergent, with Christopher and Jesse identifying personal inputs that would impact on student success. On the other hand, Bob and Glen had little taste for musing on these matters, but rather identified that outcomes – that is student achievement - were the primary tests by which to assess the value of teacher capacity. Bob in particular was scathing in his assessment of teacher motivation in taking up an appointment to a remote school. He disparagingly identified most teachers as falling into one or more of the following criteria: “*misfits, ... mercenaries and... missionaries*”, all of whom were seen to perpetuate practices that ensured student underachievement. Critically, many of these staff failed to establish effective classroom programs that connected to students, or sought to understand either students' or parents' aspirations. From the community perspective, student underachievement was the result of systemic racism, deficit theorising, poorly constructed programs and teacher indifference, views that differed little from those found in Bishop and Berryman's (2006) research on Māori student underachievement.

While the issue of teachers' motivations in accepting a teaching appointment in these locations was not central to this investigation, the comments highlight concerns held by many within communities about the selection of staff to work in remote communities. Roberts (2004) identified that education authorities have long been aware of the difficulty in attracting teachers of both quality and resilience to take teaching positions in these

locations. Research by Hall (2013) established a number of personal factors that appeared to underpin teacher willingness to teach in isolated rural locations. Hall distinguished key personal attributes shown to be supportive of teacher resilience including: self-efficacy and fortitude, pedagogic qualities that engaged students and a capacity to build relationships with students. Not surprisingly, these qualities were also identified in both the Social Justice Report (2009) and in Aotearoa through the *Te Kotahitanga* project, which developed a supportive teaching profile for effective teaching of Māori students (R. Bishop & Berryman, 2010).

Schools in locations such as found in this research continue to be staffed with young inexperienced staff and school executives. They have insufficient knowledge of the community in which they are appointed and inadequate access to in-school and regional professional support (Sharplin, O'Neill, & Chapman, 2011). Communities saw the regularity of teacher transfers and wondered about the impact this had on their children's educational success. From their perspective, the cause lay in structural and pedagogic issues of which they had only a limited understanding but they were all too aware of its implications in respect to student outcomes. As Kirsten, the Aboriginal support teacher noted, Aboriginal students were overlooked and misunderstood:

Kirsten: I think it's ... they've got a mindset on what a student should be. And anything outside that perfect student is not, oh how do you put it, it's not ... well ... They're [the teacher] not interested, yeah. (Mayanbri, Term 3, 2012).

As Kirsten saw it, to be seen, the Aboriginal student needed to be stripped of their identity and context, such that there was little discernable difference between them and other students. However, there were other mechanisms at play that also affected what happened in the classroom. The historic proportions of Aboriginal student underachievement would point to wider issues that reinforced community's perceptions of teacher indifference. The ensuing commentary briefly identifies the largely unnoticed pedagogic processes of the differentiation of Aboriginal knowledge from that of the 'mainstream.' The following opens up discussion on how the marginalisation of Aboriginal knowledge in the classroom impacts directly on Aboriginal student engagement and educational outcomes.

Power, pedagogy and assimilation

The complex issues surrounding notions of Aboriginal identity have appeared to press on many Aboriginal families, as they have been forced to relocate from Country to regional and urban environments, inter-married and in many cases struggled to stay in touch with those unique elements of culture that underpinned the core elements of an Indigenous identity (Bolt, 2009). These challenges are further exacerbated by state and school curriculum and teacher 'knowledge' that perpetuates notions of multiple identities, a concept that undermines the claims of Aboriginal people to a unique heritage and ancestry that connects them to place (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Bolt, 2009). Consequently Indigenous communities are denied a theoretical framework within the curriculum from which to claim their own unique Indigenous identity. As Lowe and Yunkaporta have shown (2013) the feigned neutrality of the national curriculum, with its unwillingness to address the substantive issues of colonisation, has left Indigenous students ill equipped to interrogate the processes that have left their communities epistemically diminished and socio-economically disadvantaged. The effect has been to leave communities dependent and muzzled (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Pence, 2011).

Raelene, who at the time was employed as a community facilitator at the high school in Mayanbri, was active in the community and had recently been elected as President on the local AECG. She had moved from a nearby village and had been employed in several key community positions over the previous decade. She spoke of her cultural disconnectedness from the town where she now lived and her feeling of 'statelessness'. She resented that her position was seen as to limit her epistemic authenticity. This made her all the more offended at comments by staff about their knowledge of Aboriginal people and of the over- simplified complexities of the lives of local families. She said:

Raelene: The perception they have is one size fits all – that we are all the same! But each community's so different. Its like cultural awareness... sometimes teachers think they know everything after doing a one-day cultural awareness course. But cultural awareness is different in each community. Cultural awareness is when a new teacher coming to a town learning about the dynamics of a particular [Aboriginal] community and that means each Aboriginal community. It's knowing 'who is who? What family do kids come from, and who belongs to who? Who runs your land council? Who runs all of the Aboriginal organisations? You know, to a white person, they seem to think that we all go hunting. And that how Aboriginal people lived years ago is like why we live as we now. What

do they expect that? That families out here in the country live like that? Do we still-hunt for our food or do we do all that sort of stuff? (Mayanbri, Term 2, 2012).

Raelene's comment touches on teachers and the wider community's limited knowledge about peoples' history, languages and cultures. Of particular concern to both her and the community was how this misinformed knowledge was transmitted as 'fact' about all Aboriginal people. She was adamant that what is fundamental to understanding local communities is their situatedness, - that sense of being located on Country and the bonds of kinship that binds families (Altman & Kerins, 2012). The paucity of teacher knowledge was a known, but what irked Raelene was the self-assuredness of a system that conceptualised and measured others from within a position of their own un-recognised dominance (A. Robinson & Tout, 2012). Raelene noted that this lack of knowledge gave them the self-assurance of the ignorant in homogenising 'Aboriginal' knowledge by making local epistemic knowledge invisible and generalising what they knew of these unique communities. This was only the half of it, for there were some on the staff who, armed with this 'knowledge', now sought to redefine 'Indigenous' authenticity, identity and presence by measuring local communities against this normalised Australian Aboriginal yardstick (Fawaz, 2012; George J. Sefa Dei, 2000).

Like Raelene, Eddy - the Karrajong based, didgeridoo playing, language and cultural education tutor was very discrete about who was given access to restricted cultural knowledge. His knowledge and understanding of the significance of the Dreaming narratives grew as he learnt more of the language and spent precious time with the few remaining Elders. Deborah Bird Rose (1996), in her seminal text on Aboriginal people's intimate and multilayered connection to Country noted that there wasn't one part of the Australian landscape that Aboriginal people have not nourished with song, dance and Dreaming narratives This knowledge was not to be seen or mistaken for the 'Dreaming' stories found in school libraries. Those resources bear no resemblance to the complexity of Aboriginal Dreaming and their weaving of past and present into a contiguous narrative of great ontological significance. Access to this knowledge needs to be managed and its efficacy protected. Eddy argued that schools had to respect the knowledge keepers and to use proper procedures when asking Aboriginal people to share this knowledge. Eddy commented:

Eddy: To me I'd probably talk to the teachers about cultural protocols, what is acceptable to that people in that area and what's not. And also be talking to the

teachers about what the Aboriginal people need to know as much as their Aboriginality wise and why they need to pass on that knowledge to the Aboriginal students. ... I would be making them aware that some of the wording and some of the language words that we use have quite different meanings from one region to another so you would have to be very careful with how you were going to approach that, how you're going to talk to the teachers about that ...
(Karrajong, Term 4, 2012)

Eddy argues for the adoption of protocols – the mediation between the community and those involved in the development and delivery of school programs (Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, 1998). In Eddy's mind, a major barrier to the discussions between the school and community is not just a lack of knowledge, but also the significant hurdle of teacher-situated knowledge (Lowe, 2011a) that continued to teach that there was no evidence of Aboriginal occupancy of the land prior to colonial occupation.

Eddy identifies the place of language in being able to recover an Indigenous presence within a very white and often racist community and to reclaim their legitimacy by laying claim to the Country of their ancestors. He and the Aboriginal students in his care were re-writing themselves back into this landscape and were doing so through their re-connection to language and Dreaming.

At heart, the community's reticence to participate with schools has come through a reservation about the appropriation and misrepresentation of knowledge. In response to oft spoken concerns raised through community consultations, agencies like the NSW Board of Studies have advised schools to adopt robust cultural protocols (Board of Studies NSW, 2003a) that address the rights of communities and protect their cultural knowledge and intellectual property. Communities have railed against the appropriation of their knowledge (Board of Studies NSW, 2006; Harawira, 1999) and raised concerns about the efficacy of the states' desires to capture and 'know' the Aboriginal person through their knowledge (Brady, 1997; McLaren, 1995). For Raelene, these attempts are dangerous, but for Eddy, the school's engagement with local language and culture could, through careful management, be shared to great effect. However without supervision, communities had seen local knowledge disrespected and worse, used to compare Indigenous knowledge with 'real' (western) knowledge, or typecast as unscientific and without 'truth' (Abdullah & Stringer, 1999; Aikenhead & Ogawa, 2007; W. Atkinson, 2006).

In concluding this discussion, it was found that the inexorable misappropriation of Indigenous thought is part of the larger project of the dispossession of Indigenous persons from the space that the colonial state coveted. It was the sovereign tenancy of the land that the colonial powers desired, but to give effect to that they had to both physically and spiritually remove Indigenous people from that which gave them sovereign and moral legitimacy (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008). Byrd in *The Transit of Venus* (Byrd, 2011) speaks of the epistemic appropriation of Indigenous people's thoughts as the mechanism whereby colonialism empowers itself to appropriate the physical and ontological vestments of Indigenous identity. This leads to a second finding that these ill informed and appropriated cultural misunderstandings have been constantly recontextualised by teachers (Au & Apple, 2009); the consequence of which was to distance Aboriginal students from their own knowledge and identity. The assimilation of Indigenous minorities is seen to be the primary outcome of an education process that has as its purpose the disappearance of Indigenous people from the heart and soul of their homelands (Grande, 2009). These acts of appropriation and assimilation have not gone unnoticed or unchallenged, with resistance to these efforts becoming the focal point of the following chapter.

Chapter 6: Localised acts of Aboriginal agency and resistance

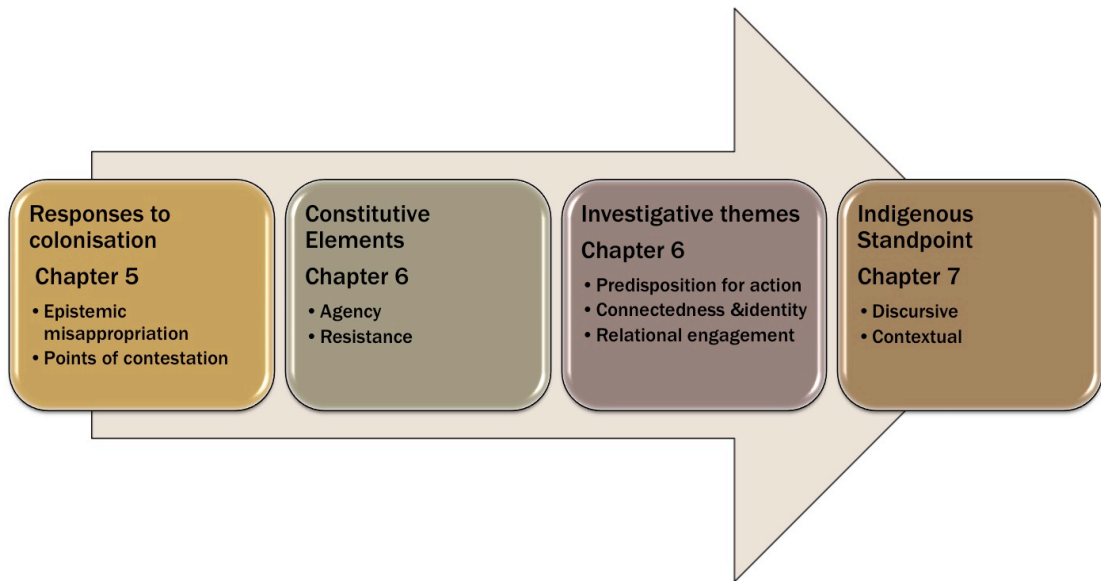
6.1 Agency and Resistance

The central purpose of this chapter is to cite the actions of both the individual and collective efforts of Aboriginal people in their four communities as they seek to avoid by whatever means they can reasonably mobilise, the challenges of colonialism. This investigation uniquely demonstrates both the particularity and commonality of experience where Aboriginal people have engaged with the state to ameliorate the impact of colonial hegemony.

The chapter will look at two closely interrelated elements: Aboriginal agency and resistance. These elements are explored through the voices of respondents as they variously articulate their own and their community's responses to the acts of colonialism and dispossession. I will argue that the discussion of these two elements is critical as they are themselves constitutive elements of a nuanced and contextual understanding of the particular standpoint position that emerges within each site. The discursive historical experiences of colonisation explored earlier in Chapter 5 and this discussion of agentic action and resistance inform the dynamic nature of the standpoint positions of these Aboriginal people as they relate to their ongoing engagement with the state and their agents.

The narratives contained within Chapters 5 and 6 both underpin the discussion and the findings of Chapter 7. The narratives within Chapter 5 focused on each community's understanding of their dispossession, whilst Chapter 6 looks at the circumstances where these communities sought to exercise their agentic capacity to contest the embedded disadvantage. As the discussion moves to Chapter 7, these narratives from earlier chapters complement the discussion in this chapter and guide and develop understanding of each site-specific Aboriginal standpoint position. It is argued that far from being just one Aboriginal standpoint, there are multiple manifestations of localised viewpoints both within and across the research sites. Nakata surmised (2007a, 2010) that these standpoints are representative of ways to understand the complexities of views and localised meanings that are discursively derived within each of these Aboriginal communities. Figure 6.1 represents how these three chapters need to be read to obtain a profound understanding of the development of the unique, site-specific instances of Aboriginal standpoint.

Figure 6.1: Establishing site specific Aboriginal standpoint



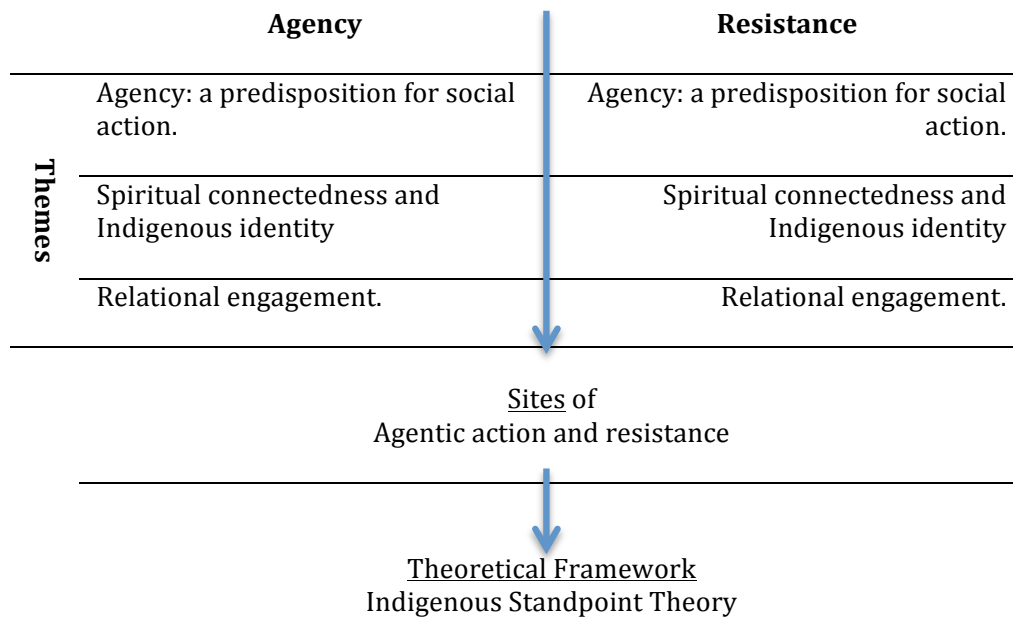
The key findings of this analysis can be abbreviated to the following overarching matters. The first of these themes links this understanding of the particular actions of these four communities as they responded to their particular experiences of colonisation. Throughout this chapter the voices of participants provide evidence of both their experiences and interactions with the state and its agents. Though all Aboriginal communities have been challenged with similar experiences and the loss of political, social and ontological autonomy, their responses and standpoint vary in form, tone and direction (West, 2000). These variations will become obvious through participant experiences across a diverse range of historical, economic and social locations.

A second finding explicates a clearer contextual understanding of the exercise of Indigenous agency and resistance. There is evidence that the community enterprises resists the largely unspoken but ever present policy of assimilation – a policy that sought to make Indigenous socio-cultural connection to Country opaque and replace it with a colonial history devoid of Indigenous presence. A consequence of this finding is that the very measure of action taken by Aboriginal people unlocks the space or cultural interface that enables them to negotiate change. Nakata (2007b) argues that this space operates at the intersection between two different cultures. It is dynamic, multilayered and a multidimensional space in which relationships are reconstituted, whereby people can speak of themselves and each other and can construct new ways of seeing and understanding (Nakata, 2007b).

A third finding emanates from the community’s deep connection to Country which situates both the complexity and site-specific nature of these connections, and highlights their discursive efforts to maintain these tenuous links (S. Harrison & Dourish, 1996; 2007).

Agency and resistance will first be discussed separately and then in the ways they interrelate, as it is important to recognise the complexity of the interrelationship between them. The purpose of this discussion is to identify how the notions of agency and resistance are key constitutive elements of Aboriginal standpoints as they are observed within each research site. In this chapter the analysis of agency and resistance will be explicated through three inter-related themes: 1) Agency: a predisposition for social action: 2) Spiritual connectedness and Indigenous identity, and: 3) Relational engagement. The purpose of this thematic juxtaposition is to highlight the key contextual elements of each site, allowing an Aboriginal standpoint to emerge in both in time and place. Table 6.1 represents the conceptual interrelationship between agency and resistance, how they are enacted and then inform the dynamic standpoint positions of these communities.

Table 6.1: Thematic investigation of Agency and Resistance



Agency has been identified as the human capacity of action undertaken within a certain space, time, and situation for the intention of achieving purposeful outcomes and / or transformative changes that benefit those who undertake it (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998). Hewson (2010) has characterised agency as the capacity or propensity for action; the doing of something rather than accepting the actions of others. Carter and Charles’ (2013) critical study, focused on the exercise of agency as a direct display of intentionality, drawn

from a deeply centred reflexive response to the exercise of power. Emirbayer and Mische (1998) argued that agency is a process of self-engagement developed from within an individual or collective ontological inclination to act, but projected forward into an as yet unknown future social environment. Each of the definitions provides insight into the diverse elements of agency, revealing its conceptual complexity, the elements of purpose, and those boundaries that constrain its attributes.

The concept of resistance used within this setting similarly emanates out of the critical social sciences to provide an understanding of the heightened levels of opposition to schooling witnessed among groups of students from marginalised communities. The focus of much of this research seeks to expose the nature and purpose of this opposition. Abowitz (2000) drawing on the work of Giroux (1983b) argued that resistance is defined as the act of purposeful opposition that challenges and then transforms the environment that reproduces oppressive social structures and relations.

If agency relates to the propensity for future action, then resistance can be characterised as the discursive actions or responses of Aboriginal people to the unceasing efforts of the colonial enterprise to dislodge them from their ancestral lands (Parry, 1994). These efforts are born of their efforts to survive, of their resilience to maintain that which cannot be lost and the acts of individual and collective agency in negotiating strategies that counter colonial repression (Poirier, 2010). Out of episodes of everyday necessity, Indigenous peoples have learnt to manage their daily survival, legitimacy, and identity against an uncompromising colonial state.

Indigenous resistance, both in Australia and elsewhere, is characterised as purposeful in its application to withstand as best as possible the inexorable encroachments of the 'invader' onto coveted Indigenous estates (Sonn & Fisher, 1998). For the sake of this work, this capacity and willingness to act is defined as Aboriginal Agency; while those actions that repel, counter or sidestep hegemonic actions of coloniser, are seen as acts of resistance (H. Goodall, 1996; H. Reynolds, 2006). While resistance is often characterised as explicit or dramatic acts of defiance, they are also inclusive of actions that support community cultural and linguistic aspirations and that gives support to programs that facilitate genuine participation in decision making (Lowe & Ash, 2006). Conceptually, resistance speaks to those actions by Aboriginal people responding to activities of governments and their agents that are informed by negative or racist stereotypes or that

hinder their legitimate rights to self-determination or sovereignty (McConaghy, 1998; G. H. Smith, 2003). Rowse (1993) in his critical text on Aboriginal resistance defined 'resistance' within Aboriginal communities as having several key dimensions. The first is an intransitive dimension that symbolises the elements of existence and common identity, which accrue to those participating in these acts of defiance. Rowse went on to argue that once this common identity was shaped and defined through resistance, communities axiomatically defined themselves as being in opposition to the state and its apparatuses. Rowse's explanation of these acts of resistance provides examples of a landscape where purposeful resistance is seen in the everyday of community responses to the everyday manifestations of colonialism and how this intergenerational contestation has shaped the very expression of Aboriginal identity and agency.

As revealed in *Figure 6.1*, this study of Aboriginal agency and resistance is analysed using the voices of participants as they articulate views about their exercise of agency and resistance through three inter-related themes: the predisposition of action, spiritual connectedness, and relational engagement. These views are then characterised as constitutive elements of an emerging Aboriginal standpoint theory that is nuanced to each participating site. The following discussions follow the first of these three themes: Agency: a predisposition for social action.

6.2 Agency: The predisposition for social action.

The discursive responses of Aboriginal people to the efforts of the colonial enterprise to dislodge them from their ancestral lands was born out of the necessity of resistance to survive. The consequential community resilience in meeting these challenges enabled them to preserve what they could of their ontological and epistemic knowledge, and a discrete integrity that has offered some protection from the intrusive interventions of the state (Fleming & Ledogar, 2008; H. Goodall & Cadzow, 2009). These episodes of everyday resistance have by necessity centred on Aboriginal people having to learn how they could best survive and to maintain that legitimacy and sovereign identity under a regime that has sought to remove them from their territories (Cowlshaw, 2004).

There is some debate within the Australian context as to how agency is to be understood. Martin (2008) underpins her thesis on a wider, historical and community focused understanding of agency, while Nakata (2010) takes a specific and narrower conceptualisation, arguing that agency represents a particular localised field of action. He

poses that the complex relationships between Aboriginal people and the state are better understood as unique constructions developed within the microenvironment; what he refers to as the 'cultural interface'. Nakata maintains that in this rich and turbulent space people are able to speak of themselves and each other, and articulate what we have understood in the past and come to understand about others and ourselves.

The following narrative sketch by Bob, a young and popular Aboriginal community leader in waiting, from Wurtindelly identifies one such defining moment of community agency, where a small group of local women confronted Aaron, the new principal. This critical event, which figures largely in a number of narratives, and is retold from a range of different perspectives, identifies the actions of a small group of women who stared down the principal as he sought to exercise his 'principal's authority' to make decisions for the community. Bob said:

Bob: And when that was formed, Aaron [the principal] had his idea of how it would work and how he'd spend the money. When he went with the community, it wasn't like the other communities where he just signed off on it. The community was strong-minded and they said what they wanted. You know what I mean? They knew what they wanted and they asked Bob [XX] [a Yawaalaraay elder, and leader visiting the town], "can you just come down Bob and be a critical friend", you know what I mean, almost a speaker. He come down and the first meeting actually went for about five or six hours. And it was about the community not wanting to be taken as token and we weren't just gonna sign off on things just because Aaron was the Principal, just because he had that title, it didn't mean nothing. [Wurtindelly, Term 2, 2012]

The community – or more precisely, a number of families closely related to Myra and Bob, had taken a leading role in expressing their views about what they called 'proper' or authentic school decision-making. The recently established Commonwealth-funded *National Partnerships* (Council of Australian Governments, 2009) program, spoke of the value of Aboriginal community engagement and its importance to program implementation. Myra, who was employed as a community liaison officer in another key state government agency, held a well-supported view that to date, the community's participation was tokenistic with their advice largely ignored by successive agency managers who continually decided what was in their 'best interest'. The events leading to this terse engagement between these women and Aaron appeared in itself to be of little

import, as similar events were occurring weekly as schools continually deciding on key issues with little or no discussion with Aboriginal parents or the wider community.

The convergence of events dramatically altered the dynamics of this school's engagement with the community. The die had been cast; the establishment of this self selected ad hoc group of articulate, opinionated and increasingly well-informed women seized the moment with a new principal and funding requirements providing the backdrop to this moment when a new social contract was struck.

In late 2011 the incoming NSW State government commissioned yet another review of Aboriginal education. The reviews' terms of reference was to establish a framework of school accountability and parent participation that would underpin student's academic achievement (NSW Department of Education & Communities, 2011). This was an ongoing issue as an earlier consultant's report to the *Wurtindelly Community Working Party* (2006, p. 36) had noted the community's many concerns, including teachers' limited experience, knowledge or historical understanding of community dispossession. Lara, the school language tutor working with Colin, and Myra had blocked Aaron's attempt to push through his decision on funding. She spoke of these concerns when she commented on the departure of staff and the subsequent wait over the summer break for the new, young, inexperienced teachers to arrive to take up their first appointment. She said:

Lara: *Well I reckon when they first come out here, like if they're applying for work out here and especially in these communities where there's a big majority of Indigenous students you know do a bit of research [pause] you know the Indigenous kids, they're in the teacher's care you know from nine to three, they have to care* (Wurtindelly, Term 4, 2012).

Lara spoke for many of the parents when commenting on what they perceived as an ignorance born of indifference to the history of colonisation; or the lack of a realistic knowledge of the lives of families living in remote communities. She noted that while students were in the teacher's care for six hours a day, they had done little to establish an education that was conscious of each community's history, experiences or aspirations. Lara's view, which was representative of other parents, is a precursory articulation of Myra's more explicit declaration of demands for a greater say in the staffing of the school. The parents and community were restive as they looked to make a real attempt to change the relational dynamics between the school and themselves.

As 2012 drew to a close, there was increased anxiety about finding a replacement for the retiring principal, as well as the large number of teaching staff who had also indicated a desire to transfer. Though expected, as all but a few teachers left within the first three years of their appointment, tensions increased as the end of term drew near. A form of paralysis pervaded the staffroom as teachers awaited their notice of transfer to some 'more desirable' location. This yearly cycle of staffing was debilitating for not only parents and students, but also the school. The three-year turn around left little time for the school to establish the necessary corporate knowledge to affect teacher's learning relationships with students and parents, or establish teaching programs that were effective or cognisant of that history. And so the cycle recommenced, with the school community having to play staffing roulette, to see who would arrive at the commencement of the new year and what potential changes would be forced upon them (Green, 2008; Locke, 2008).

The following exchange brought Bob and Myra directly into this discussion. In response to a question on the replacement of staff at the upcoming end of year, Myra chimed in:

Myra: It's sorta hard to say just off the top of your head because... what sorta teachers are we getting? Are we getting predominately male? Are we getting predominately female? ... Do we have all the older people that have been around the traps? Do we have new ones? So everything's not gotta [be] the same, you've just gotta have different ... it's like the learning plans I suppose, yeah. You've got different strategies for different teachers and how they're gonna go about doing it and yeah the way you do business it could be individualised with the teachers and that, you know? (Wurtindelly, Term 3 2012)

In part, parent concerns related to having to recommence the cycle of relationship building with each new group of teachers commencing with so little sense of the town, its history or its inhabitants. Myra could see that the town's community had to take a more direct approach to 'educating' these young teachers, and introducing them to the community into which they were 'blow-ins' from the east. These ideas were radical, as it was suggested that parents should mentor staff so they could learn about the community, and its protocols and where teacher misconceptions about the school and township could be addressed.

The disquiet generated by these yearly staff changes was wrapped in a larger apprehension about the impact of the revolving door of teacher change. Community members had been repeatedly asked to address the staff at the commencement of each

year about their interaction with parents, and provide a few introductory remarks about local history and culture.

Teacher housing was a misnomer for what were a cluster of small one and two bedroom flats built near the school and isolated from much of the township. Their isolation reflected teachers' ontological isolation from the rest of the community and their general epistemic ignorance about Aboriginal people. This newfound exercise of community agency took a new turn when in frustration Myra penned a list of *Dos and Don'ts* for the staff. This list identified a record of community frustrations concerning the measure of teachers' social and cultural disconnect, as observed in those behaviours that demonstrated their beliefs and attitudes about this Aboriginal community. This was a manifesto of relational protocols that articulated community expectations about the establishment and maintenance of effective relationships. As such, it was both a declaration and pre-emptive strike against both teacher behaviour, and what the community argued was the school's abrogation of its social responsibility to the community. Table 6.2 represents the list that Myra and the other women presented to the principal. They wrote:

Table 6.2: Community's manifesto of "Dos and Don'ts"

<p style="text-align: center;">DO'S AND DON'TS OF WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN WURTINDELLY</p> <p>In one of the many group yarns held in Wurtindelly, our discussion fell onto specific things that Aboriginal parents felt should and shouldn't be done by teachers, here in Wurtindelly. Below is a record of what the group came up with:</p> <p><u>DON'Ts:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Don't talk down to people – kids and adults• If kids are in trouble, don't talk down to the parents (this includes body language and tone of voice – these carry messages as much as do words)• When parents are asked to come to school due to student misbehaviour, there is often conflict even though there is possibly more chance for an agreement. The words of one parent make this clear: <i>"You go down there really twisted with your kids, but we will jump camp and defend our kids when we are talked down to... we will defend the under-dog."</i>• Don't assume you know the parent's expectation of what they hope for their kids to achieve: <i>'We all want our kids to go further.'</i>• Don't label (make assumptions – based on family membership, history)• Don't think 'This parent was a really good kid at school, so their kids are going to be ok'• Don't use past history with family to draw expectation[s]• Don't expect parents didn't have a bad experience in school• Don't assume the first story is the right one• Don't not acknowledge traditional owners• Don't name specific traditional owners unless you are absolutely sure there is settled claim (<i>this is a particularly important point in Wurtindelly</i>)• If told gossip – treat gossip as gossip• Don't come here (<i>having sexual relations with</i>) all the parents.• Don't suck grog just to be included• Don't come here dealing drugs• Don't place personal values on others... <p><u>DOs:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Let the kids have their say – especially if there is a dispute between kids• We want to know the how's and why's – give us the proof (of student misbehaviour)• Make sure you have all the facts before accusing kids of misbehaviour, especially with major incidents• Take into consideration any major events in the community – especially with grief, loss, and big 'blues' (large disputes or fights) – be aware of community factions – grief doesn't end with the funeral – appreciate that there are differences in how individuals and families deal with grief, loss and 'blues'• When new teachers come to schools, meet the people in the community –• Speak to everyone• When significant tragedies happen, immediately consult with the community on how best to respond• Take the time to be aware – listen to what the community has to say• Be aware of major family groups• Show respect to kids as well as parents• Understand racism• Attend the Working Party (<i>Council of Australian Governments</i>) – with the school delegate: our kids are (<i>not angels</i>), but this is why we are here• Pull your curtains closed! (Keep private lives private)• Understand we are hoping you are someone who can lead the kids• Be aware of the economic realities of families• People respect their property here• You look out for people – you're wanting to give the kids what they want / need. Our kids are aware of their role in looking after people (<i>when they are just kids and should be playing</i>), so they expect that of others.• People could be the deepest enemies, but death brings a community together...Black fellas can have a good laugh about anything... it's a way of dealing with life so join that laughter. <p style="text-align: center;">(Presented to the Principal Dec 2011)</p>

Many in the community considered this list of *Dos and Don'ts* as a formative representation of concerns; making it clear to teachers and the school, those issues on which they would be judged. They were not afraid to articulate a desire for teachers to be more professional in their dealings with parents and students and questioned both their own and their colleagues' misconceptions about community, parent, student or cultural deficit. The document stands as a clear evocation of acceptable teacher behaviour, their beliefs and attitudes, and practices. The community wanted to affect the educational experience of their children and so sought to challenge teacher capacity in establishing a curriculum regime that was relevant, contextual and of a quality such that it would positively engage student learning.

These initial declarations by the community were evidence of explicit acts of both Aboriginal agency and resistance, and are representative of an explicit desire to proactively represent themselves in a relationship that they wanted based on genuine collaboration. The stimulus for this was the desire to challenge the practices of tokenising community capacity that constructed them as victims to the claims of 'knowing' what was in their best interest.

While the nexus between student engagement and parental involvement has been broadly acknowledged within the Australian context (Goos, 2004; NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004; SCRGSP, 2009), little has been said directly of the importance of Elders and grandparents in regards to students' schooling success. Horner et al. (2007), writing from a Canadian First Nations perspective, spoke of the importance of community Elders in underpinning schooling success and student wellbeing. In Australia, anthropologists such as Diane Bell (2002), in her book *Daughters of the Dreaming* diarised her extensive experience with the Warlpiri people of central Australia, noting the vital and ever present role women played in parenting children with their increased care giving responsibilities being akin to the preeminent role they had held in pre-contact social structures.

Like Bob and Myra, Ivan, the Aboriginal mathematics head teacher in Tubbagah, acknowledged the importance of student's experiencing educational success in addressing issues of the student under-achievement, community under-employment and welfare dependency. Ivan touched on matters which he knew from experience positively affected success, focusing on the role that parents or grandparents could have when exercising their capacity to positively imprint success in the minds of Aboriginal students. He spoke of his grandmother (Nan), and the influence she had on his success at school. Even though

she was elderly and still chipping cotton, her commitment to him and his success was unquestioning. On this occasion he said:

Ivan: *Mum and dad split up when I was about 10 and probably at the time it was quite hard but in hindsight probably the best thing that ever happened to me because I went to live with my grandmother, my maternal grandmother; and Nan had already raised seven children before me and I was like the eighth child. And up until that point mum and dad were at a point where education wasn't a really, really big thing. We went to school every day but I didn't get much support when it came to homework and stuff like that because mum and dad weren't that way inclined. Nan had left school when she was about in roughly Year 8 or Year 9. Had her first child at about 17. So although she didn't go a long way herself she saw it was really important to her and she's one of those people really affected by her time in the mission in Gulargambone and really believed that you know the next generation should have it better than they had type-thing. (Tubbagah, Term 2 2012)*

Ivan's comparison between his parents and his grandmother, is a metaphor for wide concerns about the impact of social breakdown due largely to the impact of the policies of exclusion. Ivan spoke of his grandmother changing his life's direction, a capacity many grandmothers and/or aunts had exercised in stabilizing the lives of many children in Aboriginal families. This phenomenon is widely recognised with community wellbeing underpinned by the efforts of Elders and more stable members of the family to step in for parents (Fuller-Thompson, 2005). Kirsten who also grew up with her grandmother spoke of the key role of the broader family in providing a safe haven for children. Bradley (2012) in his work with Yanyuwa people of Borroloola, in the Northern Territory recognised the foundational role of Elders and grandparents as the primary transmission source of that ontological knowledge that culturally situates the child in both their communities and on Country. Each time Kirsten referenced her grandmother, the conversation was accompanied by long pauses, a welling of tears, and a gaze that seemed to take her to another place and time. She said,

Kirsten: *So she knew, I mean she worked hard, she worked on the cotton until she was in her seventies, cotton chipping, but ... sorry [crying] she'd always, I don't know, she just knew she had to look after the kids or no one else would...[pause]. So she was more or less looking after our grandfather and us - But also an alcoholic son and my mother - an alcoholic too... I mean just looking around; even in my*

generation growing up [with the] influences of all the different types of drugs.
(Mayanbri, Term 2, 2012)

Kirsten's comments, like that of Ivan, highlight two pivotal issues impacting on family structures in many Aboriginal families. Colonial occupation and dispossession, which saw the shattering of community connection to each other and to Country, was characterised with violence and trauma that has had intergenerational impacts on family and communal structures (J. Atkinson, 2002). These vignettes of elements in Ivan and Kirsten's lived experiences are representative of the ongoing impact of colonisation and the states' continual efforts to dismantle or assimilate Aboriginal communities. But they are equally demonstrative of the unending counter exercise of community agency, resistance and resilience. The context of their comments relate directly to a growing problem of drug and alcohol abuse, of socio-economic stress and breakdown (Marie et al., 2008), and of insufferable pressure placed on grandparents to be responsible for bringing up young families whenever there is family breakdown. The stress on these familial structures with their primary educative role taken by the state has meant that these responsibilities have increasingly fallen on those with the least social and economic resources to bear the brunt of bringing up the child. The care and transmission of epistemic, ontological and axiological knowledge has been stretched beyond breaking point. Key elements of the Dreaming, along with familial responsibilities to teaching culture and language, have been stripped from communities and /or misappropriated by socio-cultural, legal and economic structures that have sought by whatever devices to impose assimilation on Aboriginal communities (K. Martin, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2004).

While Ivan and Kirsten spoke of their grandparents, Rayna identified her own agency when she approached the local school to enquire about becoming involved in her young son's education. While her initial thoughts turned to her involvement in her son's early schooling experience she also had in mind her own economic position. She initially took a voluntary role in his kindergarten-reading program and only later was offered a part-time position tutoring reading and later teaching in an expanded Wiradjuri language program.

Rayna: *[Of] all jobs that I have had, it was ... I got my jobs quite easily because ... when my son started school I started volunteering in his class. And going to AECG meetings. That's when I first was asked if I'd like to do the language. So that's how I got my jobs...* (Karrajong, Term 2, 2012)

Rayna's approach to the school identifies the committed efforts that she made to positively affect the direction of her son's educational experiences. She surmised from her own experience that she was best placed to give this support by seeking a position, even if unpaid, in his school. Rayna related her own mother's influence on her views on employment and welfare as she spoke of the positive values of being employed, and the need to be independent of welfare. She acknowledged that it was these values that influenced her desire to become involved in her son's schooling.

The school Wiradjuri language program in which Rayna played an integral teaching role, is a unique community driven program proactively developed as a result of the initial language classes undertaken by Finn and Stefan in 2008 (G. Pearson, 2010, 2014). The positive effect of this program (ABC Open, 2012), evidences the profound positive socio-cultural impact of these efforts on community identity and well-being. Their successful establishment was largely due to the work of a small number of Aboriginal language activists who set themselves the task of learning the language against a social backdrop of white incredulity and indifference, and while learning the language they convinced first one school and then three more to establish the program (G. Anderson, 2014).

What follows is a broader discussion about the pivotal role of Aboriginal agency on the discursive acts of community resistance and resilience as evidenced in these four communities. The purpose of this following analysis of Aboriginal agency is to identify its influence on our understanding of the underpinning motivations for community action and resistance.

Karen Martin (2008), referenced the work of Christopher Anderson (1984) to deepen her understanding of the responses of the tribes of Cape York in the initial period of colonisation. Martin (2008) agreed with Anderson's analysis that the theories of contact history were inadequate in explicating an understanding of the efforts of tribal action as the tribes sought to protect themselves from the impact of dispossession. Recent research, by Babidge (2004) on the localised experiences of Aboriginal communities has provided verification that both the experiences and impact of invasion and colonisation were discursive, dynamic and multi dimensional. It was Anderson who initially understood this discursive nature of colonial settlement and that its effects were likely to be correspondingly, discursively reciprocated in dynamic, complex and deliberate ways. Martin (2008) picks up on this theme when she argues that the social structures of Aboriginal communities created an environment in which localised action was born of

these particular historical and the ongoing discursive experiences as they occurred across both time and place.

The discursive nature of community response is seen in the actions of Myra and the women in Wurtindelly as they issued the school with their exceptional demands about teacher selection and behaviour; and their role and that of their families in looking to shape their children's educational experience.

The data provided to date starts to build a field of ontological annotations that represent case-specific stimuli that has propelled individuals and communities towards purposeful engagement with schools. Events such as Bob's representation of the community challenge to the principal's authority are indicative of collective resistance to systemic practices, which had created tokenistic involvement in the decision-making. In each case, participants identified significant moments or events when they and their families challenged the structures, policies, beliefs and actions of those who for so long had affected school achievement for Aboriginal students. Each of these examples illustrates possible underlying motivations for contextualised action emphasising the dynamic nature of action and the various ways that agency and resistance are uniquely manifested in situated contexts.

Central to the purpose of the engagement between non-Aboriginal Australia and Aboriginal communities is the constant re-negotiation of Indigenous identity within a colonised framework that to date has found itself unable to locate a form of words that acknowledges the unique place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within their own Country. The following theme of Aboriginal people's spiritual connection to Country frames that uniqueness within their sense of identity and moves the analysis from the propensity to act, to one of the two sites of active engagement and resistance between black and white Australia.

6.3 Spiritual connectedness and Indigenous identity

The anthropologist Deborah Bird-Rose wrote of the socio-cultural complexity embedded within the concept of 'Country' – a term applied by Aboriginal people to describe the uniqueness of place and space where an ontological sense of Aboriginal 'being' emanates (D. B. Rose, 1996). To understand its meaning and its conceptual majesty, one needs to see it as both a place within the landscape, a multilayered and enduring spiritual custodianship that links those born to that Country and the totality of elements – both animate and inanimate that reside on and within the environment. The essence of Country

is a community's life force – the place in which ontological authenticity is situated and where axiological responsibilities reside. Both history and the following participant voices speak to the efforts of communities to challenge their dispossession of sovereign title, with Aboriginal families and community seeking to maintain a bond and knowledge of their Country (Bradley, 2012).

The concept of spiritual connectedness figures largely in this discussion of how Aboriginal communities are bound to 'Country.' For the modern colonial state where land is property - and where its value is intrinsically economic and private, the Aboriginal sense of Country is foreign, without legal acknowledgement or cultural understanding of the ontological significance that comes from being situated in one's Country (Altman & Kerins, 2012; Bradley, 2012). Within a holistically Indigenous conceptualisation of space, the Aboriginal person and community is enabled to make sense of the world both with his/her past and future. While they can keep this cultural connection alive, they have a capacity to shield themselves from the foreign world of the settler (Altman & Kerins, 2012).

The following opens with Olivia stating her standpoint as informed by being a special education teacher, the wife of a local Aboriginal man and mother of an Aboriginal child. This position has given her a particular insight into white Australia's confrontation with its beliefs on race, colour and Aboriginal identity. Issues related to Aboriginal identity, and connection to Country are explored, culminating in an uncommon act of community agency when the Wurtindelly community staged a dramatic representation of the impact of child removal and Olivia's cathartic return many years later.

These examples frame the discussion of Aboriginal agency and resistance through site-specific instances of Aboriginal people linking identity to their capacity to connect to Country, to know its Dreaming, and reclaim their voice within its landscape (Biddle & Swee, 2012). Martin (2008) in situating her analysis of Indigenous research methodology on the 'Quandamooka Ontology' from her mother's ancestral Country on Fraser Island, provided a locationally specific understanding of the Dreaming - and its impact on her ontological sense of belonging. The nature of Aboriginal people's connection to Country facilitates their ability to draw on the ontological authority that emanates from this relationship and which authenticates their authority to speak. While Errol West (2000), positioned his 'Japanangka' model from within Walpari Country, Martin Nakata looked to his ancestral homelands to locate his tour de force on the deconstruction of the western sciences from within a Torres Strait Islander worldview (Nakata, 2007b). By situating their analysis from within their contextually positioned worldviews, Martin, West and

Nakata each illustrate the importance of their elemental attachment to Country and to everything that ensues from it. Aboriginal people's connection to Country is the context from within which the nature and quality of the relationships between all entities is formed and maintained and thus it sits at the heart of their relational ontology.

The level and authenticity of connectedness makes sense when Aboriginal people are situated in the Country of their ancestors and where the discursive efforts of Aboriginal communities to reclaim their reconnection to language and culture is underpinned by an ontological assertion of cultural sovereignty to Country (Viatori & Usbigua, 2007). The following commentary gives witness to both this sense of belonging and the inability of many non-Aboriginal people either to be aware of this connection or unwilling to accept its importance to Aboriginal people's sense of being. It reflects a common issue that when the existence of Aboriginality and its intrinsic connection to Country is denied, the denier challenges everything that is underpinned by that identity (Paradies, 2006). Olivia reflects on this colonial myopia, when she said:

Olivia: *[My husband and I] have a child that identifies as being Aboriginal.... And it's ... do you know, it's hard too, sometimes. Even my friends' view of things; and I often have to pull people up and say well hang on a minute, because my son identifies as being Aboriginal, and I don't think that. Or just, you know, just people's preconceptions of things... you know, you get comments [like], 'Oh God I had the shock of my life that your husband's playing in the... where did he just go, the Northern Territory!? For cricket? Oh I know, the Imparja Cup.' Or, 'God I didn't think he was Aboriginal, he's not that black.' And it's [pause]... you know; it's people like that; they are uneducated (Karrajong, Term 2, 2012).*

Olivia herself was born into a small country town about two hours west of Karrajong. Since moving to Karrajong from Sydney, Olivia and her husband had discussed which school their five-year-old son would attend. Though she had a preference for the small Catholic school, she was visibly concerned that the school would fail to give due attention to her son's Aboriginal identity. She candidly directed this concern to the issue of racism, which she and her husband felt was largely hidden but nonetheless pervasive in the town. Yin Paradies (2007), who has written extensively on the contemporary manifestations of racism in Australia, noted that within Australia the pervasiveness of racism was largely hidden within essentialised cultural discourses that mask the direct exercise of power over the nations of Indigenous people. Olivia too, understood the hidden nature of racism, when she spoke of acquaintances who, when in a 'safe' environment amongst 'friends'

talked of the 'Aboriginal issues' that impacted on the town. The social commentator Waleed Aly claims that these conversations are part of the 'subterranean racism' that is pervasive yet largely unseen and undetectable by the mainstream (Aly, 2013). This distressed Olivia, as she had been witness to many such conversations; knowing what these acquaintances believed but not daring to speak of them when her husband, child or other Aboriginal people were in earshot. This was her son and husband they were talking about. She was impatient, wanting to challenge these often inferred or even spoken manifestations of racism, and wanting and wanting to speak up about her son's rights, to attest to his connection to the Country of his father.

Ivan is an effervescent character, comfortable within his own skin with a self-assuredness that appears to come from strongly identifying with place and family. Yet Ivan spoke of the deep sense of loss and personal shame in not being able to root his identity in the language of his community (Battiste, 2000). He comments on the inner demons that reside near to the heart of many Aboriginal people who question themselves and their cultural authenticity when unable to speak the 'lingo' or exhibit local cultural knowledge. He said:

Ivan: *But anyway, like Colin, I would talk about it all the time and you know he would sit there and just talk in some of his language and lingo and stuff and I knew a word here and a phrase there and that kind of stuff but I kinda half felt, and this must sound really bad, but kinda felt like I wasn't as Aboriginal as him. And at no point there has anyone ever said that and if I [pause] even as I say it out loud now it sounds stupid... So like you know and when you think of cultures like you know people that come over from different countries or whatever, when you hear them speaking their language like, as I said earlier, I think language is a bedrock of our thing and what made our culture so you know special and what made it last so long was not only just a language and all the other stuff that we learnt, but it came back to language, you know just the stories (Tubbagah, Term 2, 2012).*

Later in the interview, Ivan came back to the issue of language loss; but in doing that he also spoke of its redemptive capacity to re-situate people by shoring up their ontological sense of belonging. These comments not only underline the passionate aspirations with which Aboriginal people elevate their desire to 'know the lingo', but also provides insight into the depth of their despair at its loss. This redemptive power of 'their' language fortifies its speakers and strengthens their resolve to reclaim and use language such that the Land resonates with the sound of the unique tongues (Aguilera & LeCompte, 2009).

These actions of individuals and small groups such as Eddy, Finn and Rayna in the task of language reclamation are representative of their aspirational desire to reclaim an audible rendition of their cultural sovereignty. The act of language reclamation is an example of both Aboriginal community agency and resistance to colonial hegemony. The task in front of the language team appears to be insurmountable when measured against the two hundred years of 'linguicide', the worldwide phenomenon of collective linguistic punishment of Indigenous peoples (Hinton & Hale, 2001; Ghilad Zuckermann, 2013). Yet the challenge to affect the re-awakening of their ancestral language (Hobson, Lowe, Poetsch, & Walsh, 2010) to re-connect to its Dreaming stories and to recreate language pathways to culture (Ahearn, 2001) is if nothing else, audacious and an act of Aboriginal defiance.

Nikki, a local farmer's daughter who later became a highly respected senior teacher in Karrajong, was a close friend and mentor to both Finn and Eddy, and a powerful voice in the school in support of the Wiradjuri language program. She too sensed the strong link between student underachievement, cultural loss and the impact of settler racism. She commented:

Nikki: *I think when I was growing up; when I was at high school and school it was embarrassing to be Aboriginal. You didn't admit to it. You didn't want people to know, there was a lot of teasing, and there was a lot of racism. Now, from my perspective I don't [now] see any racism in our school. The children, yes, they identify, but it's no longer an embarrassment to be Aboriginal. A lot of our children and a lot of our families don't identify to get benefits. They identify because they're proud of their culture and they want to share it with other people. So I think that's the big change is because they're sharing it with other people, other people are valuing them, other people are saying look you're no different to us, you can do this, you can go to university (Karrajong, Term 2, 2012).*

Nikki identified an emerging sense of pride in the school's Aboriginal students and their increasing willingness to publicly identify their Aboriginal identity which she also directly tagged to the community's increased desire to partner the school in improving the educational outcomes of their children. For Finn, this involvement was both a direct consequence of their efforts to establish the language and cultural programs and indirectly, through the establishment of working partnerships with schools, the local council and the

wider community. He spoke of the subtle but positive impact that these programs had on reducing racism (G. Anderson, 2010, 2014).

Nikki spoke of her observations as a child, of what she now recognises as incidences of racism against Aboriginal students with whom she had attended school. With this newly acquired knowledge she now had an insight into the socially debilitating consequences of racism on those students who had been too afraid to identify their family's heritage. Looking over the few years from the inception of the Wiradjuri program she commented on the positive change affected by the establishment of both the language and cultural programs and the underpinning partnership that she and the school had developed with Finn and the local AECG. Finn and Eddy both spoke about the deep and positive impact that these programs had through providing all students an exposure to the ontological and epistemic knowledge embedded in the class lessons. Finn wrote:

Finn: *Further, the children's proactive, anti-racist attitude has had a positive impact on parents and the wider community. It is also evident in the political acceptance of Indigenous identity by the erection of Welcome to Wiradjuri Country signs by the Karrajong Shire Council (G. Anderson, 2010).*

Some time earlier, the Year 5 and 6 Aboriginal students had been speaking with Eddy of the limited recognition in the town of the Wiradjuri people's ongoing occupation of the land. Finn, with Nikki's assistance, followed up by having the students 'practice' generating a persuasive letter to the council, asking that it formally recognise its Aboriginal community and the Country that the town was now situated. These efforts were rewarded with the council voting to erect roadway signage that drew motorists attention to the fact they were passing through Wiradjuri country (ABC Open, 2012; Karrajong Shire Council, 2010).

Some twenty years earlier Jon Reyhner (1992), a noted linguist working with First Nations, wrote of the positive impact on social wellbeing that resulted from the establishment of First Nations language programs in the United States. Similarly, Purdie et al. in two recent ACER reports on school based Aboriginal language programs (Purdie, Frigo, Ozolins, Noblett, & Thieberger, 2008) and Aboriginal school attendance and retention (Purdie & Buckley, 2010) found evidence of a correlation between the establishment of quality language programs and improved student engagement. Evidence from Wurtindelly and Karrajong substantiate not only this correlation, but also highlight the critical role of community agency in propelling schools towards the uncharted territory of establishing

these programs in schools (Lowe, 2009; Purdie et al., 2008). A unified community voice had emerged, demanding that schools play an educative role in supporting the larger project of language reclamation by providing time and space within its curriculum to facilitate its teaching.

Wurtindelly, a small riverside historic township some ten hours drive from Karrajong, was also drawing on the more recent historical experiences of members of the community to embed locally relevant knowledge and experiences within the curriculum. The school had employed William, an Indigenous Tongan musician who had earlier interactions with many of the families in the town. William was a talented musician with particular skills in coaxing the participation of many of townspeople to support his school musical projects. He had been working on a musical on the life experiences of one of the town's favourite aunts. The performance, titled *Weeping Cloud*, was overwhelmingly acknowledged for its cathartic exploration of the issues surrounding the 'stolen generation'. This hit a nerve, for this was a town whose history was replete with stories of the loss of its children to the state and church (Ratcliffe, 2014). The central storyline pivoted on the experience of one elderly Paakantyi women forcibly removed as a child, focusing on the deep loss experienced by the whole community and her subsequent return years later (Halloran, 2004). Lara commenting on the school-community musical production of *Weeping Cloud*, said:

Lara: *Yes. And when we just finished ... we just done our big production on Weeping Cloud and a lot of those kids that was part of that wouldn't even walk up on stage to get their awards during assembly. And then after that come about, the Weeping Cloud production, kids just come out of their shells, you know? And they're more, not frightened – that shame thing has gone. Yeah, and we drilled that into their heads when we was actually doing rehearsals for all the Aboriginal kids. But they said 'no, they're shamed.' I said 'no, shame, you don't use that word,' and we drilled it into their heads and they just got up there and performed and even now I've seen the difference from when I first started, like kids wouldn't perform or even go up, but after all this, and with William's input, a lot of changes has happened (Wurtindelly, Term 2, 2012).*

The performance with a cast drawn widely from the school and local community was a celebration on many levels; their collective trauma and resilience in the face of the everyday immorality that was pervasive in the state's controlling relationship with Aboriginal people (Krieken, 1999). The performance of *Weeping Cloud* was electrifying as

it provided an emotional release for those affected by the crime of being Aboriginal. Denzin (2003), who had written on the impact of performance ethnography, had noted how such performances enabled the creation of texts that move across the personal, political and the historico-cultural divide, such that the spaces created enable oppressed communities to gaze back and see through the actions of the oppressors. Lara's commentary provides such an opportunity by demonstrating how this one community sought to understand the impact on itself of a policy that forcibly removed its children (Fast & Collin-Vézina, 2010).

Each of these discursive episodes provides insight into the local historical contexts in which each of the research sites have actively sought to re-situate themselves through direct and purposeful action within the ancestral landscape. Central to this discussion are the voices of participants across the sites commenting on the significance of being able to site themselves and community within a discourse of being Aboriginal and within a space from which they derive their ontological authenticity.

These participants' voices shed light on both; the complex contextual manifestations of community resistance and the convergence of views within communities that asserts a moral and spiritual connection that tenuously links them to their ancestral past. The complexity of these relationships and the capacity of people to engage in these relationships have given rise to the discursive nature of the context specific commentary provided by participants.

Aboriginal peoples' responsibilities and relationships to Country are relationally complex as it is the spiritual heartland in which their ontological source resides and where relationships need to be attended (Bradley, 2012). The maintenance of these relationships in the post invasion period has been for many communities difficult if not impossible, but as both Bradley and Russell have identified, the desire to remain connected and attached to place is strong even in the most densely urbanised areas of Australia (Russell, 2012).

There are however, other relationships that Aboriginal people have had to turn their attention. These are the personal relationships that Aboriginal people have struggled to maintain with their extended families and those developed with other Aboriginal groups and the state as a result of the pan-Aboriginal identity that has been imposed. The last theme that focuses on this relational engagement looks at the articulation by which Aboriginal people have sought to define these relationships, which in turn facilitated a wider dialogue about the acceptance of Aboriginal people within in the public space.

6.4 Relational engagement

The third theme that focuses on relational engagement examines the contextual application of Aboriginal agency and resistance within the everyday realm of interactional relationships that have been struck between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Within the context of these interactions Indigenous agency is seen to be the purposeful exercise of singular and/or collective engagement. Nakata argues that this interface is commonly misrepresented as it is seen as the simple intersection of two different and often contested cultures. In reality it represents the site where contested and conflicted beliefs, histories, aspirations and understandings are continuously played out - and where new understandings are continuously created through contested negotiation and exchange across the epistemic divide (Nakata, 2006, 2007a, 2010).

That moment of understanding or accommodation, which is achieved within each site of interaction, is a product of reflexive engagement that may appear mundane but within the atmosphere of post invasion cross-cultural exchange, it is profound in both its political and epistemic significance (Nakata, 2007b). There is a sense of being that comes from these ontological epiphanies, providing a visionary shift that refocuses the gaze of the community from itself to that of the state that has sought to surround them.

This third and last discussion focuses on a discursive sampling of interactional engagement between Aboriginal protagonists with principals, teachers and between members of the same Aboriginal community. Each example provides insights into that moment when new knowledge and /or understanding occur through the acts of contested engagement. In each case we witness through the exercise of Aboriginal agency and resistance, the collision and contestation of epistemologies of the cultural interface and we are provided with a moment of insight into attributes of reflexive change.

The following conversation by Bob, recalls an earlier conversation concerning the Wurtindelly community's contest with Aaron, the school principal, over the expenditure of money to support the engagement of students at school. While the issue may have appeared petty and inconsequential, in reality it was neither. The community had drawn a line and was refusing to budge in its refusal to support the school until a more collegial style of management was negotiated. Bob commented on that moment of intervention when his aunty and the other women stood their ground against an extremely experienced principal. The outcome negotiated over the course of this extended exchange was to signal a change in Aaron's leadership style, the school's decision-making processes,

the employment of Aboriginal staff and the community's engagement in the school's future.

Bob commented:

Bob: *And it was about that the community didn't want to be taken as token and we weren't just gonna sign off on things ... because Aaron was the Principal, just because he had that title, it didn't mean nothing. It meant something but they weren't just gonna take his word as gospel either. And that's that partnership, how it started. When I was, in 2007, I was employed as an Aboriginal male educator, and my role was to provide a positive link between the community and the school... Myra often quotes that, "[the] chains were on the gates" you know when they first come here they (parents) weren't allowed to be in here.*

(Wurtindelly, Term 2, 2012)

The assertion of genuine engagement was a clarion call by a small activist group of women who made it clear they intended to be heard and regarded as partners in the endeavours of educating their children. They seized the opportunity to cross swords with the principal and 'discuss' his plans for the school, the place of parents, the support for a community education program and the implementation of the school language program. While the stated purpose of their intervention related to school decision-making, the reality was far more revolutionary. This group singly mastered a deeply pervasive discourse that had all but convinced them of their impotence to affect the exercise of hegemonic power of government agencies over their lives (De Graaf et al., 2000). The resolution of this conflict was unlike any other skirmish in that it set a new benchmark in the school's relationship with the Aboriginal community, opening the door to a more productive engagement, and heralded a shift in the school's curriculum such that it was more responsive to the community's cultural aspirations (Lowe, 2009; G. H. Smith, 2012). The emerging 'Wurtindelly identity' that has been linked to the purposeful intervention in the school was a uniquely communal effort in disrupting the everyday decision-making practices that ignored Aboriginal knowledge or aspirations. However as has already been identified, this is but one of the means by which Aboriginal people has had the confidence and authority to assert their presence and identity.

It was clear in the many discussions with Fran that her identity emanated from the familial relationship that she and her siblings had with her parents, both of whom had been relocated to Balladoran, a small village 19kms to the south of the main town after the 1955 flood (Walton, 2008). The isolation of the village shielded these families from the rampant racism and discrimination suffered by those who had instead been chosen to relocate to

the 'Pines' – the scrubby hill country on the outskirts of the town (Mayanbri Shire Council, 2012). Fran's mother and family took to this isolation, looking for ways to support her community through their involvement in the Wiradjuri language and cultural revitalisation. This knowledge saw her family accepted as one of the main keepers of local history, genealogies, stories and Dreaming knowledge. Fran, like her siblings, sought to follow in her parent's footsteps, keeping this vital knowledge in currency. She spoke about her parents, by saying:

Fran: *I'm a Gamilaraay woman... born in Coonabarabran but raised in Mayanbri all my life. My dad was a shearer and worked on farms and those kinds of things. I basically went through Mayanbri primary school, Mayanbri high school, got my education here. Have great parents with great values who have taught probably myself and my brothers and sisters... Basically about respect and about ourselves and who we are and that we've always known that we're Aboriginal. So I faced racism at high school but it was more so from the Aboriginal community because they always thought we were better than everybody else, but in our eyes we weren't. We were the same as everyone else. The difference was I used to say, was my father worked. Where I could see their parents weren't working and you grow up to learn that everyone's got different backgrounds and have it harder than some. (Mayanbri Term 2, 2012)*

Fran speaks with an air of authenticity, an authority that flows to her from her parents. She speaks tangentially about her father's quest to keep the culture and language alive, of the costs in doing so – and the wider impact of their isolation that came from the dispersal of the Mayanbri mission in 1955 (Higgins, 1976). The family spent the following years reclaiming almost forgotten elements of culture and transforming their role from archivists to teachers of Wiradjuri epistemological knowledge (Walton, 2008). This was a difficult mantle to carry, often being accused by their own of being mercenary in their efforts to profit from the public displays of dance and ritual.

Zahra, a non-Aboriginal teacher in the student support unit at Tubbagah, came to research after the project had commenced. Her name had come up in several conversations with Glen and the manager of the school's homework club. Zahra had grown up on a rural property 20kms out of town in remote western NSW. In her first year back in the town as a 'first year out teacher' she met Fiona, an Aboriginal teacher who hailed from an equally isolated community. This relationship turned out to be seminal to both herself and the

black and white communities she inhabited. She described the impact of their friendship like this:

Zahra: *To be frankly honest, when I first came into the classroom I thought oh here we go, you know it's going to be a big push on, which I suppose was my mindset at the time, [about] Indigenous education. I just watching her [Fiona] in the classroom - there were no differences [between students], and that colour was totally taken away, there was nothing; it was just kids... and yeah, as I said it was from the first day. She was obviously put with me, I was a first year out teacher; and it just became yeah a great partnership. So from that I suppose I was introduced into the Indigenous community. I used to go down with the Sisters of Mercy and do lots of programs down there with the kids - I mean I was young and I had no kids, no responsibilities. I used to travel to Wurtindelly and Broken Hill and all that with Fiona. We went on lots of big travels ... She's an amazing person. I actually use her as a reference for a lot of my students here. I said you know I tell them that story. I say you know I was a white person that really probably didn't see that not everyone's box was square. That's probably my big philosophy. They don't have sharp corners and straight edges and I explain that Fiona changed that for me. (Tubbagah, Term 3, 2012)*

The relationship between Zahra and Fiona the Aboriginal Education Resource Teacher (AERT) became a central theme, a reference point that Zahra came back to throughout our two lengthy conversations. The quality of this relationship between two young and inexperienced teachers morphed into a friendship that underpinned Zahra's exposure to deeper knowledge and understanding of this community. Zahra learnt of the 'other side of the town', realising how little she or her family understood of the lives of the Aboriginal families in the town that they had lived for three generations. She spoke of her ignorance of the deep dissonant undercurrents between Aboriginal families and the rest of the township, the level of intergenerational racism and the depth of social discord between black and white Australia (Cowlshaw, 2004). This was a history that Zahra was largely ignorant of even though her family, and many like hers, had employed these very same Aboriginal families as farm labourers over the many years that the property had been in the family.

Stefan, a part-time publican and teacher, came to the research when he attended a lunch meeting with Finn at Stefan's 'Railway Hotel' in Karrajong. Stefan and I had met several years previously when he was an Aboriginal Studies teacher at the local high school. He

had shown great interest in Finn's efforts to get the Wiradjuri language project off the ground, attended the weekend community language classes for several years and later assisted in the negotiations with the schools to establish the language program. The relationship between Stefan and Finn, like that with Nikki was pivotal to the success of the language project (ABC Open, 2012; G. Pearson, 2010). As we ate, they spoke of this period of time:

Stefan: *Well see at Karrajong East it was Nikki. She's the one, she just come out you know and said I think we need to get this into the school so there was, we just sort of took little steps. We you know like through her class and next thing you know she says can you translate this presentation for this [school] assembly. But yeah I did it and I said what do you want this for she says at the time the principal wasn't really for it...*

Finn: *Well he was, I think he had other things on his plate. He had bigger issues to worry about in his home life and adding something else. Then we were at a AECCG meeting and I was laughing when Bill left and everyone said what are you laughing at and I said oh well Bill's gonna get side swiped when he gets back I said because this assembly he's going to is gonna be all in Wiradjuri and he's not gonna understand a word and they're giggling and they said oh okay. So that's how we sort've got him around because Ange said she walked up to him and says well how you gonna stop it now? So he said - oh well I don't think I can so he got on board so ... you know I think it was more he couldn't say yeah I'm in the wrong so he couldn't you know what I mean? (Karrajong, Term 3, 2012)*

The creation of this now lauded project was carefully planned and championed by Finn, a small number of community members, and supported by Nikki and Stefan. These two non-Aboriginal teachers clearly understood the community's deep aspirations in wanting to establish the language program, first for themselves and then the students. Finn, the community elder, implicitly understood the potential of the language to affect the social and cultural wellbeing of both the student and community alike (ABC Open, 2012). His own participation in the initial Wiradjuri classes run by Uncle Stan and Dr. John Filmore, was a turning point in his own life. He wrote:

Finn: *People ask me when did I first get interested in the Wiradjuri language. My truthful answer would be, 'The language found me.' ... In 2004 I was invited to go to a language class at a school in the nearby town of*

Forbes... From that point on I was feeling as if I belonged. I then knew this was me and I knew I had to help get the culture of the language out to the community (G. Anderson, 2010).

Finn had been unwell after an industrial accident had left him debilitated, suffering both physical and emotional anguish and unable to find a purpose to his life (J. Atkinson, 2002). His participation in the adult learning classes opened a door to his future and a past he had only dreamt of; with an opportunity from his elders to renew himself and to move the language forward into the schools. Though the stated outcome was to establish the language in one or more of the town schools, the underlying issues they sought to address were quite different. While both teachers saw the program as having a direct impact on the level of student engagement, Finn understood the program as having a broader, more ethereal purpose. Finn spoke of reconnecting himself and community to Country; giving voice back to his Country; and of establishing family centred learning that linked Aboriginal students and community elders (G. Anderson, 2010). Though unread in this literature, Finn had unmistakably made a claim for the schools to establish an education based on the principles of Culturally Responsive Schooling (Berryman & Bishop, 2011; Berryman, SooHoo, & Nevin, 2013). The convergence of interests which underpinned the relationship between the key players, meant that Aboriginal students were exposed to an opportunity to access programs that enabled them to culturally identify in a school that like so many others had homogenised the local identity of students to some form of pan-Aboriginal identity (ABC Open, 2012).

Yet these dialogues provide a broader discursive view of how Aboriginal people have commissioned the engagement of their children with schools and sought to establish the parameters for a different, culturally responsiveness educational experience to the one they were subjected to. The cultural interface is far more complex and multilayered than its name implies. Nakata (2007b, pp. 197-199) argues that the concept is more than a simplistic reading of cultural difference and dissonance. The cultural interface goes beyond this, for he has defined it as a point of interaction where Indigenous peoples' personal and family experiences, cultural knowledge and local histories merge into interconnected discourses. The power of this concept is where conflicting goals are forced to engage and where new knowledge is created. Nakata (2007a, 2007b) suggested that the interface was the point where the hegemonic power that schools and teachers had over communities was able to be challenged and where new knowledge and understanding

changes the dynamics of relationships between those who enter the contested discourses that play out within this space. These new arrangements can be the consequence of grand acts such as explored in Bob's dialogue of the seismic shift in the relationship between the women of Wurtindelly and the school. Zahra's exposition, nonetheless significant in consequence, saw a deeply personal and epistemic shift in her understanding of the community in which she and her family had lived for generations. With Fiona's assistance, Zahra entered a two-year apprenticeship into the parallel existence of the Aboriginal people in her own town, glimpsing a community wrestling with the demons and consequences of intergenerational colonisation (Cowlshaw, 2004; Ross & Taylor, 2000). Zahra's social epiphany came as a result of her initial relationship with Fiona and then the wider community of Aboriginal people with whom she now cohabitated. This ongoing two-way engagement allowed each to speak for and of them, to represent their own lived realities and refashion a world of purposeful collaboration with the external world. Like the actions of the Karrajong community, Fiona saw the possibility to reach out to Zahra, to infect her with lived experiences of Aboriginal Australians and to affect her life's trajectory with the knowledge that they would share with her.

The following Table 6.3: provides both a thematic summary and the overarching findings on the propensity for action and Indigenous agency and its unequivocal links to collective efforts of Aboriginal people in these four communities as they sought to avoid the ongoing scrutiny and control of governments and to mobilise their individual and collective efforts to challenge the impact of colonisation.

Table 6.3: Thematic summary of findings

Theme	Summary
1. Agency: The predisposition for social action.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The exercise of Community agency is in responses to the exercise of systemic practices of coercion, power and control. • The exercise of agency and action can be either individual or collectively driven.
2. Spiritual connectedness and Indigenous identity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The discursive episodes of agency and resistance provides insight into the underlying local historical contexts in each sites • The responses of Aboriginal people centre on attempts to re-situate themselves within the ancestral landscape • The complex contextual manifestations of community resistance within communities are linked to their assertions of identity, and a moral and spiritual connection that links them to their ancestral past.
3. Relational engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two-way engagement at the Cultural Interface facilitating Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people being able to represent their own lived realities, and refashion purposeful collaboration with the external world. • The interface is the point where hegemonic power is challenged, and where new knowledge and understanding changes the dynamics of relationships between those who enter the contested discourses that play out.

The key findings on the exercise of community agency and resistance are:

1. Action arising out of community agency and resistance was seen to emanate from the impacts and grievances of colonial histories and contemporary experiences of policy implementation and the actions of government agents
2. The situatedness of community enterprise in resisting the ever-present policy of assimilation.
3. Agentic action by Aboriginal people unlocks the space or cultural interface enabling negotiated change
4. Ontological connections to Country situate both the complexity and site-specific nature of these effort to articulate the distinctiveness of actions that seek to protect their transcendent connection to Country

Each of the first three themes has focused on the exercise of Aboriginal agency and resistance and was born of family and community's engagement with the colonial state. The next chapter follows the emergence of an Aboriginal Standpoint, which materialises from within each of the research sites. In some cases the ontological assertion of knowing and being will be a direct outcome of broad consensus born of crisis and deep community reflection, while on other issues, consensus will be contested and elusive (Nakata, 2007b). As Dennis Foley (2003) noted, the assertion of such an understanding is born of both

living within and being affected by the structures that have sought to control Aboriginal communities and the deep reflexivity that provides a way to make sense of the world that is contracted to support the dominant discourse of colonialism.

Chapter 7: Aboriginal standpoint

7.1 Introduction

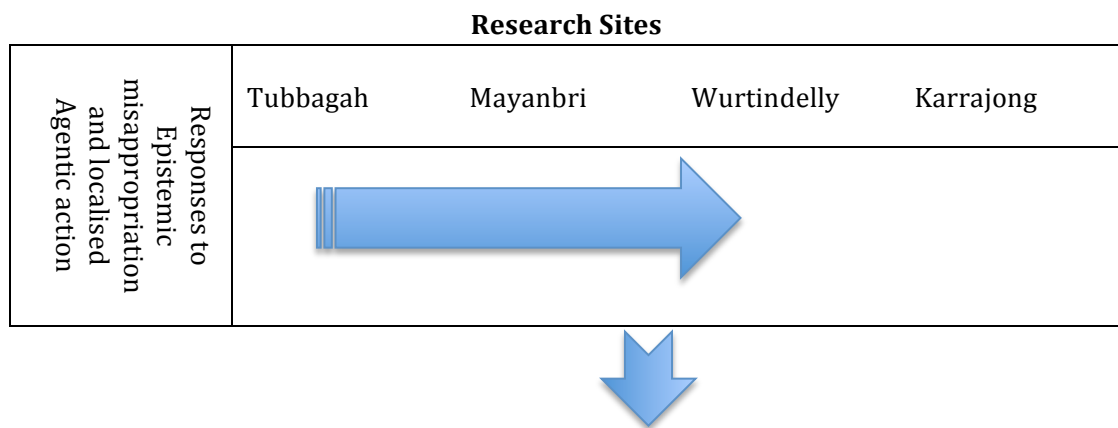
This chapter is structured around a site analysis demonstrating the articulation of individual and community agency within each location. These actions are interrogated for evidence of an emerging Aboriginal Standpoint position. Where observable these standpoint positions will provide deep insight and understanding into each community's responses, action and resistance to its interactions with schools, teachers and governments. The establishment of the form and shape of these site-specific Aboriginal standpoint positions will be considered through investigating each community's particular historical and contemporary experiences and how its responses have been shaped by these experiences.

It is argued that the development of these contextual views is a particular manifestation of ontological presence that respective communities have sought to assert within each location. This would be defined by their historical experiences of dispossession and the engagement with the effort to assimilate Aboriginal people. As argued in Chapters 5 and 6, there is an emerging understanding of the complexity and particularity of these local standpoint positions (Friedal, 1999; Nakata, 2007a). The constancy of changes wrought by the socio-cultural dynamics of two-way interaction at the cultural interface has a consequent impact within each Aboriginal community of knowers, especially when they are sited within that space that centres their presence and ontological authenticity (Au, 2012; Grieves, 2009).

This chapter draws on the key findings from the earlier discussion in Chapters 5 and 6, which relate to each community's insights on the historical and contemporary efforts of the state to further marginalise these communities and how each applied their agentic capacity to affect a change to their current status. The analysis of participant narratives in Chapter 7 is augmented with narratives from earlier chapters. This deepens understanding as evidence of community views is slowly exposed to the emergence of a rich, nuanced and context situated exposition of these unique Aboriginal standpoint positions. It is argued that these standpoint positions represent an account of each community's discursive engagement with, and experience of, colonialism; how this experience has grounded their individual and collective responses; and in turn how this has affected their willingness and capacity to engage with the state and its agents. Of

particular note to this discussion is the finding that the Aboriginal participants distinguished a link between their propensity to engage in agentic action and their unequivocal inner sense of being resident in, and belonging to Country (Turner, 2010). It is contended that Aboriginal people’s connectedness to their ancestral home-space, provides an authentic basis upon which they lay claim to their cultural sovereignty as Indigenous people, without having to concede their de facto sovereign status in a post invasion state (During, 2000). This assertion may look problematic as Levi and Dean (2002) have noted, a claim to cultural sovereignty may in fact be deduced as an acknowledgement of having conceded colonial sovereignty over Aboriginal land. I would contend that while acknowledging this conceptual paradox, the evidence provided demonstrates an emerging community self-assuredness based on an epistemic and ontological connectedness to Country. The consequent localised standpoint position differentially empowers each community to challenge the assimilatory practices of governments, and in its place, assert a new and more constructive engagement. Figure 7.1: Site-analysis through situated action diagrammatically represents the analytical matrix through which site-specific action has been investigated in this and the preceding two chapters. The findings lead to an understanding of these communities’ standpoint positions through the aggregation of participant views and beliefs. These provide an overall articulation of their responses to their epistemic misappropriation and their agentic responses to the efforts of schools to assimilate their children. The resultant analysis provides a reference point for seeing how particular standpoint positions can be developed within each site.

Figure 7.1: Site analysis through situated agentic action



Aboriginal Standpoint: Establishing an analytical framework

The key findings of this chapter, which emerged directly from the site-specific data documented across each of the preceding Chapters 5 and 6, fall into three overarching matters. The first links directly to the issue of whether the derived standpoint position is specific to particular sites. That is, whether each standpoint position is discrete or representative of the histories and experiences within the separate research sites. This observation of site-specific standpoint positioning references its localised and contextual nature, challenging the notion that there is a singular Indigenous standpoint position (Nakata, 2007a, 2007b; Tur, Blanche, & Wilson, 2010).

This finding leads directly to the second finding, which is that the development of locally situated standpoint positions are as a consequence of each community's historic and ongoing experiences of colonisation, and the application of policies and practices that impact on its lived experiences (Pohlhaus, 2002). The third finding speaks to the constantly evolving nature of standpoint and its dependence on the need for Aboriginal communities to challenge the unmitigated relentlessness of contemporary colonial exploitation exerted over their lives (Pohlhaus, 2002). To maintain a sense of community presence within this environment of relational flux requires each community to engage and/or challenge those manifestations of the state's power and control that sublate Aboriginal presence and identity (Au, 2012; Tur et al., 2010). A consequence of this evolving relational environment of engagement is that the viability and relevance of each locally derived standpoint rests on ongoing community reflexivity and self-critical engagement at the cultural interface where knowledge and positionality is reconceptualised (Nakata, 2007a; Swartz, 1992).

These findings critically inform the development of Chapter 8, where each research site is investigated in the light of participant data that speak of how schools, and more specifically its teachers, collaborate with parents or other members of the local Aboriginal community. The establishment of these educational partnerships and their perceived authenticity in drawing in and on the local community is assessed against the articulation of the identified standpoint positions within this chapter. The localised context of these Aboriginal standpoint positions constitutes the key finding of this chapter and informs an understanding of each community's facility to respond to its ever present concerns about its children's education.

The following sections of this chapter commence with an historical overview of each site, with reference to key events and data that evidence those issues that have significantly

affected Aboriginal people, or that are indicative of the Aboriginal communities socio-economic and educational position.

7.2 Tubbagah:

Tubbagah a large inland New South Wales city of over 40,000 residents situated on a major river approximately five hours drive from Sydney saw Europeans settle the area in the late 1820s as part of the push westwards soon after the access road over the mountain range west of the Sydney settlement had been constructed (Dormer, 1981). Early contact with Wiradjuri people was characterised by periods of considerable violence as clans were pushed away from the well watered flood plains to make way for enormous grants provided to squatters (Dormer, 1981). Conflict almost immediately followed these initial contacts along the frontier in what became known as the Bathurst War, with marshal law proclaimed in 1824. After a significant loss of Aboriginal lives the conflict came to an end in 1825.

By 1900 three Aboriginal camps or reservations had been established in and about the town, two under railway and road bridge crossings close to town, and a third along a western tributary of the main river. The two closer camps were closed during the 1930s, leaving the larger camp, with its government houses and small mission school, remaining open until the late 1950s. The wholesale closure of the local government reserves forced families to move away or into housing on the western outskirts of town, an area that soon was seen as an Aboriginal ghetto (Code, 2013). This population influx was soon accompanied by increased poverty, high unemployment, crime, limited schooling opportunities for the large number of children who moved into these houses, over policing and systemic racism (Code, 2013; Muir, 2006).

A major conflict with government and police and the 1300 Aboriginal public housing tenants in the town's largest Aboriginal estate came to a head after a violent clash on New Year's Eve 2005. As a result, the government responded to pressure from police, the council and the local media, by moving all tenants; selling all 325 public houses (Louise Hall, 2010) and forcing families to relocate to public housing elsewhere in the town or in other towns across the state (Kent, 2006). This unprecedented action resulted in increased levels of social disadvantage being experienced in other parts of the town as a result of chronic over-crowding or the break up of families through relocation (Council of Social Service of NSW, 2007). This had the effect of further marginalising people within the community while doing little to address the issues of racism, social disadvantage and

chronic underemployment (Muir, 2006). As recently as 2013, concerns were still being raised regarding a second area in the city, with high drug and alcohol abuse, low standard housing, deep-seated welfare dependency and high levels of crime (Code, 2013). Improvements in the social wellbeing of many Aboriginal families appear to be patchy and inconsistent, and were recognised by many of the participants as having an ongoing impact on community cohesion.

In part these issues are likely to become more focused as the town draws increasing numbers of Aboriginal families from nearby rural towns as a result of drought, unemployment, the closure of facilities and deepening social dislocation (Council of Social Service of NSW, 2007). At the 2010 census the Aboriginal population accounted for 13 percent of the city's population, significantly above the state figure of 2.2 percent. The Aboriginal student population at the school is also well above the state average. In 2013 the school's Aboriginal enrolment was 20 percent, in comparison to the state wide average of 4.3 percent (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2014).

Glen who was employed as an Aboriginal program coordinator, was two when his family moved with his widowed mother and five siblings to Tubbagah from a smaller community on the state's south coast. His father's accidental death, his mother's subsequent alcoholism and the family's ensuing dependency on welfare adversely impacted on his schooling and his later life-style choices. These saw him leave school early, play semi-professional rugby league and, in his own words, 'run with the wrong crowd'. The cumulative impact of these events found him fighting to find wider acceptance in a town that had a long history of racism. He spoke of his feelings of isolation, of being between two communities; each being troubled by his existence, and his search to find acceptance. He had this to say:

Glen: *I've never been able to work out why someone would challenge what I do when I'm getting outcomes. And that's what it's all about. But at the end of the day before I go into the little bit of my life story, ever since I can remember being a young boy through to an adult I've always had to walk two paths in life and those two paths have been part of our non-Aboriginal community and the other foot's been in the Aboriginal community. And I guess because of a lack of information that people know about me I'm often challenged by both of those communities of whether I'm a white fella pretending to be black or a black fella who thinks he's a white fella (Tubbagah, Term 2, 2012).*

Questions of Aboriginal identity and authenticity are central to Glen's explication of being positioned in two worlds, feeling challenged in both when seen to assert his Indigeneity; under scrutiny and experiencing racism and suspicion at each turn. Glen, like so many disconnected Aboriginal people who have essentialised their race-based identity as being both an insider and outsider, has internalised this self-inflicted contest, in which he battles to know himself and his identity. Brayboy (2000) and Morton-Robinson (2004) have both noted that Indigenous people have fallen victim to the 'hybridising' and self-problematizing their Indigenous identity, and the impact it has on community well-being and ontological positioning.

While Aboriginal people are constantly being challenged, settler identity remains unproblematised, conflated with occupation and then superimposed over Indigenous presence such that it is given a legitimacy denied to the country's original inhabitants. Grande (2009) has argued that Indigenous identity is mired in western constructions of difference and culture in such a way that it loses its essential qualities that are central to the Aboriginal sense of distinctiveness. This has the effect of marginalising them from their own ontological roots.

Glen's position traverses three paths that emanate from this ontological confusion created by colonial caveat and white racism: *Who am I? From where does my identity emanate?* and; *How do I understand the particular situation of my family and community?* These are questions that constantly re-enter the conversation as Glen looks to find a place where he belongs and is accepted in a town that he has always lived in. Many of these narratives give an indication of the ephemeral nature of his ontological sense of belonging. At a point further into this initial discussion, Glen seeks to answer one of these key questions: *What is it that he needs to do or be, to be himself in this community?*

Glen: *And about 15 years ago I stood up one morning and looked at myself in the mirror and told myself it was time to start being the Glen that I am, and not the Glen that me friends wanted me to be... When I realised that I was living my life for everyone else and not myself, was when I decided that I'd make a few little changes and the first change that I decided was I had to get an education. So I spoke to my wife about doing a Cert III at TAFE in Community Welfare and I chose that because in my mindset I thought I had something to offer because I'd lived a lot of the dramas. It cost me \$250 to do that first Cert III. It was a big call because that was \$250 out of our income at that stage of our lives which was the*

difference between my kid having steak for dinner or eating mince. (Tubbagah, Term 2, 2012)

Glen was fiercely committed to the Aboriginal students at the school for as he regularly stated, he knew their lives having been in their position; he had lived their experiences of bunking down in commission housing, being dependent on welfare, and being around the edges of petty crime. Sport and then education provided the social vehicles through which he could leverage a different future from that which anchored this community in deep poverty. Glen had stepped into an unfamiliar space propelled by a desire for recognition. Haynes' (2013) paper points to the importance of understanding this affective domain of resistance, where how 'one comes to oneself' occurs in those 'barely perceptible transitions in power and bodily perceptions' that occur within the micro-environment of everyday life (2013, p. 559). Glen's decision to enrol in TAFE was one of those judgements, which was to become of singular importance; he was driven by a desire to move beyond his past, to secure his and his family's future and seek an intellectual environment in which he could learn how to make sense of the history that encumbered both him and this community. This was an act of self-directed agency and resistance; and a response to his own past.

Ivan (who had only recently arrival in Tubbagah) and the mathematics Head Teacher at the school also recognised the significance of educational success. On the back of his success at school and university, Ivan rose quickly through the promotions' positions, and was in his second school as a Head Teacher within the space of ten years. Yet he was to acknowledge that it was his grandmother who ensured that Ivan was able to escape his history of inter-generational welfare dependency and poverty. Ivan spoke admiringly of his grandmother's aspirations for him:

Ivan: *... it was really important to her and she's one of those people that really believed in the [the negative impact] of mission life in Gulargambone and really, really believed that... the next generation should have it better than they had. So from a young age, when I was ten, I kinda got it drummed in, so all of a sudden I had to get home and I had to do homework all the time (Tubbagah, Term 2, 2012)*

Ivan returns to the familiar theme of education. In this instance he speaks of the influence that his grandmother. Bond's (2004) research with the Mornington Island community identified the high level of interest amongst the community elders in the education of the

community's children. Bond was moved by their understanding of the potential impact that education would have in addressing issues of poverty, while also being cognisant of the potential for conflict with schools over cultural maintenance and authenticity. Ivan's grandmother's aspirations, similarly to those of the Mornington Island elders (Bond, 2010) was underpinned with a discourse that spoke of the socio-economic value of schooling and the advantages that would accrue through diligence and hard work.

Jack, the Tubbagah school principal, also noted the sense of urgency from within the community Elders group who believed that students needed to experience educational success at school. The parents and local community voiced their concerns about the level of socio-cultural dissonance between schools and Aboriginal people, and the impact that this had on schooling success, as Jack and the school sought to establish closer ties with parents and the wider Aboriginal community. Jack said of these exchanges:

Jack You know I think, I think it's easy to sort of say: "oh yeah we see Aboriginal people walking around unemployed and so on. Well that's all really all they're gonna do and that's all their kids are gonna do." Well that's not what they want. That's not what the community want. And the community are working hard to change that stereotype and they're trying to take some control for themselves. But they also realise that school and education is the way out of it. You know, most people - the AECG and, [particularly] Aunty Pat, they know. (Tubbagah, Term 2, 2012)

While state and commonwealth governments continue to argue that the current Indigenous education 'Closing the Gap' strategies are predicated on best practice research (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014), they have to date failed to sustainably impact on improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. Indeed evidence from a recent ACARA report on student achievement, (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2014) has identified that without a serious alternative educational intervention, all state and territory jurisdictions are set to see a continuation of the current flat line trend in Aboriginal student achievement. In particular, a recent Productivity Commission paper on disadvantage in Australia (McLachlan, Gilfillan, & Gordon, 2013) supported by a paper on Health policy (Hoy, 2014), have both argued that the gap in educational achievement is closely aligned to the socio-economic gap in social disadvantage. The levels of inter-generational socio-economic disadvantage for isolated, rural and Aboriginal families are well known and were foremost in the minds of many of the research participants. Additionally issues related to impermanence of welfare and the

ever-present social problems that were a consequence of these material conditions were seen to exacerbate the seemingly intractable problems of the schooling (Code, 2013).

While there are deep social and economic issues across the employment and educational landscape that continue to negatively impact on Aboriginal community well-being (Biddle & Yap, 2010), there have been several initiatives at the school level that appear to mitigate against some of the more obvious educational disadvantages experienced by these students. (NSW Education and Communities, 2014). While government had claimed that its policies underpinned the improvement in student retention at the school, the particular success of the school's Aboriginal education strategies appear to have relied heavily on programs such as the *Homework Centre*, and the *Post-Schooling Transition Program* and their staff, who were seen to work closely with AEOs and forge strong connections with students and parents. Increasingly, the school has become reliant on these staff, and their targeted special programs, to sustain student motivation and consequently its student retention rates.

The Aboriginal staff has privately been critical of what they saw as significant levels of staff indifference by many teachers to the concerns of Aboriginal students and parents, and were agitated at the negative impact this indifference and lack of knowledge had on student's engagement. These views, shared by Zahra and Tegan, the non-Aboriginal manager of the homework centre at the school, worked to bring them together as a team, and with the support of key parent advocates and the few supportive non-Aboriginal staff, they managed to guide many students through to the completion of Year 12. Jack the school principal, recognised how reliant the school had become on its Aboriginal staff and the leadership they provided within the community. This was the measure of the Aboriginal community that in their adversity, they sought to partner with those in the school who could work with their kids to get a good educational outcome.

These narratives provide examples of how this community sought to exercise their capacity for action in response to an environment that was laced with historic levels of racism, socio-economic disadvantage and the reminders of dispossession and displacement. Many of these acts of resistance have grown in an atmosphere of indifference that resides under a veil of epistemic ignorance and under the cloud of the deep levels socio-economic disadvantage that substantially differentiates by race, the life outcomes of this Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community (Forrest & Dunn, 2013; Paradies, Harris, & Anderson, 2008).

Glen and Zahra had commented on this gulf that separated the lives of Aboriginal families and the middle class lives of teachers (see in particular Chapter 5 pp.84-85). Glen had identified the levels of racism as a root cause of deeply embedded intergenerational underachievement among many of the Aboriginal students (see references in Chapter 5 p.87-8). He identified the common occurrence of teachers racially positioning Aboriginal students in the classroom. Glen went onto argue that these events and the general level of teacher indifference to the situation of many of the Aboriginal students had a negative impact on student identity and sense of being.

However, while there was a level of simmering tension between the Aboriginal community and the township, there were examples where the community through the AECG had sought to work with the school to establish highly effective programs. Jack had further identified that the community had sought to challenge the negative perceptions held by many non-Aboriginal staff by working with families and seeking to work more closely with those teachers who had connected with them. However, even these attempts needed to be questioned, as it was Glen who commented on how often these efforts were tokenistic in covering for the many failure in the system.

The school has struggled in its attempts to establish responsive programs that could affect substantive change in the education of Aboriginal students. Though there was evidence of the improving retention of students, an active AECG and a supportive principal, there was still a high level of cynicism among many of the Aboriginal workers and parents about the long-term outcomes for these students. Yet Karrajong, a smaller town only 100kms to the south of Tubbagah, and with significantly less resources, appears to have managed a material change in its relationships and consequent success of its Aboriginal students.

7.3 Karrajong

Karrajong is a well-established sized town in New South Wales located on the western slopes of the Great Dividing Range and was 'settled' in 1853. Its early colonial history was hampered by the lack of a regular water supply, a problem that still impacts upon its growth. Its later development was as a result of mining, an industry that still looms large in the local economy. Local history has it that the country surrounding the township was 'unoccupied' by the Wiradjuri clans (Hutton, 2012), despite the evidence held by the local historical society (Tindall, 1983).

There is clear evidence of an extensive period of open and guerrilla warfare that broke out across this region of the state as white settlers intruded onto Aboriginal country in search

of arable land (Tindall, 1983). Most of these contacts were short in duration, bloody in their outcome and devastating to the Wiradjuri nation, the largest in New South Wales. By the turn of the twentieth century remanent populations of Wiradjuri people had established fledgling Aboriginal settlements throughout the area as they sought “protection” and/or access to the basics of water, food and shelter for survival (Read, 1984; Tindall, 1983).

While Karrajong is located about one hour’s drive to the south of Tubbagah, its post invasion history developed a different trajectory from that found in nearby townships. There are several reasons for this, including the relative lateness in its occupation – a consequence of its ephemeral water supply, and the establishment of many Aboriginal reserves and/or missions in surrounding townships (Hutton, 2012; Tindall, 1983). The late closure of many of these missions and reserves, as late as 1965 in one instance (Department of Environment and Heritage NSW, n/a; Thinee & Bradford, 1998), saw an extended period in which Aboriginal families ‘drifted’ into Karrajong (Johnson, 2014).

According to the 2010 census, Aboriginal people accounted for 8 percent of the Karrajong population, a small increase of 1 percent from the 2006 census. Aboriginal children accounted for 13 percent of the total school population in the town and 25 percent of the student population at Karrajong East (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010b, 2011b). The Aboriginal family’s mean weekly income is well below that of other families within the town, with ABS data showing that the income gap widened from 13 percent to 17 percent below the median weekly income (inclusive of government subsidies and welfare payments) over the period 2006 - 2010. Though these figures are indicative of entrenched welfare dependency as a result of severely restricted educational and employment opportunities, there was little reported evidence of the community despondence evident in other nearby towns (G. Pearson, 2014). Indeed the growing public interest in the Wiradjuri language and cultural programs (Champion Post, 2012) had appeared to positively lift the community profile within the community at large (Corcoran, 2014).

The impetus for the establishment of Wiradjuri language programs occurred as a result of Finn and several other members of the local AECG being invited to attend a weekend language class being held in Forbes. Finn’s participation in these classes was an epiphany; he spoke and wrote of this experience, and the life changing effect that his participation had on his sense of belonging, and mental and physical well-being. He was to later write:

Finn *I know what happened to me and what strength it has given me; I'm talking from personal experience. Learning the language that belongs inside will heal you. Learning your native language will make you feel more complete* (G. Anderson, 2010).

In the exercise of his position as local AECG president, Finn was in constant contact with principals. He had identified several teachers who had expressed an interest in his participation in these classes and who later were to become crucial in the development of the language program across four schools (G. Pearson, 2014). Finn and other members of the AECG, worked to establish close links with Karrajong East, the school with the largest Aboriginal student cohort and the school where Finn sent his own children. This proved to be singularly the most important strategy, as its principal proved to be amenable to Finn and Nikki, a very popular teacher at the school, commencing weekly language lessons in the school.

The success of the program, which has been widely acknowledged (ABC Open, 2012) rested on the well-documented changes that occurred at the school and the considerable efforts of the AECG, with Finn and now the three other Aboriginal language tutors, in garnering wide spread public support for the classes. The program quickly expanded from one to four schools, community language classes and weekly afternoon language lessons for parents, teachers and members of the wider public.

The ongoing success of the Wiradjuri language program has been largely due to the actions taken by the Aboriginal language tutors to shore up the program through getting broad based whole-of town support. For the tutors the reclamation and teaching of the language to the students had proven to be cathartic, for themselves and those around them. They spoke of its potential to touch their inner soul. However on reflection, that was only half of the story, for these school programs represented a rallying point of Aboriginal political and ontological resistance to their cultural assimilation (Hobson et al., 2010).

Finn spoke of the genesis of their program:

Finn: Apart from the friends I had at school I think one of the most clearest memories of my school would be sitting in a class nearly every day looking out the window I'll see a flock of galahs and think to myself why is that called a galah? What would the country look like with all the trees back before the invasion of the country, I would look at the mountains for hours, I was wondering what the trees in the countryside looked before farmers cut them down, I would daydream

all day about what it would be like before that, I still do. (Karrajong, Term 2, 2012)

The concept of restoring ancestral language to its Country has long been the dream held in many Indigenous communities. Hinton and Hale (2001) in their seminal text on language revitalisation noted the aspirations of Indigenous communities to reconnect Indigenous voices to their ontological home. The first step in this transformation was being able to imagine a landscape in which their language enabled them make sense of their world. Nikki, locally born and educated, was one of the two teachers who had been invited to attend the initial community language lessons. She was later to assist in the design and development of the K – 6 programs, and worked with Finn and Eddy to enhance their pedagogic skills. She commented:

Nikki *I think it's important to value people for what they know. Though Finn and Eddy have no teacher education training, they're just as valuable to our school as the teachers... we value [them] for what they know. They know what they're talking about. They know about their culture, they know about their language and I don't. So I'm not standing there saying oh Finn and Eddy, you're not teachers, you don't know what you're talking about. They do. So yeah. I guess there are times when they'll say to me, as a teacher, we've got this really good idea, we don't know how to deliver it to a class, and that's when I can step in and say well do this, do that, but ... yeah. (Karrajong, Term 3, 2012)*

Nikki spoke about the value of the language program to both the students and staff. Her comments focused on the issue of knowledge and Eddy and Finn's ability to demonstrate that true depth of knowledge when speaking to the staff and students. She knew this was important for it provided a legitimated platform from which to publically example the substance of localised ontological knowledge. The opportunity to teach their language repositioned them back on Country and like Mabo (Howitt, 1998; Mercer, 1997), it empowered them to challenge these local myths of *Terra Nullius*. Nikki's championing of this epistemic knowledge substantiated Eddy as an Aboriginal knowledge holder and provided the sustenance to authentic school-based programs that reinforced their student's sense of Aboriginal identity.

Eddy spoke directly of his connection to language and its power to reconnect him and his community's relationship with traditional epistemology; an immersion in authentic knowledge that provided insight into its potential to affect Aboriginal people's sense of

being. Such was the restorative power of language revitalisation, that Eddy, who had himself experienced a chequered education, was enabled to be that conduit that linked the community to its past and future. He put it this way:

Eddy: *I think that the language is more of a feeling. ... it's hard to explain. Like it's not something that you can just read a book and get like that. You've gotta really feel it and become immersed in the culture to really appreciate it. You can't just teach a language by itself. You have to have the culture and the community as well for it to be successful.* (Karrajong, Term 3, 2012)

It was clear that the language program provided a focal point where the Aboriginal community was empowered to step forward and challenge many of the racially based views about Aboriginal people, their occupation of the land, cultures and knowledge (Paradies, 2007). Both Finn and Donald, the school principal, agreed that their presence, along with the cultural programs, had brought about fundamental change in the interactions between students and a decline in the incidences of racism (G. Anderson, 2010). The language program provided tangible evidence of Aboriginal peoples' presence in the township, provided a basis to assert their ontological presence and as Finn identified, held the promise to salve the trauma wrought by the history of dispossession. He gave evidence to the *House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs* on Indigenous languages teaching. Finn's evidence was reported as follows:

Report: *[Finn] has described himself as a man who was living unemployed, going fishing, banging his head on the wall trying to find work and with no future. He was so down he couldn't even face going to the mailbox to check if there was anything in it. He was invited to attend a Wiradjuri language class. He says that since that time, and involvement with the language, he has changed to being one who can stand up and make public speeches.* Statement before the: (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, 2012)

Like Eddy and Finn, Rayna, one of other four language tutors, spoke of the self-assurance that resulted from being part of the Wiradjuri language program. She spoke of the impact of what Battiste refers to as cognitive imperialism, the unremitting efforts of the state and its apparatus to culturally and epistemically assimilate the Indigenous person (2004, 2012). Rayna spoke of her mother's sadness, which she saw as being wrought by policies

of cultural dislocation, as the stimulus that motivated her involvement in the language program. This involvement was an act of ontological resistance and as Meyer (2008) noted, a commitment of public resistance. She said in her interview:

Rayna: *I do have pride when speaking a language. It really touches a chord being able to speak about what my mum couldn't speak. It's really special. It was taken away from us and now we're getting it back, and our children learn how to speak. It's amazing!* (ABC Open, 2012).

Rayna's words, spoken in her interview with the ABC, were an articulation of a commonly held view of Aboriginal people about the ontological value of now being able to voice their language on its ancestral Country. Its presence was a direct challenge to the impact of colonisation and dispossession and their marginalisation within that Country.

Karrajong has emerged during the decade up to 2012 as a case study in community agency as Aboriginal people actively pursued opportunities for collaboration with schools. This collaboration was not school driven or unstructured, but highly focused on the delivery of a Wiradjuri language and cultural program – first in one school, and then infiltrating three primary schools and the local state high school. Though there was no apparent 'master plan' for the integration of these programs into these schools' curriculum, it was driven by a small, increasingly motivated and highly focused community group who pressured the school principals to implement these programs (ABC Open, 2012).

Research into school community collaboration often focuses on the proactive role of schools in establishing and maintaining collaboration with parents; a consequence of the institutional and socio-cultural power imbalance that leaves decision making primarily in the hands of schools (Howard, Perry, & Butcher, 2006). Yet this case is clearly different, with Finn, Nikki and Eddy each commenting on the active exercise of community agency in the previous chapter. This was seen in their pursuit of collaborative relationships with the school and teachers through their weekly classroom interaction and the work with students in the junior AECG. This required skills in managing the complex issues of community training, locating secure funding to pay the tutors and collaborating with teachers to develop quality teaching programs and resources that could be shared across the schools. The strength of these programs is that they are locally developed and directed by and for the community in which all of the players lived and consequently the community was invested in its success. They are champions within their community,

important to its progress and revitalisation - and in their own way, members of a long line of Wiradjuri champions.

These programs assisted in the implementation of student based cultural initiatives that in turn, saw a re-writing of the rules for student behaviour and a student awards system based on an adaptation of the Wiradjuri Council of Elder's rules on Wiradjuri social behaviour. These rules underpin the identification of meritorious behaviour in line with the rules as laid out by the Elders and was seen to directly impact on a heightened sense of student identity which in turn buttressed students' ontological links to Country as identified in the previous chapter. Nikki and Finn commented on the impact that the language program had on students' sense of pride in being able to identify as Aboriginal and more particularly as Wiradjuri. This was in contrast to Olivia's experiences, who saw a level of underlying racism that only appeared when the white families exhibited racist views when they thought they were away from the prying eyes of Aboriginal people.

However, the upshot of the school language program appeared to afford Eddy an opportunity to go beyond teaching the language program when he team-taught with Nikki, classes on local history and Aboriginal Dreaming. Eddy saw every one of these as opportunities to expose students to localised epistemic knowledge that he had embedded in the language lessons.

Teachers had initially spoken of their initial discomfort at Eddy's presence in the classroom but his mere presence slowly chipped at their ill-informed misunderstandings about Aboriginal epistemology and their stereotypical understanding of the community's aspirations, expectations and capacities (Howard et al., 2006). The significance of this site is that for more than a decade, it has been held up as a benchmark from which other collaborative school programs are measured and community capacity and agency gauged.

7.4 Wurtindelly

The township of Wurtindelly is strategically situated between the western bank of the Darling River, the ephemeral lake system that sit astride the river and the many 'anabranches' of the river that spread weblike across the flood plain towards a low slung hilly range approximately 100kms to the west. The town has played a significant role in the colonial history of 'exploration', with white explorers and later settlers moving through the area in search of the long sought inland rivers or sea and new pastoral land onto which they could move cattle and sheep (S. Martin, 2001).

The Country both north and south along the 'Paaka' or river, was the land of the Paakantyi people, a diverse group of clans occupying both riverine landscapes and dry hilly country in the distant western range with its deep ravines, sheltered water holes and sacred sites. The landscape is replete with evidence of their occupation, from extensive middens along the river and lakes, and petroglyphs and stencils found in the hilly outcrops and throughout the western barrier ranges (Hope & Lindsay, 2012).

Contact with the Paakantyi people occurred from as early as the mid 1830s when 'explorers' and later pastoralists entered the domains of the western tribes of New South Wales. The uninvited settlement by pastoralists onto what was always agriculturally tenuous land exacerbated the fraught relations between the Paakantyi people and the white settlers. Evidence from both Aboriginal and whites alike point to mass killings of Paakantyi people and the dispersal of clans from the best-watered areas as a result of these incursions. An uneasy peace followed with residual camps appearing along the river and near the villages that developed to support the pastoral industry and consequent river trade (S. Martin, 2001).

A government 'mission' was established in 1933 some 5kms outside the town, and was soon overflowing when Ngiyampaa families who had previously lived at the Carowara Tank Reserve (200kms east) were forced onto the new mission due to drought. The town mission and its school were closed in 1949 forcing families to move into Wurtindelly, setting up temporary huts besides the railway river crossing, but on the other side of the river to the town itself (Wurtindelly Central School, 2011). Schooling, first conducted on the Carowara Tank reserve and later on the 'new mission' school, remained segregated until 1949. Cadzow (2008) has clearly shown Aboriginal parents had argued over a long period of time for their children to be able to attend school; they demonstrated an acute understanding of the importance of an education to their children (Fletcher, 1989a). It was only in the 1950s that Aboriginal students were able to access the 'public' school, which had first opened 100 years earlier in 1868 (Wurtindelly Central School, 2011).

The history of this community, like in other western townships, bears witness to an internal strength which underpinned their assertion of taking control of their socio-cultural destinies and their right to challenge the state's controls over them (Cowlshaw, 2004). At its heart was an emerging form of Paakantyi resistance that was voiced within the framework of the wider political and cultural discord that existed between Aboriginal people and the state (McCarty, 1998). This was proclaimed as an assertion of their right to be authentically engaged in the development and implementation of policies that affect

their futures (S. Martin, 2001). This shift was first evidenced a decade earlier, when they first vocalised a long held dream to 'wake' their language and to teach it at school. This attestation of cultural independence was born of their resistance to the school's policy of offering 'foreign' languages, other than Paakantyi, to meet its legislative requirements in languages education (Lowe, 2011a). This pursuit of the community's ambition shone a light on the school system's limited appreciation of the depth of its aspirations; let alone how the school's efforts to either ignore or actively stymie these pleas would be interpreted by Aboriginal people (Urbis Keys Young, 2006).

These faltering efforts over the previous decade to engage the school in establishing programs to support Aboriginal students, identified the need for the community to structure a different relationship with the school, to challenge past indifference and instead move forward with a relationship that recast the power dynamics of this interaction. This required leadership and more critically, consensus, something that was almost impossible to achieve. Many communities were deeply divided by historical circumstance; of clans and even language groups thrown together by government caveat. Bob opens up this discussion, when he spoke of a well-known joke that encapsulated the disassociative tendencies within Aboriginal social structures for collective action:

Bob: *Plus them crabs, brother, you know they're black but you've heard the joke about the black crabs and the white crabs? Have you heard it? There's two guys standing there with crabs and one guys got all these crabs in his bucket and the other guys got all his crabs running around outside the bucket. And the guy with his crabs running around said- "how come all your crabs stay in the bucket?" And he says - "well mine are black crabs and once one climbs up they all pull him back down." You know what I mean? Keep them in there. You don't have that as much (Wurtindelly, Term 2, 2012).*

In this telling Bob's metaphoric 'tale' highlights the ongoing destructive capacity of colonialism to internalise the oppression of Indigenous people, such that they self-censure. Au and Apple (2009) argue that the colonial hegemony, which manifests itself within the postcolonial space, acts to represent, reproduce and impose the social and cultural norms of the settler state, so that it overwhelms other systems, beliefs and ontological knowledge (Agbo, 2007). One of the more destructive capacities of colonial hegemony occurs when oppressed communities self-censure, questioning and often abandoning their own epistemic beliefs in favour of that which represents the views of the invaders. Bob's 'joke'

is in fact a commentary on this internalisation of colonial power, where the colonised police themselves.

Was Bob's comment self-deprecating humour, a joke at his own and the community's expense; was it a comment about a 'tall poppy syndrome', a community with so little, not wanting to have others get ahead? It appeared the purpose of this tale spoke to the experiences of these families who were caught in the vortex of poverty and welfare dependency, pressed to vie for scarce resources that are largely non-existent for Aboriginal people in these regional and remote centres. Employment in centres such as these is critical, with work participation at only 39 percent, which is 34 percent below the state level, and even 12 percent below state-wide levels of Aboriginal employment (Office of Communities: Aboriginal Affairs, 2011). One of the centrally agreed principles from the earlier 2007 community – school 'discussion' with the Principal, was that the school would facilitate greater employment opportunities for Aboriginal people by expanding its current Year 5 - 8 Paakantyi language program (Wurtindelly Community Working Party, 2006).

Bob, in his capacity as the Regional AECG President, had worked to facilitate TAFE's participation in running Certificate 2 and 3 courses that would provide employment-based qualifications for those community members looking to learn their language and gain employment in an expanded language program at the school. However, instead of supporting the community's aspirations, TAFE thwarted the school and community requests, and in doing so, dismissed the cultural promise that this program could have delivered. Bob angrily lashed out when these plans were thwarted by what he took to be TAFE's indifference, as it compounded his concerns about Colin, the aging language and history teacher and community confidante, whose growing health problems increasingly affected his capacity to deliver the language program. Bob spoke of his frustrations in trying to solve these mounting problems, when he said:

Bob: *But that's the fuckin' dilemma that I'm caught with here and yet I'm trying to fight TAFE on behalf of fuckin us, and the AECG and that you know? Getting fuckin squashed left right and centre by them. But then I'm trying to extract this from Colin ⁵ but he can't see that end game and I said: 'Colin can't we just take the lid off, put the vegemite in this cup and then put your lid back on and when we get the TAFE ticket we're there, we're right'. You know what I mean? But he*

⁵ Colin is acknowledged as being the most knowledgeable language exponent within the community due to his past deep association with the last fluent speaker some 37 years earlier.

can't, I don't know how you explain it bro because it's [so big] ... (Wurtindelly, Term 4, 2012)

Bob's anger centred on his inability to affect the school's collaboration with TAFE and establish a community centred language-training program at the school. Aboriginal communities in western NSW had been promised by the government a new deal; for real government collaboration with communities that gave them a greater say in their schools, and the development of programs that met their socio-cultural aspirations. (NSW Department of Education & Communities, 2011) Bob saw TAFE's response as an abrogation of the government clear commitment for "community ownership" and "responsive" management. TAFE's refusal to deliver the program resulted in the community attempt to flex its political leverage by writing directly to the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs requesting his intervention. The school language team and key members of the community acted, directed their concerns to the Minister, in the hope that he could affect a change to TAFE's response for assistance (Wurtindelly Aboriginal Language Team, 2013).

Colin, whose first teaching appointment was to a nearby town in 1976, had shown an immediate interest in the community's pre and post invasion history, and later in the language and culture of the Paakantyi people. This interest led him to the company of elder Aunty Elsie who was then in her 80s, and one of the last fluent speakers of language. It was said that she spoke to Colin most afternoons after school and started teaching him the language, and those Dreaming stories she had cultural carriage of. Her role was significant as it is her niece (Lara) and grandson (Murray) who today are the senior holders of the language within their two communities, and who with Colin, are the mainstay of the language work in the area. Though Colin left the nearby town in the mid 1980s, he remained in contact with members of the community, attending funerals and speaking with interested people about the language information which he saw himself as holding for them.

Aaron, knowing of Colin's close connections with many of the Wurtindelly families and Elders, contacted him with an offer of an appointment as a history and Paakantyi language teacher. His return heralded a renewed interest in the language revival and he soon made moves to commence work with Lara, teaching both community and school classes. Though Colin is aging and has already had several medical emergencies, many in the community treasure his knowledge and commitment to the language and the Paakantyi communities.

Colin's forty year interest in the Paakantyi communities, provided him with knowledge and insight into generational change taking place, actively supporting the interest of people like Bob, Myra and Lara in affecting policy change and assisting in the re-negotiation of curriculum programs that were better suited to student needs. Colin spoke of recent changes in government policy (NSW Department of Education & Communities, 2011), with its promise of authentic community involvement, his healthy level of mistrust of the new policy, let alone the capacity or interest of agencies to actually implement its stated promise. The commitment to change was perennial – but yet little was actually seen to occur. Within this context, he commented on the promise of change:

Colin: *But at least in that case at least they have been recognised and they have got enough control over their lives so with regards to let's keep it down to Wurtindelly the people need to have control over their lives, control over their society and control over the school. And now the government, [laughs] tomorrow is implementing a new policy which I had hoped to be a step on the way to this community owned school but well we shall see about that; but it's gotta be done seriously. Until the people in Wurtindelly actually have a sense of their own ownership then we probably will continue to see underachievement among the kids because what else, why bother, what do they want to work for anyway?*
(Wurtindelly, Term 4, 2012)

Each of the episodes within this discussion provides insight into the emergence of a community that increasingly sought to work with local schools in developing an ambitious K – 10 Paakantyi language program even though stymied by other government agencies. This in itself needed to be managed by the community as Bob identified in his comments about TAFE. The community ambitiously sought to develop a program that would produce real outcomes for students, ones that were centred on cultural relevance; that embedded training and employment opportunities, and provided an opportunity for authentic collaboration with the wider Paakantyi communities. Within these narratives there is evidence of the fusion of action and focused resistance where they become tools to leverage greater engagement, acknowledgement and control over those institutions that for so long had supervised their lives.

The community had moved on a pathway that longed to question the efforts of teachers to either ignore or infantilise their aspirations for cultural connectedness and instead to step

forward and challenge the manner in which the school and its teachers had marginalised them. The group of women who wrote and delivered their manifesto knew that this was a direct challenge to the long held status quo of decision making as discussed in previous chapter. This community was being propelled by their own agency towards a deeper understanding of their community's historic adversity. Colin, who had known this community for thirty years could see how the efforts of these increasingly politically savvy women led to comprehension of the exercise of colonial hegemony, and their power to effect change.

This newfound legitimacy provided the community with a confidence to go beyond challenging staff, to affect changes with staff that would benefit their children's education trajectory. Lara's commentary about the community-wide impact of the Weeping Cloud presentation is evidence of the community's journey in seeking opportunities to address the historical demons that traumatised generations of parents in this and virtually every other town across the state.

Myra's comments in the previous chapter went beyond the exercise of community agency, to projecting the community into the business of selecting and training staff so they would better understand the real needs of their children in this location. This was a much harder task and their impotence more acutely felt as it was clear they had little or no say in choosing staff who could give effect to their educational aspirations. Bandura (2001) argues that within social settings, agency is the fundamental capacity to exercise control over the nature and quality of one's life and that at its core; it is characterized by intentionality, forethought, self-regulation and the capacity for action. Bandura makes the observation that within a climate such as found in Wurtindelly, the community's transactions as agents of change place them as both producers and products within this the rapidly evolving social environment of schools and community engagement (2001, p. 1).

Aboriginal people in Wurtindelly had reached a crucial point of consciousness that fortified their ability to challenge these mechanisms of control exerted over their community by the agents of government public policy. In particular Bob's experiences, including his university education, equipped him with a deeper understanding of government methods which had served them well in controlling Aboriginal lives (Friedal, 1999). Bob had exhibited a capacity for deep reflexive thought on matters as broad as cultural reclamation and its inherent challenge to assimilation. He and his aunts had developed an acute understanding of the inconsistencies of governments and the need to

be proactively involved in social change because of their personal experiences of past practices. As Nakata (2007a) has noted, it was in these everyday experiences of responding to adversity that Bob and others developed their own understanding of the world they inhabited.

7.5 Mayanbri

The area covered by the Mayanbri Shire sits at the convergence of the territories of three Aboriginal language groups, the Gamilaraay to the northeast, the Wiradjuri to the south and the Wayilwan to the west. Archaeological evidence suggests that Aboriginal people have occupied the land to the east of Mayanbri for up to 25,000 years and the Warrumbungle Ranges for over 17,000 years. The numerous archaeological sites within the area attest to the complexity of Aboriginal existence; their culture and relationships with their Country (Christison, 2009). The area is replete with extensive evidence of occupation with many Aboriginal sites, including scar trees, petroglyphs, cave paintings and stencils being found in the shire.

The river upon which the town is located is classed as perennial, in so much as its westward inflow of water is small but usually consistent. From a distance the river appears to be more a series of long, well shaded billabongs, which in the past would have afforded ideal camping sites for the clans who lived along its banks. Away from the rivers, the landscape changes from the mountainous terrain of the Warrumbungle Ranges in the east, to dry Pilliga scrub on its western borders and open floodplains to the south, which have proven to be ideal for hunting larger game on its grasslands (Christison, 2009).

The area was 'settled' by pastoralists and later from the 1830s by wheat farmers, as part of the 'unsupervised' and particularly violent westward expansion of the colony. The massacre of upwards of 35 members of the nearby Myall Creek tribe in 1838 provides a potent picture of the deadly impact of this conflict and the contested social and legal views of the colony concerning the rights and responsibilities of the state vis-à-vis Aboriginal people (Elder, 2003). As in other areas, conflicts tended to be sporadic but violent, with the result that the local clans were pushed well away from the grasslands and permanent water. Missions and government reserves (AIATSIS, n/a; McGuigan, n/d) had been established by the early part of the 20th century, some close to the town while others were in nearby villages. The devastating state-wide floods of 1955 saw the forced abandonment of the town mission and the forcible relocation of families to "The Pines", a heavily wooded

area on the outskirts of the town; or to a small village some 20kms to the south (Mayanbri Shire Council, 2012). Housing in both locations was little more than tin shed humpies with many families having little choice but to live there unless they could find regular work. Up to the 1960s most of the men were seasonally employed on farms and as shearers on nearby properties (Walton, 2008).

At the 2010 census, Aboriginal people accounted for 12 percent of the Shire population of 4300 people but, like all of the sites, they are disproportionately represented by younger Aboriginal people, accounting for 23 percent of the 0 – 24 age cohort – a figure that mirrors the Aboriginal school student population of 25 percent. In 2010, 55 percent of the Aboriginal population had Year 9 as their highest school qualification, an issue that is reflected in the income distribution, with the median income of individuals being 19 percent below the median town income, while family income was 16 percent below the town median (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a). In many ways, the picture of Aboriginal disadvantage is similar to that found in most other rural towns with the community's high level of socio-economic disadvantage, under-employment, low school retention and health concerns linked to systemic socio-economic disadvantage.

Both Rose (1996) and Bradley (2010) in their texts on the Aboriginal worldview of Country, noted the complexity and overlapping nature of their connection to Country; in particular the two way obligations that held people and Country in a synergistic relationship. The location of Mayanbri is on the boundary of three Aboriginal language groups and there is a history of enforced relocations of communities between the various missions to the north, east and west of the town. A consequence of the confusion that emanates from the loss of the ontological status of this space, is the oft heard question – 'whose county is this?' Gollan (2002) in his text on Native Title and the law, acknowledges the considerable conflict that arises when there are disputed claims over land, while the Human Rights Council (Kildea, 1997) identified the deep trauma that arises when these contested cases come up for adjudication.

The events that are described below give witness to both the immediate and long-term socio-cultural consequences of dispossession on Aboriginal communities, and its impact on the exercise of Aboriginal agency to affect change. Julie, one of the school senior AEA's, had grown up in an even smaller community approximately 50kms to the north of Mayanbri. Julie moved with her family to Mayanbri, like many others seeking employment

and housing when forced to move after the closure of the government reserves during the late 1950s and 1960s. She later drifted to Sydney, only to return to Mayanbri after her marriage and the birth of their children. She looked back to the simpler life that she had led, and hoped to connect her children to the Country as she remembered it (Russell, 2012). She spoke of this period:

Julie: *And I had a younger baby, she was two, and I decided that I wanted to move back to the country because I wanted to bring them back and so they could grow up here. I thought at the time that the world was moving too fast. I just wanted them to come back and provide a better experience for them being brought up in their Country. I thought then that that would have been a good idea. But you know, I found out later, like when the kids grew up then, and they never, ever, connected to ... when we moved back... [pause] they never made a connection with this place... (Mayanbri, Term 2, 2012)*

Bradley (2012) and Rose (1996) both speak about Aboriginal people being able to connect to Country – of the importance of replenishing their physical and epistemic connection to the place of Dreaming. However the impact of family and community relocation had a deeper consequence as it stretched these tenuous bonds to breaking point. While Julie felt the deep need to reconnect to Country, her children, born and part raised in western Sydney, appeared to have lost that critical connection that balances Aboriginality when people are back on Country. She was dejected, somewhat forlorn as she admitted that her children had little or no ontological sense of connection to this Place. Julie saw this disassociation as being a consequence of her children's 'locational assimilation' that occurred as the consequence of their psychosocial disconnection to Country that developed as a consequence of being parted from kin and/or Place. Atkinson (2006) and Howitt (1998) have also evidenced the severe impact of the loss of epistemic memory on Aboriginal communities when they wrote of the consequences of dispossession of native place and the removal of children from parents and communities. While Julie had accompanied her children when they relocated from Sydney, their connection to her place was broken even after they returned to complete their schooling.

While Julie's comment highlights the consequence of locational duality and the impact of ontological detachment from Country, Fran's comments situate her directly in the place and space of her family and their historical connection to Country. She spoke of her family and how it situated her:

Fran: *Okay. I'm a Gamilaraay woman - I'm Gamilaraay, born in Coonabarabran but raised in Mayanbri all my life. My dad was a shearer and worked on farms and those kinds of things... [I] basically went through Mayanbri Primary School, [and then] the High School; got my education here. Have great parents with great values who have taught probably myself and my brothers and sisters, we're all very much alike. Basically about respect and about ourselves and who we are and that we've always known that we're Aboriginal... (Mayanbri, Term 2, 2012)*

Fran's ontological position is situated directly from within her family's history, its connection to their simultaneously held Christian and, Aboriginal beliefs and Dreaming traditions and the sum of their contemporary experiences. Fran's standpoint emanates from a point beyond being actually physically situated on Country, for Fran identifies it as being situated within the epistemic knowledge passed down to her by her parents and, as suggested by Turner, nourished through her family's connection to their ancestral landscape (Turner, 2010). Fran's ontological identity was sustained through her familial connection to the Country of her ancestors and their Dreaming (George J. Sefa Dei, 2013; Turner, 2010). Fran is forthright in her views, getting on with the business bringing up her son, and working closely with her parents to run the cultural camps for Aboriginal people (Higgins, 1976).

Raelene, who was a good friend of Fran's, had grown up in a small village approximately 50kms to the north of Mayanbri. She had moved in search of employment after the last Liberal government had closed the CDEP ⁶. Her administrative skills were recognised and she was temporarily employed as a school - community liaison officer, to facilitate better interactions between teachers and parents. In comparison, Raelene's connections appear solidly planted in this township. Yet, like others with whom I have spoken, she drew a blank when trying to name her ancestral connection. She, like others, had lost knowledge that would enable her to unlock the ontological position and cultural knowledge lost as a result of her family's enforced dislocation from Country. She spoke of her feelings:

Raelene: *When I was in Gular and it was the lady from, Jenny Smith from Warren. She used to always introduce herself, as I'm Jenny Smith. I'm an Ngarabal woman [it] just rolled off the tongue and that was who she was. I couldn't do that because we don't know what we are. I was never taught of what tribe we were or where what the land was. Yeah so it's just like now Jarrod, my son's been asking: " me*

⁶ Community Development and Employment Program.

where do we come from." Cause he's born and lives [here], he's never lived in Gular, so he thinks he's Wiradjuri but he's not. Because my family, my mother's mother is from Moree. So that's ... [pause]

Kevin: Gamilaraay?

Raelene: Ah. That's right. So I've had to ask Deirdre. I said: "how do I explain that to him?" She said to just tell him that he was born and bred on Wiradjuri land but his family are from Moree, yeah. So that's more important too for me to let him know who he is and give him the right information. (Mayanbri, Term 2, 2012)

Raelene spoke openly of the impact of the loss of identity that comes with the constant relocation, disruption and the lost history and linguistic memory. People who had tried to hold onto whatever fragments of their family's histories, were 'remembered' (McKendrick & Thorpe, 1998), but as Raelene knew this often was truncated to an homogenised Indigenous identity. She was saddened by this sense of being stateless and reduced to the status of being 'Aboriginal', with no solid connection to Country. This position of permanent statelessness brings these communities one-step closer to being finally assimilated. Even Kirsten, who had been born in Mayanbri, had settled from other places. Her reticence to identify where her grandparents had come from was symptomatic of the issue of being able to put down a mark - to argue their sense of being. This exchange was in first few minutes of our initial interview.

Kevin: Okay. Did you say that that family had come from Gular in the first place?

Kirsten: My grandfather was from that way. My grandmother was from south, more south. And my mother, she moved to Gular when we were just little.

Kevin: Okay. So south as in like Tubbagah south.?

Kirsten: No, no. Further down.

Kevin: On the coast? Or inland?

Kirsten: No, no, no, inland. Yeah.

Kirsten, who was well liked by the staff and students, was seen as a strong and proud Aboriginal woman, someone who had worked with the school for a decade and had developed a strong working relationship with Kelly, the senior maths teacher. Yet like Raelene and Julie she spoke of a sense of shame in not knowing what Aboriginal people

were meant to know and 'be'. There was a recurring theme within these experiences of personal trauma as a consequence of the disconnection from Country experienced by Fran, Kirsten and Julie. Each spoke of its debilitating impact on their sense of moral authority, a consequence that in their eyes emanated from not being on Country. Being able to situate ourselves in that space of 'knowing' our connections to Country is that which makes us uniquely Aboriginal; so the loss of this knowledge is all the more traumatic when people don't know that place and are forever distanced from deeper knowledge embedded in stories and Dreaming.

Having constructed Aboriginal authenticity on notions of belonging and connectedness left those unable to 'know' in the social and cultural sense in the difficult if not untenable position of being ontologically disconnected from that which has been defined as making us Aboriginal (Brayboy, 2000). Fran, a fiercely independent and proud Wiradjuri woman, stood out in this community for her deep knowledge of her family's ancestry which directly linked her to that place and its ancestral language and stories. However, she also understood the psychological injury that festered in her community as a result of their dispossession of that connection. Fran's understanding of the import of this is heard in her conversation with Raelene as she speaks of the importance of Raelene's son to be able to position himself and say, 'this is where I belong!'

It is little wonder that so much is written of the mental and physical health issues that are seen as consequential of this loss of identity (Halloran, 2004). This fear of not being known as an authentic Aboriginal is not unique to this community. Thomas King's (2003a) short film "*I'm not the Indian you had in mind*" challenges this mired construct of Indigenous identity both from within our own communities and externally, as the state attempts to use these definitions to construct the 'true Aborigine' while delegitimising the identity of those who now don't fit this definition.

These discussions express in part an area of social trauma that has had a deep impact on Aboriginal people's capacity to connect to those elements of identity that provide an assurance and authenticity to their identification through their ontological link to country. As Grande (2009) notes in his work on *Red Pedagogy*, he states that the colonial settler state has gone to great efforts to appropriate Indigenous identity to both morally justify not only their occupation and dispossession of Indigenous peoples, but also the very methods used to facilitate these acts. Raelene's response to her experiences were as Brayboy (2000) had described; where dispossession from Place has the possibility to affect the creation of an underclass of stateless Indigenous people whose identity is open

to manipulation and communities to be marginalised.

Several story lines run through these narratives – illuminating the conflicted position that Aboriginal communities find themselves being inexorably ‘othered’ as the *indigene*, or *aborigine*, by those who have ‘taken residence’ on Aboriginal community’s ‘land. The charade being perpetrated on Aboriginal people is that the state’s acknowledgement of Aboriginal presence actually sits within an intrinsic colonial project whose longer-term purpose is the eventual assimilation of Aboriginal people (Grande, 2009; Moran, 2005). Fran’s families’ response to the inexorable colonial policies of deculturalisation, was through their collective initiatives of resistance to a dominant culture imposition (Chapter 7 p.149). Even whilst they were strongly influenced through their relationships with the Christian *Aboriginal Inland Mission* (Higgins, 1976; Walton, 2008), they worked in a parallel cultural space to breathe life into sleeping ancestral Dreaming narratives using this epistemic knowledge to acculturate local communities into the ways of their forebears (Walton, 2008).

These experiences of resistance to a dominant paradigm were similar in intent to those exhibited by those in both Wurtindelly and Karrajong, who set themselves the task of challenging the little regard given to Wiradjuri language culture by actively pursuing a policy of cultural revitalisation that would provide all students an authentic linguistic and epistemic experience (Lowe & Howard, 2009). Table 7.1 encapsulates both the site specific and overall findings that demonstrate how Indigenous standpoint manifests itself in the four sites discussed.

Table 7.1: Aggregated site-specific Aboriginal standpoint positions

Research sites				
	Tubbagah	Karrajong	Wurtindelly	Mayanbri
Key elements of Locational sites of Agentic action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The sense of belonging impacted by Aboriginal identity and authenticity and its impact on community cohesion • Educational conflict with school staff and the manifestations of racism • Community response to limited staff understanding and knowledge (• Socio-economic dissonance and its negative impact on social cohesion. • Community agentic action to support student success by direct input into school policy decisions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community agentic action in establishing broad based language program • Community commitment to language reclamation (• Challenging non-Aboriginal construct of Aboriginal Identity and links to Country • Relation collaboration to affect change in relationship with cultural ontology. • Community language and cultural program and positive impact on student identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community resistance and agentic action impact on relationships with staff and school • Establishment of collaborative relationships to build community knowledge • Community action to push for external support for adult learning and training • Relational and cultural collaboration with teacher/s. • Positive impact of community action on student identity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Disrupted ontological connection to Country • Community response to limited school response to particular needs • Socio-psychological trauma due to relocation of families • Impact on community sense of identity and connection to Country • Consequent loss of authenticity and voice – effect of disconnection to Country • Active familial support for children to overcome social disadvantage
• Findings Aboriginal Standpoint:				
Key elements of Locational situated Standpoint	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deep social and economic issues that negatively impact community well-being • Community anger at level of underpinning racism within community • Community initiatives successful in mitigating socio-economic adversity in assisting students complete schooling • Aboriginal agency and resistance, relational outcomes affected by colonial history of missions, dispersal and housing ghettos 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aboriginal people actively pursued opportunities for collaboration. These were focused on the delivery of a Wiradjuri language and cultural programs, and subsequent spin off to wider engagement programs • Community actively exercising its agency in developing active partnerships with schools and staff, • Successful educational collaborations strengthens community engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Emergence of a community which proactively sought to engage in developing programs to lift outcomes for students • Community activity that focuses on action and focused resistance to exercise leverage & engagement of school. • Achieve a point of self- consciousness through community training and discussion to effect change to past hegemonic control of government agencies • School and community partnership success at leadership level, but finds on going staff resistance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social trauma affected Aboriginal people's capacity to connect to positive elements of identity. • Indelible impact on community sense of authenticity and connectedness. • Effect of colonisation and social relocation on ontological connection to space and place • Negative engagement with school as a result of socio-cultural dissonance and non-compliance • Community view their successful staff relationships as a model for future engagement.

Findings

The following findings are evidenced from the site-specific standpoint positions as discussed in Chapters 5 and 6. These complex and ever evolving positions are captured at this moment from the unique local discourses and acts of agency that frame this understanding of each community's standpoint.

These findings not only reference the contextual nature of these standpoint positions; but also how these positions were manifested within each site. Key elements of these positions include:

- It is clear that rather than a singular Indigenous standpoint position there is a strong articulation, both within and across the research sites, that evidences that there are multiple standpoint positions developed across these sites.
- That these standpoint positions have emerged out of each community's personal and collective responses to the impact of colonisation. Though it is clear that these experiences were unique, the overall effects were similar, being grounded by collective experiences of colonisation and the application of policies and practices that impact on their lived experiences
- That community centred standpoint positions are constantly evolving in their nature as these communities struggle for recognition at a local level as they look to effect change to their exploitation.

In each school site, Aboriginal communities have proactively sought to influence school policy direction; to effect change in teacher understanding; and collaboratively establish a vision that situates authentic learning within a culturally responsive curriculum that acknowledges Aboriginal standpoint (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013; Savage et al., 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2002).

The authority through which the four communities speak is that they represent a context, a history and a view that speaks to their aspirations. The effect of the exercise of both individual and collective agency has seen these groups commence the negotiation of new relationships to effect substantive change in the schools' curriculum and pedagogic practices. These challenges are taken up in the following chapters, as they describe how schools and Aboriginal communities negotiate the effective development of authentic learning relationships.

The narrative now takes a turn, with the focus moving from the discursive colonial experiences of these communities. Chapters 8 and 9 will focus on the relationships between the communities and the schools. It will focus on the views of the school leaders, their understanding of these interactions, how these schools have variously engaged in establishing local Aboriginal language and cultural programs and finally, walk with each of these Aboriginal communities as they talk about their responses to these efforts to engage them in their children's schooling.

Chapter 8: Dissonance, accommodation and collaboration

8.1 Introduction

Chapter 8 takes as its starting point the complex, discursive and evolving Aboriginal standpoint positions within each research site. The central structure of both this chapter and the following chapter is a matrix analysis⁷ of two school sites in each. Each opens with a brief discussion on the principal's understanding of its current relationship with the local Aboriginal community. This will be followed by participant conversations and a discussion across the broad conceptual theme of Language and Culture (as one connected entity). This discussion will focus on how schools articulate an understanding of the place and role of student's access to local language and culture within the school. As a consequence of the diverse school responses to the epistemic engagement of language and culture, the discussion will look to understand the varied approaches to collaboration and how the Aboriginal communities comprehend these responses. To constrain the scope of these discussions this theme has been limited to an investigation of three issues: the imperatives for engagement, enacted strategies and outcomes.

In this chapter Tubbagah and Mayanbri will be analysed as they provide examples of how poorly some schools have been seen to operate in respect to their interactions with Aboriginal parents. On many levels this interaction is seen to reflect directly on the degree of their cultural disconnect. This is evidenced by the school staff's limited understanding of the community's Aboriginal standpoint and history and the community's perception of current and past attempts to establish a relationship with them. Whilst in many schools there are a number of staff who have worked to establish quality relationships with Aboriginal people, there is a more commonly held view among Aboriginal people that schools are restricted by their limited understanding of the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal students (Sarrajong, 2011). In the following chapter Karrajong and Wurtindelly are examined; both have engaged in the language and cultural space, with particular reference to the impact on teachers' knowledge, their pedagogic practices, and the nature and quality of parent engagement.

A key finding of these two chapters is that significant social, cultural and educational outcomes are derived when schools work closely with local Aboriginal communities in

⁷ A matrix analysis is cross sectional analysis using two-way axis of research sites and component themes of community and school engagement. The development of this matrix is explained in greater detail in Chapter 4, and is here represented by Figure 8.1 in this chapter.

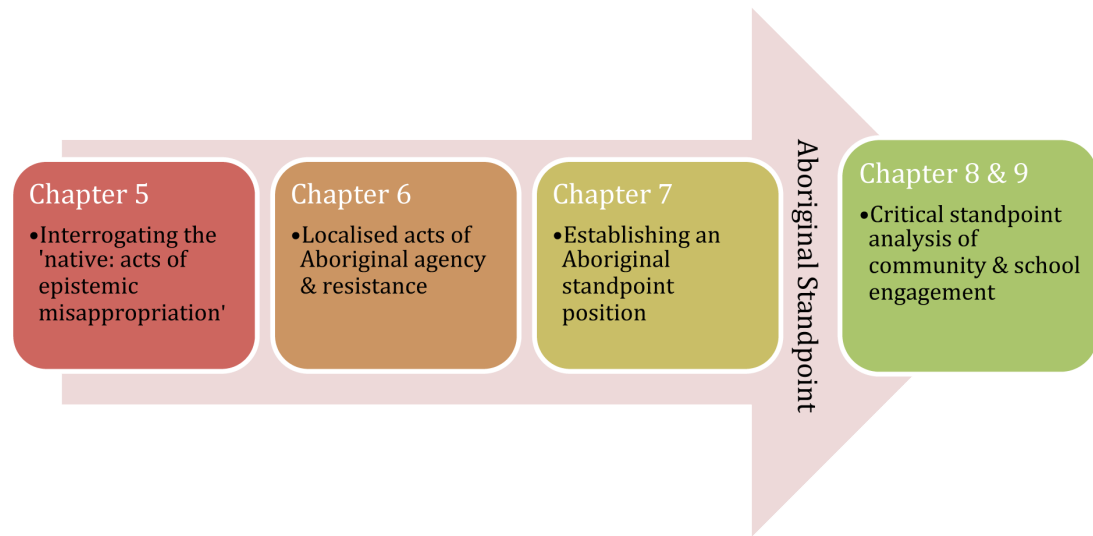
establishing meaningful language and cultural programs. Of particular interest has been the establishment of expansive and robust local frameworks of engagement that have subsequently supported other community and school interactions. Though always potentially contentious, collaboration in this area has provided insight into the underpinning and transformative capacity of this dialogue as Aboriginal people has interacted within this cultural interface.

The analysis of these data is initially undertaken using the site-specific standpoint positions explicated in Chapter 7. For Tubbagah, this highlighted the impact of socio-economic disadvantage on Aboriginal people's views about their relationship with the wider community and its traumatic impact on internal social cohesion. Secondly, it highlighted that the school relied heavily on the efforts of the local Aboriginal community and the AEOs to establish what has proven to be successful support programs to address student underachievement. Further it was noted that even with these programs the schools remained highly contested spaces, where students exercised resistance to the routines, practices and policies.

In respect to Mayanbri, the analysis in Chapter 7 underlined the fragility of their standpoint positions, demonstrating the inter-relationship between this instability and the levels of social trauma and disaffection. The analysis of their standpoint highlighted the impact wrought by people's cultural dislocation, the subsequent level of cultural disassociation from Country and its long-term impact on their resilience and sense of identity and authenticity.

These standpoint positions have been used to advance an assessment of each school's efforts. A summative evaluation using an analysis underpinned by Critical Indigenous Standpoint Theory as discussed in Chapter 3, informs an overarching analysis of community and school engagement. The site-specific evaluation facilitates an intimate understanding of the aspirations, form and depth of engagement that occurred between the Aboriginal educators and parents, and the school and its teachers. Figure 8.1 represents how each community standpoint was derived through an aggregated analysis advanced across Chapters 5 – 7. At its conclusion this analysis facilitates a deeper appreciation of the question of authenticity – that is, an evaluation of the schools' intentions and strategies to engage with the Aboriginal community as evidenced through their reception and accommodation within the community and its overall impact on the quality of engagement at the cultural interface.

Figure 8.1: Site-specific Aboriginal community and school engagement

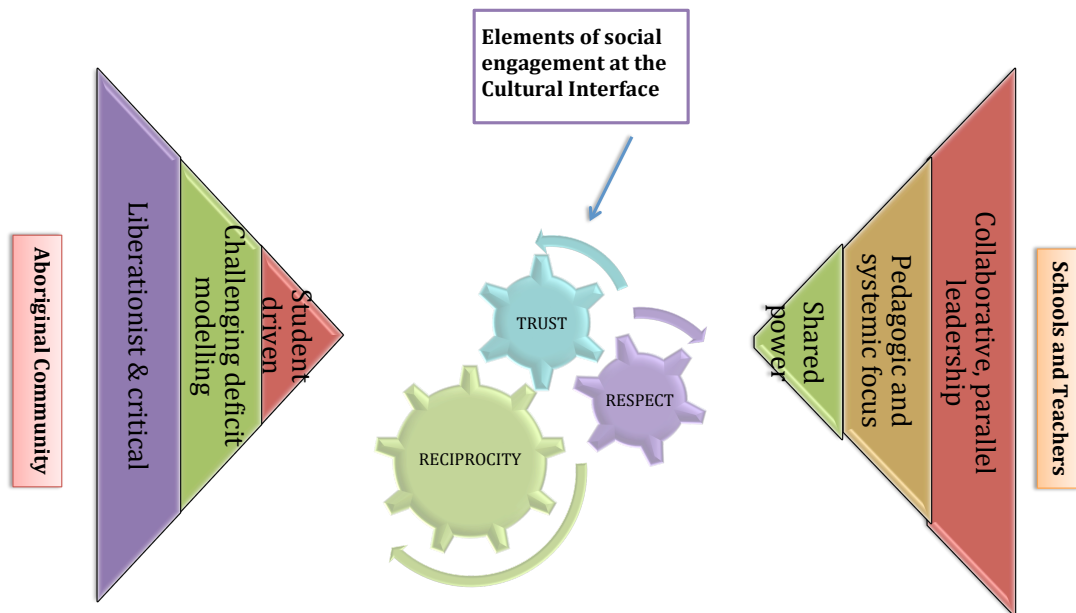


Ardill (2013) contends that these standpoint positions provide insight on how power is conceived and exercised, and how participants as social agents of change employ action to blunt or prevail over it. Within schools these interactions that occur at the cultural interface, underpin the development and maintenance of the changing relationships between Aboriginal people and teachers. Central to this is that each standpoint position is unique, contextual and legitimate, providing the means to understand the authenticity of the views, positions and actions adopted by key stakeholders within each community.

While Chapters 5 to 7 primarily drew on the actions of Aboriginal people within each site, Chapters 8 and 9 draw more broadly on the actions and views of principals and teachers, as well as Aboriginal educators, parents and community members. This analysis facilitates an exploration of the differences, within and across sites, shedding light on how these standpoint positions construct the form and nature of the engagement and the consequent impact on school and teachers' epistemic and ontological understanding of Aboriginal people.

The engagement at this interface between the two primary groups of schools and teachers, with Aboriginal people, draws our attention to the systemic differences underpinning the motivations driving school and community engagement. At the centre of this engagement is the interactional cultural interface. This engagement, represented in Figure 8.2 identifies the underpinning motivations of both groups as they struggle to work and find the points of commonality in their purpose, beliefs and strategies that effect change. The key elements of this engagement turn on the attributes of trust, respect and reciprocity and how they are perceived and enacted within the relational exchange between schools and Aboriginal people (Fattore, Turnbull, & Wilson, 2003; Goddard, 2003).

Figure 8.2: Community and school engagement at the cultural interface



The conceptual theme and the various constructs of collaboration are rich in meaning, in that they embed the sense of loss, trauma, aspirations, interactions and accommodations made by Aboriginal people as they have interacted with the wider non-Aboriginal world. Each term is heavily infused with layers of meaning, nuanced by personal and collective experience and within this research, critically communicated through individual and community situated standpoint positions.

The connected theme of language and culture relates to the highly emotional and politically charged issues of community access, use and learning of ancestral languages and cultural practices and knowledge within the school. This theme conceptually embeds cultural beliefs and knowledge within unique identities and epistemologies (Levi & Dean, 2002; Nakata, 2010). These in turn link to issues of identity which although expressed by individuals, are the ontological and epistemic glue that binds communities to a common sense of belonging and history and a consequent capacity to engage the outside world from within an Indigenous worldview (Nakata, 2010).

The history of language and cultural loss experienced among Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has direct and universal similarities to other Indigenous communities who have similarly experienced the impacts of colonisation (Battiste, 2000; R. Bishop, 2003; McCormick, 2013; Viatori & Usbigua, 2007). The mono-linguistic and mono-cultural policies and practices embedded within colonial policies and particularly advanced within school curricula, traumatically robbed communities of language (Simonds & Christopher, 2013) and in particular their epistemic and ontological

knowledge and practices that were their ancestral psychological epicentre. This in turn has resulted in a history of intergenerational psychosocial trauma (Gone, 2013).

Within this framework of cultural resistance the theme - 'Language and Culture' relate to the discursive efforts of Aboriginal communities to engage in the internal and external discourses of cultural control, reclamation, education and language and cultural transmission. Historically, schools have been positioned as one of the three instruments of state, along with law enforcement and the judicial system, to control Aboriginal people (Fletcher, 1989a) where schools proactively enacted policies, curriculum and pedagogic practices that have driven discourses of colonisation (Amery, 2003; Lomawaima, 1995; Lowe, 2011a). Though the form of these policies has largely continued unchanged, a small number of schools have established programs with local Aboriginal communities that have had the effect of establishing a supportive environment to establish Aboriginal language and cultural programs (Board of Studies NSW, 2006, 2008; Marmion et al., 2014; McCormick, 2013). A second overall finding from these two chapters relates to the ripple down impact in schools when even a small number of staff have sought to authentically embrace elements of both local and pan-Aboriginal cultural knowledge within their classroom pedagogic practices (Halloran, 2004; N. Harrison, 2012). I argue that the levels of trust required to successfully prosecute these programs can only be seen to flourish when schools engage Aboriginal communities in meaningful and ongoing dialogue on issues of substance to the community itself. Dialogue underpins change, which in turn leads to the substantive question of how purposeful engagement is to be constructed and how leadership, both school and community, is foundational to its success.

To understand the complexity of these interactions, I draw on the broader community capacity and engagement literature to gauge the underpinning qualities of these interactions as they are enacted between the schools and Aboriginal communities. The terms collaboration and partnership have often been used interchangeably to describe key attributes of the construction of those arrangements that define the type of interaction that occurs. While these terms are commonly viewed as being interchangeable I have argued that within these sites, collaboration is representative of the systemically legitimated responses of schools to manage the 'incessant' demands for interaction. Pushing back against these demands are the organisation's 'natural' propensity to control and limit parental involvement, particularly in those areas of schooling that are central to the core business of curriculum and teaching (Lowe, 2011b).

The concept of partnerships has emerged out of the literature on engaging ‘relationships’ (Patterson & Syverud, n/d; Price-Mitchell, 2009; V. Robinson, Hohepa, & Lloyd, 2009). Genuine relationships are characterised by an emphasis on the nature, quality and direction of the participation. For Indigenous communities a relationship is deep, enduring and ontologically binding (D. B. Rose, 1996) as reflected in how they conceptualise their relationship with Country. Within the school context, these partnerships are characterised by genuine collaboration, high expectations, reciprocal learning, trust and respect (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014; Young & Warren, 2003).

This discussion enters into two key areas of systemic engagement with Aboriginal people. Evidence from across the four sites explores how schools and their communities each understand the place of parent and community engagement. Of particular note is the degree to which these interactions are rich, evolving and nuanced; where new possibilities are generated; and where there is evidence of increased levels of trust, respect and reciprocity. This helps us to define how authentic engagement is enacted within the practice of genuine engagement.

The third key finding from Chapters 8 and 9 emerges from understanding the qualities of these relationships. It is clear that the qualities of trust, respect and reciprocity are essential to the establishment and maintenance of effective *two-way* learning partnerships between Aboriginal people and schools (Lowe, 2008a; Tschannen-Moran, 2001). These elements are crucial to how we appreciate the import of authentic engagement in support of student participation and achievement (Friedal, 1999; Gorard & See, 2013). This in turn leads to the finding that school leadership must be genuinely open to sharing power and core decision-making. This is essential if schools are to affect a new working dynamic between Aboriginal communities and schools (Lowe & Howard, 2009).

The following sections on each school opens with teachers and principals talking about the primary motivations and aspirations that either propel or stifle capacity to interact with Aboriginal communities. What follows in these discussions are incidences often characterised as superficial and/or lacking in the intention to affect change. However, the nature of any school environment is that it is complex and organic, where serendipity colludes to bring diverse people and ideas together. Each of these sites demonstrates such interaction, where compelling relationships are forged and even if for a moment, change is seen to occur. The first site for this focused investigation is Tubbagah, a large township with deep memories of an unhappy past, but with the possibilities of a better arrangement to support the education of Aboriginal students.

8.2 Tubbagah.

Although public secondary education had been available for almost a century in Tubbagah, Aboriginal students were frequently denied access by both legislative and policy caveat through much of the early and middle 20th Century (Fletcher, 1989a). Until the 1950s many students were forced to attend one of the three nearby mission schools, a system Cadzow (2008) exposed as being deliberately under-resourced and staffed with under-trained teachers. The consequences of this system of education was most recently assessed in the NSW Review into Aboriginal education (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004). This review identified the enormity of this failure to educate Aboriginal students. The effect of this system of education was the construction of an almost impenetrable barrier to both student success and community engagement with schools. It was thought that this would change with the announcement of a new senior secondary schooling model for Tubbagah by the Deputy Premier and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs in 2000 (Macquarie Regional Library, n/a), which held the promise of a new educational environment for Aboriginal students. Though considerable success has indeed been achieved, with the senior college consistently graduating more Aboriginal students than any other high school in the state, little was done at the implementation stage of this reorganization that would have provided students with a point to connect schooling success to an real acknowledgement of Aboriginal languages and culture.

Language and Culture

Imperative for action

It is Christopher, the non-Aboriginal teacher of Aboriginal Studies, who commences to unpack the conundrum of teacher propensity to resist engagement with Aboriginal parents. He identifies the impact of the socio-enculturation of non-Aboriginal people through a telling of the nations colonial history that ignored, demonised and de-legitimated Aboriginal prior occupation and the impact of colonial systems on Aboriginal communities.

Christopher, speaking of the need for teachers to be culturally socialised into the communities they taught, acknowledges the paucity of teachers' capacity and unwillingness to making such a transition. The impact of being socially engaged goes beyond relational engagement – as it fundamentally focuses teachers attention to question their pedagogic efficacy and their social justice credentials (McCormack & Gore, 2008).

Christopher: *I got my first Aboriginal studies class in my first year, and I remember sitting in the classroom with this small class of Aboriginal kids thinking: “what the heck am I going to teach them? What’s a white fella going to know that’s important to them, their families and their particular situation here?”* (Tubbagah, Term 2, 2012)

Christopher had spent several years after completing his degree working as a church outreach worker in small townships in western NSW assisting with community enterprises and establishing outreach youth programs. Yet even armed with these experiences he realised an inadequacy in teaching these students. These feelings peaked as he realised the level of his ignorance on matters that he now understood touched on events of great significance to the nation’s history.

In particular, Christopher understood that by honouring the language and culture of Aboriginal students’ within schools this would affirm both their cultural identity and sense of belonging. He explained the importance of this, not just to engage students but to ultimately impact on their academic achievement. The import of these issues was addressed in Russell Bishop and Mere Berryman’s (2006) New Zealand research that highlighted the importance to students and parents, of teachers making genuine and substantive connections to Māori culture , and its potential to positively impact on students’ wellbeing and schooling success.

Christopher, who had been at the school for seven years, was one of the few teachers who had consistently sought the advice of the school’s AEOs in connecting with parents and listening to their views on the issues that affected student participation and achievement. Christopher addressed the reciprocal potential of these relationships, when he said:

Christopher: *I think relationships are the key with teaching Aboriginal students. I just said [before] when we were talking about teacher socialisation about families and cultures... I think some teachers miss that the family and community relationships are so important: it’s intrinsic to their identity. I think building a good relationship with a teacher is an imperative if you want to take them [learning] anywhere... I’ve learnt that that those relationships have always been important ... Even though I’m a non-Aboriginal teacher, you can actually fit into that network somewhere and I think that gives you rapport with those kids.* (Tubbagah, Term 4, 2012)

Christopher sought advice through establishing social relationships, initially with the AEOs and then the students (Byron, 2008; Lowe, 2008a) which furnished him with a new clarity about the lives of people in this community. Christopher felt empowered by his realisation that engagement is a two-way reciprocating association that supports teachers in developing a genuine awareness about the Aboriginal students in their classrooms (Downing & Kowal, 2011). His views were in stark contrast to the one-directional relationship implied by current policy discourses which seek parental engagement as the lever to bring the unwilling child to the classroom door (Lowe, 2011b).

Glen, the Aboriginal manager of the IYLP project, had earlier questioned the current level of teacher awareness at the school. In the middle of this discussion he looked up at a large Clifford Possum print that hung on the wall and angrily questioned what it was meant to represent (as discussed in Chapter 5). His concern about teacher awareness turned to a discussion about teacher's knowledge and the difference between them being 'culturally aware' and 'culturally educated'. He claimed that schools often relied on the former, purchasing and displaying artefacts and artistic imagery as a demonstration of an imagined 'closeness' and understanding of the Aboriginal students in its care. He said:

Glen: *I think a lot of it is token stuff. I've said this before, and got in trouble for it but you know there's a big difference between being culturally aware and culturally educated. If someone walked into this room they'd have a look around and see these Indigenous paintings they've got these on the wall. They're beautiful paintings, but they represent culturally awareness. To be culturally educated, that teacher that's sitting there with that wonderful picture should be able to tell me what that picture's all about so that then when they're in here working with an Aboriginal kid they might even be able to relate it to that painting and say, "you know what's going on in your life right now, that's what that painting's talking about." That's how a culturally educated teacher would operate (Tubbagah, Term 3, 2012).*

Glen both lived and worked at the sharp end of the socio-cultural divide between the school and community and had an acute awareness of what he saw to be the purpose of engagement with the school and his community. Glen's reasoning was political, for in his view, the primary function of cross-cultural engagement was to provide a platform where teachers could be reflexively challenged - to realise that Aboriginal communities have been primarily positioned by race and that their historically situated struggle has been for recognition and acknowledgement of their ontological connection to Country.

While recognising the wider social backdrop that negatively characterised Aboriginal people, Glen believed that the school provided an opportunity to sustainably challenge these views through creating opportunities to expose teachers to a deeper epistemic engagement and in doing so, demonstrate that Aboriginal culture was tangible, real and ongoing. He made a plea for teachers to open their eyes, when he said:

Glen: *Well I guess from the perspective of the ideas of it and me believing in why this needs to be done, it's because it exposes people to new ideas by showing them that Indigenous people do exist in our community; that Indigenous people do have their own set of values and beliefs, and that Indigenous people, regardless of what others think, are still in touch with their culture whether that Indigenous person explicitly realises it or not.* (Tubbagah, Term 4, 2012)

Glen identified a primary function of community and school engagement - for teachers to gain insight into students' cultural lives; of being Aboriginal and what that means for these students. The question that Glen wanted answered was when would teachers be answerable for their pedagogic practices, such that that they are held responsible in meeting students' needs and interests (Villegas & Lucas, 2002)? Like Christopher, Glen believed that this was possible, but was dependent on teachers first identifying and then addressing the social tensions of racial privilege and disadvantage within the schools they taught in (Berryman, SooHoo, Nevin, Barrett, & Ford, 2013).

The task of schools trying to establish a school language program may appear naïve given the overall mono-linguistic climate within Australian schools and the abiding impact of language loss that has left communities culturally bereft (Lowe, 2011a). Yet research has shown (G. Pearson, 2010; R. Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Klenowski, 2009) that schools who have advanced their commitment to a strong and purposeful community engagement; their promise of making long term pedagogic commitments; and support strong community leadership have turned cultural contestation into a possibility for significant cultural dialogue between themselves, and students and parents. The imperative for schools such as Tubbagah is to ensure that community engagement provides a connection and context and is authentic in its inclusion of cultural knowledge within the classroom. However, in the view of many of the Aboriginal staff, the school has yet to demonstrate any deep appreciation, understanding or capacity to engage parents on such a level.

Enacted Strategies

The identification of strategies to support the cultural education of students often leads to a list of 'dos and don'ts', 'who can and can't' teach or participate in programs at school, or

what can be taught. Glen sought to address these underlying issues, when he evidenced how culture was successfully incorporated into meaningful social discourse with students. His conversation in the form of a cultural allegory, turned the focus from an event or program, to what appears as a more prosaic but imagined conversation between himself and transitioning Aboriginal students. He sought to draw students into a larger conversation on social and cultural responsibilities, their successful progression through this phase of learning and the acquisition of epistemic and ontological knowledge. Success was not so much about a test result, but the mark of respect they exhibited for themselves and their community. Glen looked to situate this message of success and learner identity within a wider socio-cultural context, through privileging Aboriginal voice, epistemic knowledge and ontological positioning. He further sought to identify that cultural connection is not just about content but is pervasive, and within a responsive environment, it could provide a platform to discuss issues of cultural pride, control, agency, aspirations and success. He comments on some of these ideas as part of a longer dialogue when he says:

Glen: *... the story starts with how proud I am of them being proud young Indigenous Australians. Straightaway, going into Years 11 and 12 you're breaking down stereotypes because it hasn't happened traditionally. I then take them back in time on a little bit of a journey... back a thousand years. I tell them it's the years from 14 through to 18 and they're at a time when they're going through the first phase of initiation when they are exposed to knowledge... they would go bush with Elders who were responsible for their education - to share and comprehend their responsibilities in understanding and learning the importance of totems, of the Dreaming, and the encompassing nature of cultural responsibilities.*
(Tubbagah, Term 3, 2012).

Glen touches on how culturally educated teachers can draw students into a learning environment in which cultural knowledge underpins critical discussions on matters such as moral and ethical identity and social responsibility. This dialogue highlights further issues, including possibilities of classroom discourse to address issues such as the moral purpose of the learning and its direct links to the cultural experiences, knowledge and worldview of students (Hewitt, 2000).

This imagined learning environment is far removed from the actual experiences of most students, where the Aboriginal staff saw current education as being taught in a cultural wasteland. In their view, curriculum was stripped of its opportunity to authentically

explore the world from an Indigenous worldview. Recent debate around the development of the national Australian Curriculum and its approach to the establishment of Indigenous curriculum perspectives masks an agenda that refuses to construct curriculum that is culturally authentic in its provision of Indigenous knowledge (Burgess, 2009; Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013; G. Martin, 2012). For Glen, linking effective teaching to the student's cultural frame was contingent on teachers challenging pervasive stereotypes of Aboriginal students and their parents (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) and only then constructing learning such that it actually engages students in meaningful education (C. Mason, Cremin, Warwick, & Harrison, 2011; Riley & Ungerleider, 2012).

Outcomes

For Glen and other Aboriginal participants, engagement between the school and parents had to have purpose - a consequence for altering the status quo of educational outcomes for the Aboriginal students at school. For reasons, some of which were beyond the capacity of the schools themselves to remedy, the initial interest in establishing a Wiradjuri language program across the schools had failed to eventuate. This decision had unseen consequences as it flowed back into the senior college, with students having little or no opportunity to participate in school initiated cultural programs. Additionally, there appeared to be little enthusiasm amongst many of the Aboriginal parents to participate in general activities at the school, with their interest being limited to being 'involved' when directed by the school to speak about their children. This limited engagement of Aboriginal parents consequently meant that Jack, the school principal was reliant on the AECG to be his emissary with the school, as it was the school's de facto channel to parents. In the place of a constructive two-way dialogue, the nature of the school's engagement with parents was seen as one-way, providing little space for an exchange based on mutuality, trust and authentic understanding.

The following conversation begins with Jack and his personal construction of the culture of schooling as seen by Aboriginal students as it mediated through the personal relationships which he witnessed between students, parents and teachers. The second conversation is with Ivan, a highly respected Aboriginal teacher at the school, who had admitted to the trauma of being cultural disconnected from his grandmother's Country. For Ivan, the importance of community engagement was the cultural efficacy that came when Elders were present and the impact of subsequent dialogue when teachers and students had access to their cultural capital. Jack spoke of his initial interaction at his first school, when he said:

Jack: I guess teaching in a school of all Aboriginal students you appreciate that relationships are absolutely fundamental, and a key feature of success. I didn't realise at the time but in those first few weeks every student that I talked to wanted to know who I was, "where I came from", and "where do you belong?" You know until they could put a place or something on me it didn't matter what I was saying. The kids and parents didn't want to know about what I was saying. It didn't matter. Until they actually knew where I came from, and at some point I think they made the connection: well I think this guy's okay and I can, you know, we can have a relationship. Until that happened, I don't think I could have been an effective teacher (Tubbagah Term 2, 2012).

Jack is rescued from certain failure through the relationship he establishes with the students, AEOs and Elders, and with their assistance, to the broader community. His ignorance was such that he hadn't realised that he needed to address this before he had any hope of breaking through the barriers that historically distanced teachers from the Aboriginal communities. Just as Bradley (2010) had described in his autobiography of his teaching experiences in the Northern Territory, these communities needed to "know" Jack, to position him ontologically within an Aboriginal schema so they could then relate to him. The ensuing relationship, initiated through the community's action, opened his understanding of the authority and presence of local culture, its impact on student identity and the need for teachers to engage in learning about it.

Ivan, the Aboriginal mathematics head teacher, understood all too well the power and authority that came with cultural knowledge. His lament related to his feelings of being culturally bereft at the lost opportunity to know his language and the hidden cultural knowledge contained within it. Not wanting to perpetuate his own history, Ivan argued for the Elders to be given greater access into the classroom, such as to enable them to bring language, culture and history directly to the student. Like Glen, Ivan saw a genuine capacity for change, as these relationships had the power to effect real change in the pedagogic practices of teachers (Owens, Doolan, Bennet, & Paraide, 2012). Ivan spoke about this when he said:

Ivan: I loved it when you said earlier that you [Kevin] want to learn one language first and then go back and learn your own one. I think that's really powerful. So I think the thing that giving students access to the lingo will really work [assisting students], but we gotta get Elders involved. 'Cause really, my generation doesn't know, we don't know the language. And the ones that do are unfortunately

starting to pass away now. So I reckon if we can tap into those somehow, someway. No matter what Aboriginal kid you get, they could be the worst kid in the world, but if they see an Aunty or Uncle there [at school] they'll start acting good. It's only then we can then start to engage them in learning (Tubbagah, Term 3, 2012)

Ivan then shifted the focus in his comments, projecting his thoughts to his upcoming promotion to Deputy Principal. He mused on how this change had sharpened his thoughts about teachers and their role in supporting Aboriginal students in schools. He was concerned at the level of debate and the propensity for teachers to seek reasons for student failure beyond the school. He was aware of the enormity of the task and the need for schools to reflexively analyse such issues as the appropriateness of current teaching and learning practices that met both the local and broader educational needs of Aboriginal students (Ladwig, 2010; Reyhner, 2001). Ivan further recognised that this was a much larger and intractable issue, requiring purposeful leadership (Biddulph et al., 2003); to identify, critique and then change practices seen to underpin poor student achievement (Perso, 2012). In Ivan's internal dialogue, he highlighted both the potential for change and the barriers that militate against school's empowerment of their Aboriginal community and changed teaching practices (Biddulph et al., 2003; Gutman & McLoyd, 2000).

Like other small towns situated close to larger regional centres, Mayanbri had suffered from being too close to Tubbagah, especially as their economies have suffered the impact of drought, structural change, and business closures. Inexorably, resources and services were stripped away, which then in turn has seen families relocate in search of employment. Increasingly, Aboriginal families have moved into town and that has driven the growing demographic change identified in Chapter 7 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a). Mayanbri looked on the surface to be a quiet rural backwater but the real need for change was present, driven in part by the Aboriginal parents and education workers who wanted to draw attention to the hiatus in the school's efforts to address the issue of Aboriginal education.

8.3 Mayanbri

Introduction

Jesse, who was temporarily appointed as the school principal, came back to the position he first held ten years before. His appointment was eagerly supported by those on the staff who had been at the school when he first took up the position in 2002. This relieving

position, followed on from a somewhat charismatic leader, who was promoted on the back of his 'reported' successes with the Aboriginal students. Though the veneer of his successes appeared to be in place, emerging cracks exposed the consequences of past decisions. Jesse was a very different educational leader; one who was methodical, incrementally constructing change, paring away that which he saw detracted from advancing key strategic priorities that would restore the school's public standing and its pedagogical health. However these legacies continued to impact during and beyond 2012.

Jesse, stymied by the impermanence of his temporary principalship, still thought that he could see a way forward, but had little time or authority to establish the necessary structural and pedagogic change, or initiate the connections he knew were needed with the Aboriginal community leaders. What follows is a report of both the school's current actions and people's reflections on past events.

Language and Culture

Imperatives for action

This discussion commences with a conversation with Jesse that explores the import of one of the more significant moments in Australian history - the establishment of the 1972 Tent Embassy. Though his comments mark a genuine endeavour to enlighten the school as to the social significance of the Tent Embassy, his understanding is deeply mired in a reconciliatory framework that itself fails to see the tensions that are embedded in this event (Short, 2008). For Aboriginal people events such as these were an assertion of their Indigenous sovereign status, of their inalienable Indigenous rights, of agency and resistance, and self-determination (G. Foley, 2000; Koerner, 2015; Moreton-Robinson, 2007). What follows illuminates how the mainstream, being ill-equipped and/or unprepared to shed light on these views, found a celebratory form of acknowledgement that has assimilated the events into a shared model of historical reconciliation (Muldoon & Schaap, 2012). Jesse spoke of this event this way:

Jesse: *At the moment we're talking about NAIDOC week, and its theme is the Aboriginal Tent Embassy. We're putting up a tent out there in the playground. The HSIE faculty, they're doing a history of it... on Monday we're going to have a flag raising with the whole school. We're going to have an assembly on the Tuesday, then a dinner at night for the community. Then the Wednesday's sport day is using Aboriginal games. I'm going to talk to the kids about the importance of Aboriginal culture and the importance of the tent embassy and how in times*

of change things happen that maybe a lot of people don't agree with but they happen and then gradually community perceptions and opinions change
(Mayanbri, Term 3, 2012).

Though the school's intention of celebrating these events was genuine, they were overwhelmed by contemporary celebratory events such as NAIDOC⁸, which has had the effect of 'mainstreaming' Aboriginal peoples' historical experiences of colonisation, of circumventing their voices with more palatable retelling of events, which consequently have lost the highly charged nature of Aboriginal resistance. This is a social framework of Aboriginal 'recognition', which substitutes the cultural discourse of 'difference' over an Indigenous discourse of legitimacy and agency (Altman, 2004). In this, schools have been drafted as an arm of 'practical reconciliation'; where ceremony, performance and shared histories take the place of critique and where Aboriginal identity is emasculated within a multicultural framework. The Tent Embassy celebrations, as other such events, are acknowledged as examples of 'Indigenous social action', 'building pride' and 'Aboriginal contributions to Australian identity' and not as a marker of Aboriginal resistance (National NAIDOC Secretariat, 2012).

Though seemingly not of the same import, local attempts to gain recognition were nonetheless driven by the same impetus for acknowledgement. From Julie's position as one of the AEOs, the limited recognition by the school to Aboriginal culture and languages appeared to directly impact on the student's sense of identity, which in turn was seen to impact on their resilience and participation in school.

Later Julie spoke of the 'Men's Education Project', which at its heart sought to guide the social development of an 'at risk' group of young men in the school with guided mentoring from Elders and other grounded men in the community. The program included the challenges of growing into adulthood, men's responsibilities to family and community and positive ways to affirm local identity. It was Adam the deputy principal, and Julie who took the lead on this project. It was hoped that the program would underpin students' schooling success, build bridges to the community and facilitate positive student identity and resilience. She spoke of her concerns and the students' needs, when she said:

Julie: *That is a very interesting subject because most of our kids today don't really know their culture. They don't have any idea. I think that for many, they're in a*

⁸ NAIDOC Week celebrates the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. NAIDOC is celebrated in both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. The week is seen as an opportunity to participate in activities and support local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (<http://www.naidoc.org.au/>).

twilight zone! We've got a group of boys that are causing problems and most of it's because of a lack of respect. So what we've introduced is a 'Men's Program'. We've engaged community men to work with those 16-18 year old boys at the school. When we were yarning with them, it came up that lots of these kids have little idea of their cultural heritage, and we need to do something to help them be better men in our community (Mayanbri, Term 2, 2012).

Community Elders had expressed a concern that unlike their own childhood, parents were not educating their children in the Dreaming; the cultural narratives, songs, dances and spiritual elements that contained their Wiradjuri and/or Gamilaraay beliefs, values and histories. Julie knew that it was these stories, which bore the essence of each community's presence and it was this that separated Aboriginal people from the rest of the town's population (Austin-Broos, 2004). Of particular concern to these Elders was the importance of community 'respect' – a concept she related to the quality of the physical and ethereal relationships to kin and the Land, of deference to Country and responsibilities to Elders and kin (D. B. Rose, 2003). People are judged on how they rendered themselves within community; of not imposing, but rather engaging with the knowledge that underpins collaborative action (Board of Studies NSW, 2008). Julie and other Elders on the Lands Council maintained that the 'respect' they sought was not about them, but a manifestation of engagement with community well-being; one where actions were informed by their respect for their Aboriginal identity.

For Julie and Kirsten, the heart of a student's ontological sense of being was the security of their connectedness and the actualization of an authentic identity. The challenge is significant, with Raelene the school community liaison officer and AECG president, voicing her sadness at her inability to identify her Country; a consequence of her family's lost connection which would now cascade forward through following generations. Fran, the primary school's AEO and daughter of a highly regarded and well connected local family whose roots were deeply embedded in Country, understood the ramifications of her friend's dilemma and the impact of being defined as 'stateless' or worse - unauthentic (Brayboy, 2000; King, 2003b). Fran's advice was situated in her understanding of the multiple consequences of being culturally disconnected. She knew it was critical for children to be able to assert an Aboriginal identity even if ontologically problematic, where people have to reconstruct their sense of belonging from the snippets of knowledge serendipitously passed on from one generation to the next. Being Aboriginal meant being able to identify - providing an assurance to their sense of being. Raelene spoke of her concerns:

Raelene: *I was never taught what tribe we were or where their land was. So my son's been asking me where do we come from? 'Cause he's born and lives in Mayanbri, and he's never lived in Gulargumbone, he thinks he's Wiradjuri but he's not!*
(Mayanbri, Term 3, 2012)

For Kirsten, the stories of place and family are central to her sense of Aboriginality. Critical to the stories were the imprinted memory of belonging and a shared history of community, where their collective world of being black in a white world set them apart from all others. While the state looks to essentialise the 'Indigenous' person's collective experience of belonging to Country Kirsten spoke of feeling unique, of knowing her familial connections and identifying as Wiradjuri (S. Hall, 1996). She spoke of how these feelings both centred and made sense of her life:

Kirsten: *They (community members) don't feel comfortable talking, because they're not aware of what the history was, what has really gone on and how we belong. It's like... I don't know how you would explain it - like [for example] Aboriginal people love water, we love sitting down the river and telling stories and stuff but we don't know, it's just a thing with Aboriginal people. We sorta can't explain why. We don't know where we exactly fit; it's how we feel – that at least is important, especially if we don't have the stories that makes sense of it all*
(Mayanbri, Term 4, 2012).

The loss of cultural knowledge was traumatic - its inter-generational impact and its effects were psychologically damaging. Kirsten who was in her early 50s, and Julie who has earlier indicated that she was close to 65, spoke of their feelings about the rapid loss of knowledge and its ongoing deleterious impacts on their community. Battiste (2000) referred to this stage of colonisation as 'cognitive assimilation'; the power of epistemic imposition that has the effect of challenging, diminishing, appropriating and finally expunging Indigenous knowledge from the memory of these communities. Julie's earlier efforts to encourage the school to establish a Gamilaraay language program was at its heart an act of resurgent agency, challenging the loss of language, seeking to fortify students' home cultural knowledge and to implore the school to provide a genuine place within the curriculum for Aboriginal epistemic knowledge (Lowe, 2011a).

Yet the school's response was less than half-hearted and without strong advocacy from the school leadership team, change was unlikely to occur. The Men's project at least was seen as a legitimate community program that addressed an emerging problem of disaffection among many of the young men who stayed in the town. However, overall, the school had

not yet shown an inclination to support these aspirations, with the level of disconnect remaining in place and implicit trust seen to be in short supply. The principal, swamped with structural issues needing immediate attention, was distracted from the task of developing with staff and parents a shared educational vision about Aboriginal education (Lowe & Howard, 2009; Young & Warren, 2003). Here the issues of leadership collided with the tyranny of day-to-day management issues. Certainly the evidence would suggest that without a long term and ongoing effective leadership (Epstein, Sheldon, Simon, & Salinas, 2009), there is no chance for programs that challenge embedded structures, such as Julie's language program, to be introduced.

Enacted Strategies

What follows provides an insight into key issues affecting the delivery of education to Aboriginal students at the school. This centres on how the school conceptualised its relationship with the Aboriginal families, the reception of Aboriginal students in the school and how the school acknowledged their presence within their pedagogic discourse. Relationships had been increasingly strained with the immediate past principal, especially after he had chosen to fund the temporary employment of two middle management positions over establishing programs that promoted inclusive pedagogic and curriculum reform. Both Kirsten and Fran had often spoken of the educational, cultural and social rationale for the establishment of a local language program at the school. Yet the school had stalled on this, citing costs and the lack of an off the shelf program they could easily implement. Jesse was flummoxed by these decisions that he now had to manage, which he commented had wasted irreplaceable financial resources, while educational opportunities went begging for the lack of a coherent educational vision for Aboriginal education. Kelly, the highly respected mathematics head teacher and confidant of the Aboriginal staff, had extensive experience in teaching. He conveyed his thoughts on the paramount importance of infusing classroom discourse with important contextual cultural knowledge and to appreciate that effective teaching is built on a two-way dialogue. He said:

Kelly: *I think first of all you've got to understand student expectations, where they come from, and then start with that. Like it means adapting your teaching methods to suit them. Your teaching methods with a lot of the young Aboriginal kids (and I taught in Moree too), is totally different to if I'd been appointed to say, to an affluent inner city school; right! [In] your preparation you must look at commonalities between what these kids can offer you in that classroom and what you can offer them – it's two-way, to find something that is there and work with it. So if you know they like to work in groups then you work in groups*

(Mayanbri, Term 2, 2012).

Kelly, nearing the end of his forty years teaching in western NSW, knew that teachers had to first know and work with the students' cultural sense of being to effect a change in their learning trajectory. Kelly had recently been promoted into the position of '*Virtual Mathematics Head Teacher*' in far western NSW. The task of professional support to early scheme teachers across a third of the state gave him a unique insider's view of the extent of the socio-cultural dissonance between many teachers and the communities in which they taught. He saw that the level of misunderstanding translated into an inability to differentiate the learning environment within their teaching. Without reference to the 'scholarship' on this, Kelly 'knew' that both the student and effective pedagogic practice needed to exist within the same context (Freire, 1974). He was also aware that teaching practice is not an end point, but the beginning of an iterative process that is influenced by both dialogue and knowledge (Hattam & Prosser, 2008). Kelly spoke of teachers having to know the student before being able to respond to their lived experiences, to interrogate the privilege of being a teacher in these communities; of being non-Aboriginal in a world constructed through race and colonial benefit and the cost of being epistemically bound by western knowledge traditions while being in an Aboriginal world (Giroux, 1983a; Ladson-Billings, 1995). The power enacted in teacher's authority and the cultural underpinnings of curricula have formed an almost impassable barrier for many Aboriginal students. Mayanbri is at present someway off from being able to embark on a program of strategic change

Outcomes

Attending to the busyness of running a school and not having a specific project to hang these relationships on, saw the progress of the school's relationship with parents wane. Changes in leadership had adversely affected the depth of these interactions; from being genuine curriculum and pedagogic engagement and participation, to collaboration based on formalized agreements with the AECG. Both Jesse and Julie had spoken of their disappointment at this. Julie said:

Julie: *And we're [the AECG] is not doing what its supposed to do... we come together and we just discuss what the different schools are doing ... there's three schools, but the Catholic school chooses not to join in. We just discuss what's happening, if there's any new programs we talk about that but really we don't discuss educational things, or what's not working ... yeah we don't get an opportunity to discuss the big issues.* (Mayanbri, Term 3, 2012)

This process of formalizing the exchange between the parents and schools had become the point of action, where time was spent with schools providing reports on activity that had little direct involvement from parents, and where the meeting became the reportable output of success. The previous principal had pushed for a formally signed agreement with the AECG; a document now found on the hallway wall at the Lands Council. Julie had invited me talk to members about the research and had organized a meeting. What transpired was insightful; as it highlighted how concerned they were of the discord, and how little the school understood the dynamics of these community organisations. Of particular concern were issues related to the school's reaction to the perception of community conflict. They commented that the school's "wait until the dust settled" approach, which in reality meant that they suffered from a relational paralysis, obviated the need to engage more broadly in the community. This now made sense of Kirsten's earlier comment about their lack of 'involvement' and the community's response of disengagement. Two voices were being heard, the school's; which Kirsten and Julie saw as being blind to the impact of its subterfuge; and the community, where voices spoke of marginalisation within this discourse of 'collaboration' (Ladson-Billings & Donnor, 2005).

Kirsten: *Community should be involved. They're not involved enough. I don't know why? We've tried various ways to get them involved but they don't have a say in their student's education. We tried that once! Now it's now hard getting parents to come in. (Mayanbri, Term 4, 2012)*

Kirsten, the Aboriginal Student Support aide and Kelly's close confidant, had been a key member of the successful *Maths in Indigenous Contexts* projects (Howard, Feirer, Lowe, Ziems, & Pearson, 2004; Howard & Perry, 2007), a highly successful Years 5 – 8 school community curriculum activity. Kirsten, who had strong links to Aboriginal parents and had a keen knowledge of their aspirations, identified a growing malaise – which she saw as a consequence of the school's absence in attending to its commitment to maintain what were once quality relationships with parents (Goos, 2004; Howard & Perry, 2007). This was not surprising, as Warren et al. (2009) noted, that effective relationships required purposeful leadership to challenging the state of inertia that reifies the everyday exercise of the school's power, knowledge and practices over that of the parents. Jesse too was aware that engagement had to be active and purposeful and be outcomes focused.

Jesse: *If you ask what do teachers know about it (Aboriginal education) well they're, they are familiar with the policy. But that's a tick the box thing. My view on this, and I communicate this to people a lot, is that until you implement something in*

the classroom, it doesn't matter what it is... unless you do something about it it's never going to happen. (Mayanbri, Term 4, 2012)

Jesse's comments, short as they were, were nonetheless significant, as they touched on the lack of a sustainable vision for change. Jesse saw that the point of engagement was its capacity to affect a change in teacher's classroom practice. The question that begged an answer was whether teachers understood the effect of their practice on student engagement and outcomes? Without change in the relational dynamics between parents and the school, the magnitude of improving student outcomes becomes too difficult a task. Its complexity, its inter-relatedness to socio-economic disadvantage and the structures of schools themselves, had the effect of making change beyond their capacity to deliver. Schools consequently resorted to a tick the box approach – being seen to be doing something while doing little.

8.4 Concluding remarks

These community and school narratives provide a brief opportunity to pull some rich threads together. In particular, I want to address two matters, that of policy driven engagement versus curriculum engagement and the second, the matters of authenticity.

To understand how a policy that purports to facilitate school and community engagement has had such little impact in developing genuine programs, we need to understand that notions of community empowerment have been embedded into bureaucratic structures that have impeded the development of genuine collaborative partnerships with local communities (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2010). A further flaw in the policy is that it makes no mention of the role of school leadership in sustaining these partnerships; sharing actual leadership with community, or shifting focus from structures to what actually happens within the classroom. Though the Aboriginal workers and parents had implored the schools to establish authentic curriculum programs that would resonate with the Aboriginal students, both schools had failed to entertain such a possibility. This left both schools ill-prepared to meaningfully negotiate with local parents and local Aboriginal organisations on key issues of authority and power in the school setting.

Nowhere is there an explicit acknowledgment that empowerment is more than the aggregation of a series of strategies, or that schools are required to share effective power with parents by relinquishing their sole control of the school's core activities in curriculum and teaching practices (Lowe, 2011b). This policy has produced a form of negotiated interaction that enables agencies to maintain their effective control over their

core business, while enticing parents to be involved in the ephemeral business of meetings and celebrations.

The issue of authenticity, as previously defined, relates to acknowledging the uniqueness and contextual positioning of programs that are rooted in the local environment of the community in which they work. Auerbach has defined authentic engagement as “*respectful alliances among educators, families, and community groups that value relationship building, dialogue across difference, and sharing power in pursuit of common purpose in socially just, democratic schools*” (Auerbach, 2012). While Auerbach has captured the broad elements of an authentic relationship, evidence from these sites highlights the critical elements of trust, respect and reciprocity. These elements, which form both the nature and the strength of the interaction, are cited as actually underpinning the quality of the interaction, the respect that is shown between teacher and community, and the depth of knowledge shared between them. These were the stand out attributes observed between Kelly and Kirsten, and Christopher and Vivienne. The quality of these interactions will be more fully explored in Chapter 10, as it will form a central point of discussion in the overall evaluation of this research.

The following chapter duplicates the form of analysis used in Chapter 8 with the sites of Wurtindelly and Karrajong. Again, the critical theme of language and culture is used to test the substance of the engagement and its outcomes. This chapter will finish with an analysis of the elements of engagement, and draw conclusions on its capacity to affect teacher knowledge.

Chapter 9: Effecting change through cultural engagement

9.1 Introduction

This chapter utilises the same structure as Chapter 8 allowing for an informed comparative understanding of the various assertions and programs implemented in the two schools in Wurtindelly and Karrajong as opposed to those in Tubbagah and Mayanbri. This analysis interrogates the level and purpose of school commitments, their interactions and impact with parents and the wider Aboriginal community. As with Tubbagah and Mayanbri, the contextual critique of these sites rests on analysing rich participant data through Aboriginal standpoint positions evident in each.. These engagements between the school and the Aboriginal parents and community have proven to be complex and in many cases fraught with the historical experiences of educational failure, social control, inadequate access and racism (Fletcher, 1989a).

The analysis of the discursive experiences of schools, teachers and parents in the two geographically different sites of Wurtindelly and Karrajong provides a contrasting understanding of school and community engagement as it emerges and takes shape at the cultural interface. These sites are demonstrably different from Tubbagah and Mayanbri; a consequence of their contrasting histories and educational experiences, and of localised Aboriginal agency and resistance. Each community's evolving standpoint position serves as the relational well from which its responses emanate and in turn informs and directs responses to the everyday moment of interaction with schools. Whilst the standpoint positions in each site were shown to be contextual responses to colonisation and consequently uniquely divergent from each other, there were also similarities in these Aboriginal responses that also legitimate discussion across the four sites. These are substantively addressed within the analysis in Chapter 10.

If the sites discussed in Chapter 8 were cast as being representative of the norm in respect to the form and substance of relational interactions, the situated findings from both Wurtindelly and Karrajong are representative of a very different paradigm of community and school engagement. What unfolds is evidence of the purposeful exercise of community agency in the brokering of community interaction that forces each of the schools to engage both epistemically and relationally on unfamiliar ground. The evidence highlights the impact of community driven

imperatives that focused on school's capacity to engage in the cultural and language space.

9.2 Wurtindelly

Until recent times Aboriginal students in Wurtindelly had similar educational experiences to those found in most other townships in western NSW. Though there was considerable variability in each community's experiences of mission life, many of those in the Wurtindelly mission had been forcibly relocated from the Carowra Tank mission in 1949 (S. Martin, 2001). As stated in Chapter 7, issues relating to student access to schooling had always been problematic for Aboriginal students, either as a consequence of the quality of teachers and resources provided to these schools (Cadzow, 2008) or their non-existence when the schools were closed for extended periods when teachers could not be found, or when students were removed after 'complaints' were lodged by white parents (Harris, 1978).

The provision of education in these remote schools was vexing with Aboriginal enrolments growing and the problems of providing teachers becoming more difficult. Official reports criticising the NSW Department of Education argued that they had failed to providing a meaningful education or to ensure that students were encouraged to remain at school past the age of 14 (Harris, 1978; McCausland & Vivian, 2009).

The circumstances surrounding these parents' preparedness to finally challenge the staff in 2011 with their log of 'Dos and Don'ts' was unique. They drew on their collective experiences of its violent and racist history to construct a strong sense of agency which they used to great effect to first challenge the school and then through dialogue, develop a new model of community-driven interaction. Out of this came an agreement that the school needed to expose itself to greater scrutiny and to undertake deep structural and relational reforms. These reforms created opportunities for community access to decision-making and participation in school and community projects. This in turn facilitated curriculum change and legitimated the community's aspirations for curriculum inclusion of the Paakantyi language. The scene was set for a new experiment in a deeper community engagement, one that looked to address concerns about teacher disengagement with the education of Aboriginal students and provide opportunities to realign the power relationships between schools and parents (Honig, Kahne, & McLaughlin, 2001). This directly

affected the teachers' professional knowledge about Aboriginal communities (Sobel & Kugler, 2007).

Language and culture

Imperatives for action

The present day village of Wurtindelly sits beside the road and rail crossings of the mighty Paaka – the Country of the Paakantyi people, those people (belonging) connected to the river. Evidence of the Paakantyi clans' presence is found as far north as modern day Bourke and south to Wentworth, some 800kms of contiguous river country. The river meanders southward from its sources in far western Queensland and northern NSW, and with its floodplains and lake systems, forms a significant part of the western NSW landscape. The floodplains which spread out both sides of the river, are covered with stands of the great red river gum that grow along its bank, interspersed with ageless mulga forests, red soil clay pans and ephemeral grasslands and small shrubs. These harbour a wide variety of food sources that sustained the Paakantyi clans that peopled this diverse landscape. Though the Paakantyi clans were the 'people of the river' they were not chained to it as they moved out into the western and northern landscapes, through the low lying hills that formed the last physical barrier to the deserts and ephemeral lake systems in the South Australian inland, and into the ageless hidden ravines that were the source of great Dreaming to these and other nearby tribes (Beckett, Hercus, Martin, & Colyer, 2008; Hope & Lindsay, 2012; Pardoe, 2003). This was their country. Though there had been recent flooding in March 2012, the land had been increasingly subject to severe droughts which had a grinding impact on the town's viability, which in turn saw the social phenomenon of 'white flight' (Patty, 2008) where mobile non-Aboriginal families abandoned these western towns, leaving behind even smaller and less viable communities.

While all these communities suffered from socio-economic phenomena, some Aboriginal families saw an opportunity and the harbinger of social change. These demographic changes that saw the Aboriginal families become the majority of townfolk meant that they could now directly influence events that impacted on their lives. The following provides insight into the aspirations and actions of the parents of the school, the town community and its Elders. They now sought to influence principals and teachers who lived and worked amongst them within the cultural interface of this small, remote and historic township. Myra, the

spokeswomen for the group of women who had fronted Aaron, the long-term school principal, spoke of the central purpose of engaging the school. She said:

Myra: *One big thing is ensuring that every kid has the right to a good education, and that they [the school] more or less give our kid every opportunity under the sun [to succeed]. Just 'cause we're in a remote area doesn't mean to say our kids shouldn't be given the best opportunities. That's sorta what we ask for, along with knowing that they've got passion... [pause] yeah, towards Aboriginal kids and this community where they're living... to make a commitment to us!* (Wurtindelly, Term 3, 2012)

Though she was aware of the task and historic gulf that lay between the community and the school teaching staff, Myra now saw an opportunity for change. Her comments were a plea for teachers to seriously attend to the educational achievement of students. Myra, like her sister Joy and nephew Bob, knew that although many teachers initially failed to bridge the cultural gap between themselves and Aboriginal families, that with support it was possible for teachers to make a real connection to these students. Sarra (2011) had noted that without strong, consistent and reflexive leadership, the gap between schools and Aboriginal communities would remain unbreached, and the ontological disconnect in schools between teachers, staff and Aboriginal people would remain in place. Within this environment, socio-cultural differences are glossed over or ignored and socio-economic disadvantage interpreted as community socio-cultural incapacity. These powerful colonial discourses have normalised student underachievement and without a serious and unceasing community pushback, schools remain blind to the broad suite of policies that are predicated on indifference and constructing powerless communities (Lowe, 2011b).

Myra called on the teachers to develop a 'passion' for the students by championing educational success and to 'want' to be part of the community where they had chosen to reside. This was something that she took up earlier when delivering her now famous "*Dos and Don'ts*" manifesto to the staff⁹. Though overtly unstated, Myra's thinking was clearly underpinned with a belief that the school and its staff would immeasurably benefit from genuinely partnering families in the education of their children. This view echoes a raft of findings from the likes of Biddulph et al. (2003), Berryman and Bishop (2011), and Bond (2010) who all reported that

⁹ See Chapter 6.

teachers could be epistemically liberated from the limitations of their own monocultural perceptions through actively collaborating with First Nations and Aboriginal families. The evidence of such possibilities was there for all to see in Colin's enduring relationship with these women who formed the school's language team. Colin, the rapidly aging teacher, Paakantyi language exponent and confidante to many in the community, spoke of the imperative for the school to support the implementation of the community's broader socio-culture agenda. He argued that the community fought for access to these programs as a way to fortify and legitimate their Paakantyi identity (Demmert & Towner, 2003). The delivery of the programs consolidated the community's ontological sense of place, and provided a bailiwick from the racist attacks of the likes of right-wing commentators who saw these communities as easy targets (Court transcript-Victorian Supreme Court, 2011). Colin spoke of this when we met in Term 2. He said:

Colin: *... learning any language is an activity, which has got many beneficial effects.... But in terms of identity, that's what is crucial, and I, that's why I believe that it needs to be carried on. Questions are always being raised about people's Aboriginal identity in Australia today. Myra brought me across an essay topic for her nephew, who's doing a university essay for a course about identity, and this topic talked about 'white black fellas' and it gave a very jaundiced, ill-informed and white right-wing view about many Aboriginal people ... and how whites are constantly trying to define who and what an Aboriginal person is (Wurtindelly, Term 2, 2012).*

Colin's comment touches on what he saw as the critical importance of the community being on the front foot, proactively engaging the school in pursuing the delivery of programs that support student resilience and educational success. He was aware of the duplicity of the school talking about student identity while doing little to develop programs that supported culturally resilient students. Without these programs, Aboriginal students were disarmed and unable to challenge the pressures of being homogenised into a pan-Aboriginal identity; expected to adopt this 'Australian' identity while vainly seeking to maintain the vestiges of their Paakantyi identity also. Du Bois (1897) calls this feeling of having to have multiple identities, the 'double consciousness' of oppressed people (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Without this cultural armour, Aboriginal communities are disabled by the weight of socio-cultural 'authority' that is exercised by the dominant identity. Colin for one could see that students were forced to live in two worlds, where the state and its

systems constructs its legitimacy from within a paradigm that correspondingly denies Indigenous validity even when residing in ancestral Country (Bradley, 2012; Poirier, 2010; Watts, 2013). As Grande noted (2009) the revitalisation of Indigenous cultures sits at the heart of an empowered community striving for a self-consciousness that is underpinned by being culturally sovereign Aboriginal people (Du Bois, 1897).

On many levels Aaron the school principal, appeared to be unaware of the discussions occurring around him. The proverbial 'cat (community self-determination) was out of the bag' and no amount of coercion was about to force the community stakeholders from moving from what they saw as their right to access their language in school (McCarty, 2003). However, while parents took to the challenge afforded them to infuse their aspirations into school decision-making, there remained a significant degree of staff resistance to what they interpreted as interference in their professional role. Aaron was concerned at the staff's insularity and looked to advance efforts to broker the potential for the staff to socialise with Aboriginal families. Bob had already suggested that the community had typecast most teachers as 'misfits, mercenaries and/or missionaries' (Wurtindelly Term 2, 2012), and as such were not to be largely trusted until they demonstrated a willingness to actually engage with this community.

Though laudable in intent, these efforts at creating social intercourse were limited and constructed to distance parents from involvement in the core business of schools. Aaron had initially sought to have the staff become actively involved in the emerging language program, but this had failed to eventuate, leaving the school's efforts in the hands of the rapidly aging and sickly Colin.

Aaron had worked hard in the hope to achieve a dream of training the aspiring band of adult learners so they could move the program forward as it grew, especially when Colin inevitably retired. Aaron had shown insight in realising that instruction in and through the language would facilitate access to local knowledge (Friedal, 1999; Madden, 2015). However these plans which failed to materialise before Aaron's retirement, became a source of growing angst, as the community saw their dreams for a whole-school program rapidly evaporate. Aaron commented on these issues when he said:

Aaron: *I suppose you would call it collaboration - every Sunday afternoon up at the station¹⁰ where we run the café with the kids, who do the serving, the preparation, cleaning and making the coffee. So it's very informal, but people know that it's a place to meet and network... We also wanted to get into the language. The community wanted me to write to the Minister, telling him what they wanted for the Paakantyi language - first because they had a resource¹¹ that they knew and respected, and what they wanted was training... This is their community and this is what they want. And I suppose that is central to what I do... it's important that they can see that I can deliver on those things. (Wurtindelly, Term 2, 2012)*

Aaron had sought to construct opportunities for teachers and parents to socialise when the Year 10 Hospitality students ran a community coffee shop at the 'train' - a decommissioned railway carriage that Aaron had bought and had relocated to the school. Other than for a few staff this relationship could at best be said to be non-existent as the young teachers kept to themselves, while the community continued to observe and comment on their disinterest. Without a circuit breaker the inter-generational relationship of distrust was unlikely to change (Auerbach, 2012; Cousins et al., 2008). Aaron had sought to address this issue by facilitating a two-way dialogue where teachers and parents could socially interact (Hong, 2011). Although Aaron had tried both moral and professional pressure on the staff to attend these 'get-togethers' few availed themselves of the opportunity. It was clear that while Aaron had sought to find a solution to this insularity, this was not likely to occur without a different approach in his leadership of the school. As Lonsdale (2008) noted, Aaron needed to apply an approach to relationship building where relational aspirations could be jointly constructed and enacted.

That both parents and teachers had spoken of the gap between the staff and community gives an indication that for all of Aaron's attempts to fashion a collaborative partnership, it was very difficult to actually broker. Lara said as much when she spoke of how the Aboriginal workers at the school were annoyed at being

¹⁰ The Enterprise Park project that Aaron was able to get funded in the third year of being principal. It was developed to provide hospitality training for the community, and as a place to meet parents away from the school proper.

¹¹ The community were very invested in Colin, as he was one of the last historic knowers of the language from his time in Wilcannia 35 years ago. They had increasingly despaired as Elders passed away, and irreplaceable knowledge was lost. Myra and the other women were concerned that he would pass on without having taught people in the community, and so had asked Aaron to support the establishment of a community language program being funded through the school.

left out from even the simple decisions of school organisation and of the failure by the staff to recognise the significance of cultural events. Lara commented:

Lara: *In the past, the teachers controlled everything - like our cultural stuff. I feel we didn't have much say in organising anything. So we all got together, and we organised an assembly with just all of us Indigenous workers. We had community members come along and they all said that was a good thing, you know, it's about time you got all of the workers to be involved and show them [the school] what you know and what you can do!* (Wurtindelly, Term 2, 2012)

Resistance was the one common action that bound these players in what appeared to be an never-ending struggle of teacher indifference, disengagement and disrespect (Hong, 2011). Though Lara was hostile at what she saw as the staff's unwillingness to progress Aaron's plans for community collaboration, it was the community's exercise of its own agency that now took the lead in progressing its ideas for important innovations in the school. These actions in favour of reconstituting relationships with the school echoed the views of Graham Smith (2003), that actions that led communities to take responsibility for transforming social conditions were precursors of their own ontological liberation. Aaron's legacy was not as he imagined nor necessarily understood. Yet his tenure as principal had seen momentous change, with the community stepping forward to a 'take' greater responsibility in progressing its claims for reform.

Wurtindelly was a town in transition, moving from a past which gave witness to the intergenerational impact of colonialism, its controls and racist policies, to where now parents felt empowered to seek a role in informing the school's delivery of the essential service of education to their children. They had become increasing assertive, developing expectations about how teachers should behave in their community, of being part of the school's decision making and having an agenda in regards to what their children should learn and how it could better be taught. The following discussion provides insight into the community's growing confidence and actions in respect to its relations with the school and its staff and in turn, the school's efforts to be more responsive to this community.

Enacted Strategies

Though one of Aaron's strengths was that he was a generator of ideas, always looking for ways to improve the educational experiences for the students, he

appeared to lack the leadership capacity in encouraging staff to run with these ideas. He had program versatility and the considerable resource capacity to contract high-level professional support to work with teachers; yet was unable to articulate a clear strategic argument for the direction he proposed for the school. Many on the staff were confused and it took considerable effort to procure the interest of a small number of staff to initiate opportunities to connect with students, extended families and the community.

The following discussions evidence three different perspectives on these interactions. Bob commences by speaking of the community's broader efforts to positively engage the school; while Lara makes observations about teachers needing to attend to the everyday activities where students and parents can be engaged. Thirdly, Patti, the newly appointed music teacher, speaks of the efforts that she and her family made to meet people, to penetrate the considerable apprehension of the racial divide and to 'learn' about this town.

Bob had a number of key roles that he had to manage while in the school. Though only in his twenties, he had been employed as the most senior Aboriginal non-teaching educator in the school. Away from school he was a university student, the rugby league captain and coach and President of the Regional AECG. His employment had come about through the community's concern about the low aspirations and academic achievement of the boys at school. Early in 2012, Bob and a number of community members were asked to lead in the '*Connecting to Country*' (NSW AECG, 2011) project with the new teaching staff, and now recalled several of the strategies they hoped would facilitate greater teacher engagement and understanding. He said:

Bob: *We talked to them about the significant cultural things that happen here. There are significant sites and the landscape is alive with stories known by local people. Hearing their stories, and their journeys is important. We also organised a speed dating session [with these new teachers]. They had two minutes, not with us, but with all the inter-agencies that they will deal with, like the Department of Community Service, Health, and Police. All of them were Indigenous people that we got and they had to get their contact number, and what they all did (Wurtindelly, Term 4, 2012).*

Bob scoped this discussion about the joint '*Connecting to Country*' program, by speaking about what teachers should know and understand of the uniqueness of

these people in this community. On one level he identified the critical agencies that the school, if not the teaching staff may have need to interact with. But in an almost off-hand manner, he opened this discussion with a reference to the land and the significant sites on which the town sits. Bob had often expressed a clear desire to be connected to his mother's Country (Russell, 2012). While he wanted the staff to have an insight into its impact on Aboriginal people, he also wanted to ensure that the community wasn't anthropologised, but rather, this understanding would provide an insight into the significance and depth of their connection to this place (Altman & Kerins, 2012) and its epistemic authenticity (Fenelon & Hall, 2008). This was the quandary of determining the balance of what could be shared and what should or must be left unsaid. There were pressures afoot for the community to be more strident in asserting their cultural sovereignty and a mounting expectation that the school needed to play a more direct role in facilitating the establishment of a Paakantyi enculturation program that would underpin its decolonisation (Stirling, 2015).

Lara came to the issue of engagement much more directly. She was witness to the staffs' social and cultural disinterest which she saw as diminishing the few opportunities that staff and families had to meet and engage. She mused on how teachers could break through these professional and racial barriers that appeared to stop them from 'really' living in the town which for these three short years was their home. In her mind there was no better way to do this than to be in attendance when nearly the whole town came out to watch the local league side play on a Saturday afternoon. She spoke of this:

Lara: *I think that for teachers to change, they need to meet us when we are out doing things that we like... like Wurtindelly is big on rugby [league], and it has a special place... some teachers come out and get involved at the football and then they come to school and you can see that they enjoyed being there, meeting the parents, and their kids actually seeing them, you know it wasn't a school thing, it's a community thing. They're really happy when they actually see the teachers at the football (Wurtindelly, Term 4, 2012).*

Lara had spoken before about teacher change, suggesting that she saw little evidence that teachers understood the impact of their apparent indifference to the students in their classroom. She was intuitive about their character, saying that in

the first ten minutes of meeting these new teachers, she had a good sense of which of them wanted to be there. Lara saw their unwillingness fed by the certainty of their professional status (Richardson & Placier, 2001) and a disconnection that acted as a barrier between themselves, parents in general (Lareau & Horvat, 1999) and Aboriginal parents in particular (Grande, 2000; Sobel & Kugler, 2007). From her perspective, this indifference was linked to the issue of racism that she and others had experienced and an assurance that comes of being white and middle-class in a town of largely black and 'under-educated' people (Standfield, 2004).

Yet Lara did acknowledge that on several occasions she had seen a number of staff change their approach to students and the wider community. In each case, these teachers changed as a result of establishing a key connection with one or several members of the community. She commented that change was underpinned by the entrusting of insights and knowledge through genuine two-way engagement (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Tonkiss, 2004). A clear discourse woven into this commentary is of teachers' capacity and needing support. A century of observations had provided this community with the critical faculty of knowing how institutional oppression had been exercised against it (Lather, 1992; W. F. Pinar & Bowers, 1992; Zamudio, Bridgeman, Russell, & Rios, 2009), as well as by those who worked within it (Brooks, 2007).

Feeling their way in these towns was hard and it took time, personality and perseverance to make in-roads. Past experiences had hardened many families and the efforts of a few teachers were mistaken for interference and judgement. While Patti wanted to reach out to the families in town, she was to later understand that in her case, connections to parents required the intermediary support of her students. Patti was a maverick, who took matters into her own hands in her attempt to meet and talk with townspeople, looking for opportunities to engage student in classroom discourses, while reflexively questioning herself of the relevance of the curriculum and her own pedagogic practices (Timperley & Alton-Lee, 2008; Tran, 2014). She said:

Patti: *I had always seen Patti, the schoolteacher, as a separate and parallel role that was somewhat divorced from my own reality and knowing. Playing out the 'script' learnt from my own very different experiences and which generally supported those pedagogic practices that had previously worked for me and were used by colleagues, the department and the curriculum. What constituted*

the general consensus was often the considered views of my similarly ill-experienced colleagues, the Principal, and school executive, most of whom themselves were only in their first decade of teaching and first promotions. But, you know what, that even with this broad agreement, I and others knew that this just wasn't working for me or the students! (Lowe & O'Connell, 2014).

For the three years she resided in town, she first questioned herself and her ability, wrestling with wanting to be 'true to type' as a music teacher, but by the end of her appointment she had radically changed as she made in-roads into understanding what motivated the students and parents. Commented on her own change, she said:

Patti: However what happened though the course of teaching it was that I – the person who was fearful of letting go the control over curriculum and pedagogic practice – now understood that I needed to remind myself that this was about the students and that I needed to listen respectfully to the various ways that they communicated their feelings about what was happening (Lowe & O'Connell, 2014).

Towards the end of this conversation, Patti then commented on an emerging understanding of the importance of conceiving that there was an invisible hand that directly influenced this learning relationship that she sought to develop with these students. She said of this:

Patti: The other significant 'narrative' in all this was the need to find a connection with home - to my students' families. I figured out early on the difficulty in finding a connection between school and home. My perception was that the two were separate to each other, and my experience was that engaging parents was particularly challenging. Yet I knew that this was crucial to the success of what I could see my students experiencing. I was aware of the history of disconnection between the school, teachers, parents and the wider community. I supposed that if their parents knew what learning was occurring, then the experiences of the students would be more empowering and motivating (Lowe & O'Connell, 2014)

Though Patti appears to think that her engaging with parents was going to impact on student engagement in their schooling, it was she who was most affected by this slowly emerging relationship, she who chose to overturn conventional teacher

directed pedagogic practices, and she who now appreciated the need to listen.

Outcomes

The end of 2012 was a watershed moment for this small community with Aaron, the sometimes-irascible principal, announcing his retirement at 70 for the second time in his career. He had stayed on this seven year journeying with many of the parents and in the process, had effected significant personal change from being an 'old school' principal to being a nemesis of Departmental officers, a guiding light for school and community engagement and a champion of Aboriginal leadership. But this outcome was 'not writ in the stars' for what has been revealed though these chapters is that this transition was not achieved easily, nor without angst. Yet something special had occurred in this community through its interactions with this principal. Myra was at the core of this relationship, a natural community leader who with her friends, had stymied Aaron's earlier attempts to exercise his 'principal's prerogative'; had brought him to a better understanding of their aspirations. They formed a partnership, continued to fight over their respective fields of influence, but collaboratively looked to build a different long-term schooling experience for students. Bob, Myra's nephew, who was a young man on the move, commented on this history and the community's aspirations when he said:

Bob: *The strength of the community is the strong base of women here. You go to other communities and it's usually the males that are the ones that call all the shots. You know? Males aren't always the best leaders! And the thing is that this little cohort of women ¹², they're the backbone of the community ... But even with these things in place, Wurtindelly's not there yet. We've come a long way. We've come a hell of a long way, but we're not there yet. And we'll never be satisfied with what we'll get and what results we have, because we want better and better every year. As soon as that drive's gone, you might as well quit if you don't want to be better than you was last year. (Wurtindelly, Term 2, 2012)*

Bob, like Aaron, had identified the significance of the role of the influential group of women and the event of their confrontation, which changed the relational dynamics between the school and the Wurtindelly community. This meeting served as the

¹² All of these women had multiple responsibilities, both at home, with extended families and in other key organisations. This group was an ephemeral group that had come together to support Myra's complaint with Aaron. It later morphed into the women's Aboriginal Studies group, and the would be language teachers.

opening salvo in a sometimes-fractionious relationship, where the women were emboldened to resist, challenge, suggest and negotiate a range of programs whose influence went more broadly than just the school. The exercise of their agency was masterful, for it actually made a collaborative partner of the school, such that Aaron was able to bask in its reflected kudos (Dempster, 2011). These interactions evidence the impact of community empowerment and self-determination, skilfully enacted by these women as representatives of the town's Aboriginal families (I. Anderson, 2007). This experience was unlike that found in most locations. This was the Wurtindelly challenge and Colin was witness to this dramatic shift in the exercise of power. He commented in his last interview late in 2012: *'there is definitely this edge to them [the community language team] which just doesn't put up with any shit.'* They had dynamic ideas and were getting used to being heard knowing that if they were not satisfied they had other direct routes of influence, including the Minister's Office. Aaron had come to see this group as holding the effective reins of power in providing the broad strategic directions and being the chief advocate for the community. Aaron spoke of this relationship:

Aaron: *[Myra and the group of women]... They're the keeper of the gates. And, that was always the philosophy of the School's in Partnership [SIP], that you build capacity so that they can identify the things that are important, and we're able to enact them. That's so it doesn't depend upon the principal. The principal works for them. And again that's the difference; that's part of the relationship – of what the principal should do. So if you're talking about what the new principal would do when they move into this seat, it's that they're working for the community, that they're not the principal who thinks he has all the knowledge. They need to walk with the community, and engage with a person like a Bob (Wurtindelly, Term 3, 2012).*

In so many ways this small and remote community appeared to be typical of those locations that once had been the service hub of a thriving rural community. Its demise could so easily have been like any of its nearby neighbours, with their crumbling colonial architecture, limited services, its largely Aboriginal population in a permanent state of socio-cultural crisis and without the tools to change its determined destiny. However this was not Wurtindelly's destiny, for though it had struggled in the drought, its resilience had if anything, sharpened as it sought to re-define itself and its relationships with service providers.

These discussions demonstrate the potential of a community's capacity to draw on its own resources to challenge the historical relationships between itself, the institutional power residing in the school and the 'authority' of teachers. This is a story of both individual and collective agency (Ahearn, 2001), where Aboriginal parents and educational workers were able to successfully mediate the development of a very different relationship with their school (Bandura, 2001). Together they worked on establishing a more responsive educational experience for the children and on its cultural reclamation (Watts, 2013). Such was the presence of its standpoint position that it enabled them to resist the everyday controls exerted over their lives and to renegotiate a purposeful relationship (Emirbayer & Mische, 1998) that would underpin the systematic improvement in the delivery of education (Bandura, 2001) and enhance teacher's knowledge about Aboriginal education.

What follows is an equally purposeful engagement between a small but determined group of Aboriginal language advocates and parents and one of four public primary schools in Karrajong. This was a community whose experiences within their shared historical space with non-Aboriginal community had led them to a quite different outcome to that developed in Wurtindelly. Yet like Wurtindelly, it too exercised its agentic capacity with aplomb, developing purposeful relationships with schools and establishing language programs that proved to be second to none across the state.

9.3 Karrajong

If Wurtindelly's experiences of colonial engagement with Aboriginal people are seen as representative of the experiences of Aboriginal communities in western N.S.W, then the Karrajong experiences are strikingly atypical when measured against those experienced in the other three sites. Many settler families in Karrajong had sought to perpetuate a popular and 'convenient' view that Aboriginal people had not 'settled' in this district even though local archaeological records provide ample evidence of a counter story of pre-contact occupation within the district (Nash, 2015). Karrajong's inclusion in this dual narrative with Wurtindelly is not based on a contrived commonality of historical experience, but simply that this community established a robust Aboriginal standpoint position from which they derived a capacity for action. This action saw the community and nearby schools work to establish a viable language and cultural program that is immeasurably popular with parents and the envy of many across Australia. In a recent ABC Open presentation on the town, Bill, the previous school principal was reported as saying:

"When I first came to Karrajong in 1988, the number of children of Aboriginal descent was something like 8%. The number now has grown to something like 23% of people in the school community who are claiming Aboriginal heritage." Bill believes that the Wiradjuri language classes are helping to engender within Indigenous kids a strong sense of identity and self-respect (ABC Open, 2012).

John, the past ex-principal proved to be a catalyst for change when he suggested to Finn, the language elder that he might like to come up to the school and introduce the students to Wiradjuri. Little did Finn or Stefan and Nikki the two teachers who had closely supported the language program from its inception, realise that this would blossom into the program that would capture the imagination of teachers, Aboriginal parents and students alike; would prominently figure both in and beyond the town; and be a cause célèbre among language reclamation activists Australia wide (G. Pearson, 2014). What follows is an overview of how these relationships developed and their impact on the level of engagement between the community, the school and its teaching staff.

Language and Culture

The imperative for action

Donald, the school principal who had inherited the fledgling school language program, took it forward, brokering greater staff contact with Eddy and Finn by extending the scope of the language program across the whole school and expanding its cultural influence by underpinning the school's student behaviour program with a Wiradjuri narrative. He encouraged Lisa, one of the younger staff, to take on the coordination with Finn and the Aboriginal students of the running of key parts of the school assembly and also organising the establishment of the Junior AECG¹³ (Bano, 2015). He had noted that the Aboriginal students in particular really responded when they were able to learn within an encompassing culturally responsive environment. Donald understood that in establishing these opportunities, the school was facilitating students and their families to construct real cultural connections to their ancestral Country and to forge re-connection between students and Elders. He said:

¹³ Student run AECG with support and collaboration of school and the town AECG.

Donald: *And I see where Aboriginal education works best is where people are on Country and they know their connection to it. If you look at groups that have been relocated or moved... many have lost that sense of Country. When you talk to Aboriginal people, you sense that us gubbas [whites] can't really tap into, what that really means (Karrajong, Term 2, 2012).*

Donald's comments demonstrated an insight into the significance of Aboriginal people connecting to their ancestral Country for it was within this space, with its embedded epistemic and ontological knowledge that people would be truly enabled to connect to their Dreaming and the songlines that indivisibly entwined people to their landscape (D. B. Rose, 1996; Russell, 2012). He also understood that in enabling these programs, the school was empowering its Aboriginal students through this very public affirmation of their Aboriginal identity. Purdie et al. (2008, p. xiii) noted in her commissioned report on Indigenous language programs, '*of the critical importance of understanding the cultural backgrounds of Indigenous students and the links between language, culture and self identity.*' The presence of these discursive socio-cultural programs was taken as a public acknowledgment that the school and its staff valued both the language and its embedded cultural knowledge.

Finn honed in on this aspect, as he spoke of the language programs more broadly across the four schools, their popularity with the students and the shift in parents' perceptions of the school. He said:

Finn: *the kids are going brilliant, they accept it with open arms and want more and more of the language and culture - they just seem to be like sponges and absorb everything. You know you have a good product when the kids meet you up the street and say 'Guruulbarng' ['hello'], and then start even a small conversation with you in lingo in front of the parents. I always love the look in the parents' faces; it's pure astonishment that their child can say this. When something like that happens, it fill me with pride to know that you are getting through to the children and they are willing to talk Wiradjuri in public (Karrajong, Term 2, 2012).*

Finn's infectious enthusiasm appeared to be devoid of the usual politics of Aboriginal advocacy as he spoke of the students and their responses to Eddy's language program and the broader injection of Wiradjuri epistemic knowledge into

the classroom. That the programs proved to be popular should not have been surprising as this has been a common phenomenon with Indigenous students wherever language programs have been established (Hobson et al., 2010). What was unique and yet also political was the broad based support that developed around what became a larger town project. The task of establishing the broad level of public support, especially in such a conservative location, was explicitly political (Walsh, 2005). This required the language team marshalling their energies and delivering a coherent and 'non-threatening' message that would attract broader political support as they sought to more broadly interact with the township (McCarty, 2003). Success relied on a synergy of moral, political and pedagogic purpose, and dedicated action. These became the mainstay of the close relationship that developed between the language teachers, the school principals and the staff (G. Anderson, 2010).

Nikki draws heavily on the relationship and respect that she has for both the language and its teachers. She had grown up in this farming community and like others could have either ignored or failed to see the levels of racism suffered by Aboriginal families. Yet commitment to social justice, which had been an influential part of her Catholic education, provided an opening into the lived experiences of the students she now taught. She said that later she was able to reflect on how the educational opportunities of Aboriginal student were affected by everyday curriculum and pedagogic decisions of teachers. Nikki could see that it was Finn and then Eddy who had organisationally and epistemically driven this project, overcoming staff resistance, limited funding and their limited language knowledge to successfully establish a game changing school program that made a difference with the students. Nikki spoke of Finn's particular role in pushing through and getting this off the ground:

Nikki: *We couldn't have done it without them at all. There's no way. I mean a lot of other programs sound great to start with but then they fizzle out, but Finn's is the driving force that just keeps everything going and moving forward. He's so passionate about it. It's infectious! You can't escape him. He's everywhere. I think because we see the valuable benefits of it that, that, we're happy to continue and to keep it going (Karrajong Term 2, 2012).*

A mainstay of this project is the quality relationship between Nikki and both Eddy and Finn. Though professional in purpose, it is elementally personal, underpinned

by a deep respect and trust, developed in the language classroom and reinforced in their daily interactions at school (Goddard, 2003; Weiss, Bouffard, Bridglall, & Gordon, 2009). This relationship is clearly dependent on the staffs' willingness to intimately engage with the local Aboriginal community. For this to occur the staff needed to conceive itself as a learning community (Price-Mitchell, 2009), to make professional space available and to concede the curriculum and epistemic legitimacy of the language teachers' knowledge (Battiste, 2000; Lareau & Weininger, 2003). The final element of this engagement was the recognition that these programs had a significant impact on the achievement of Aboriginal students (Mapp, 2004).

Though the official discourse of community engagement has assumed a deficient or limited community social capital (Michelle Lonsdale, 2008), this instance clearly identified the quality of two way interactions and its significant impact on the teacher's professional engagement at school. Whether it was Nikki with her comment about the impact of the language learning on the students, or Donald's emerging sense of the importance to Aboriginal families to connect to Country, this program was both challenging and then supportive of a deep change in teacher's epistemic knowledge, their pedagogic capacity and quality of their interactions with students. This was a very different form of engagement to that found in Wurtindelly and worthy of examining to understand how these strategies were situated and enacted in the daily engagements of the class teacher with Eddy.

Enacted Strategies

One of the unique elements of the overarching community strategy was that the local AECG headed by Finn, had managed to gain almost fulltime employment for each of the three language teachers. With initial support from Stefan and Nikki, community language teachers met each week after school, preparing lessons, learning more of the language and strategizing wider community support. Part of this latter strategy was to encourage the participation of a small group of other non-Aboriginal townspeople who sought to attend the language classes. This eclectic group grew in confidence as they extended their influence in both the schools and town, all the while deepening their learning partnerships with other parents, students and staff in each of the three schools. Eddy spoke of his relationship with Nikki and the quality and impact that these interactions have had:

Eddy: *Oh Nikki's input was invaluable... She's a trained teacher, while Finn and myself aren't. So basically she showed us strategies and ways on how to*

keep the kids engaged, how to keep them interested and on task... she'd say look maybe next time you can maybe do this a bit better, or I can give you a couple of little hints on how to keep your kids more engaged so they don't play up or what not... Generally, the kids were very well behaved and I like to think that we had a pretty good rapport with them and we kept them in line (Karrajong, Term 2, 2012)

Eddy was clear in his assessment that the success of the school programs was intrinsically linked to Nikki's explicit support of him and the program, and the wider support from other staff who slowly acknowledged the positive impact that the language and cultural programs had achieved with the students and the improvement in their relationships with parents. Eddy alluded to this late in his last interview when he said:

Eddy: *I think the relationship between my school and indigenous people in Karrajong has improved a great deal to be honest with you. I think now that they see the Indigenous paraphernalia around the school where once they probably never saw that and now that we have the we recognise the Wiradjuri people as the traditional owners on our front office I think that gives the Indigenous people their right well I can come on here now (Karrajong, Term 4, 2012).*

The advent of the language program some five years earlier had opened the door to a range of possibilities that only now were being seen. The impact on all of the students was being widely acknowledged both in and out of the school as students embraced the language and the newfound confidence that came with public recognition of their presence in the township.

Similarly, Nikki spoke of this impact on the classroom, Eddy's interactions with the students, and the sense of pride that the Aboriginal students in particular felt in having regular contact with him. Eddy's influence went beyond the classroom and appeared to be far greater than the sum of these 30 minutes classroom lessons. His influence reached into the common room where he and Finn charmed the staff with their enthusiasm and commitment to the broader school life. While several comments had been made about his pedagogic delivery, these criticisms were outweighed by the staffs' greater acknowledgement of the import of his presence, the open engagement with all students, and his particular influence with the Aboriginal students and parents. Nikki's comments echoed Olivia's assessment of

the impact that Eddy's presence had on the students and the power of cultural knowledge and actions in keeping the attention of the students. She commented:

Nikki: *Finn and Eddy had a huge impact on those boys because they'd come in and it'd be like we're gonna do secret men's business today now boys. And yeah, and we had boys asking what their totems were and it was just wonderful to see that. That was a very enjoyable experience for me.*
(Karrajong, Term 2, 2012).

Presence and knowledge proved to be two key elements that underpinned the impact of Eddy's tenure as Wiradjuri language teacher, the 'didge' player, raconteur of local stories and community knowledge holder. The manner of his presence was disarming and allowed him to segue into the classroom from where he quietly challenged the embedded western epistemic authority of the school curriculum by demonstrating an alternative pedagogic pathway that facilitated authentic learning for Aboriginal students (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Perso, 2012)

There was a change occurring in the staffroom, with teachers now being heard to support of the changes and appearing to overcome their earlier reticence in having Eddy and Finn in the classroom. Rayna identified these pedagogic changes when she spoke of the teachers and their growing interest in her language lessons.

Rayna *I do feel it does. Just to see their regular teacher getting in and enjoying the class too. They are becoming more involved! I think that's important. If the teacher's going to be up at the back of the classroom just marking their work that's not really setting a good example for the children too*
(Karrajong, Term 3, 2012)

Increasingly the staff had at first become interested in what the language staff was teaching, and then slowly some of the teachers became actively involved in the language lessons. However, as Rayna also observed, this was not to say that progress was always upwards, for there were still some teachers who were seen to distance themselves from these lessons.

The response of the classroom teacher to the weekly language lessons was always going to be telling. Though there had been some concerns raised by the staff about Eddy and Finn's limited teaching capacity, Nikki and Olivia proved to be staunch supporters as they reported in particular of the extraordinary impact that Eddy had

with students. Olivia, who had a class of ten high need learning disability students, spoke about Eddy:

Olivia: *They love him, they love the didgeridoo, they love listening to the stories ... they're eager to learn the language. Their eager to learn, [and] they get so excited when they know Mr Eddy's coming (Karrajong, Term 2, 2012)*

.While many of the staff failed to make the connection between their own pedagogic knowledge and practices and student learning (R. Bishop, Berryman, Cavanagh, & Teddy, 2007), both Nikki and Olivia saw the impact that Eddy had with students. Both they and several other younger staff looked to incorporate his attendance into their management of student learning (Hattam & Prosser, 2008; Sleeter, 2012). Within this town a revolutionary change in responsive schooling was underway for those who chose to reflexively engage with what Eddy and Finn brought to the school.

Outcomes

These interactions between the language team and the school staff were unique and also genuine. Here the extraordinary became possible as the community struggled to re-connect with their language, as well as locate ways to translate these efforts more generally into the classroom. Stefan and Nikki, the two support teachers both understood that these activities were the catalyst for a larger disruption to the history of educational underachievement which came about through the establishment of programs that were authentic and inclusive. Little did anyone foresee that the program would take root, with weekly language lessons being held in each class and the establishment of a student voice project that explicitly required the school to acknowledge Aboriginal presence (Fielding, 2004). Eddy's account of the consequence of this relationship was:

Eddy: *Yeah, when I first started with Wiradjuri at the school, it sort of started like a business arrangement [between] myself, Nikki and Cathie¹⁴ and a few others. During my time at the school, Wiradjuri has brought the non-Indigenous teachers and myself closer and we've formed a very close bond. I think that's what the language does to people. It forms bonds that are there forever. And the language has created that nice comfortable buffer for the teachers and myself so we can just talk to each other about*

¹⁴ The other Year 6 teacher who worked closely with Nikki and who coordinated the junior AECG.

anything that we want to... I think that's breaking down those barriers
(Karrajong, Term 4, 2012).

Eddy's comments identify the clarion call of genuine cultural engagement that would both induce and underpin a transformation in the relationships between Aboriginal students and the school. The 'business arrangement' was soon to morph into a close professional, two-way relationship, as each of the parties talked, planned and implemented the language and cultural programs. This respect that they had for each other (Lowe, 2011b) underpinned the quality and strength of these relationships which in turn were seen to more broadly impact on student engagement and behaviour. This was enhanced in the eyes of the Aboriginal community as knowledge was contextualised and recognition, acknowledgement and authoritativeness was given to the knowledge being transmitted (Austin & Hickey, 2011; Sheldon, 2003). This proved to be one of the more significant outcomes of these interactions.

Nikki, forever the classroom teacher, accounted for the program's success in terms of the depth of student engagement and its impact on student growth. Nikki had earlier commented on students being unwilling to identify their Aboriginality, of acts of racism in and out of the classroom and deep levels of resistance from both students and their parents. Nikki marvelled at the substantive shift in teacher attitudes and the effect these programs had on the wellbeing of the students. She shared her thoughts when she said:

Nikki: *I think it's the respect to Indigenous kids; it gives them more respect to realise that we are actually teaching them something that belongs to them... And that was a very powerful moment for me because I then realised that everything these guys had done, has had a huge impact on these children's lives. If I could make one comment about our staff it is that we need differentiate our behaviour to suit these kids* (Karrajong, Term 3, 2012).

For Nikki the impact was almost immediate and overwhelming. The inclusion of Wiradjuri in the school's curriculum spilled over into teacher's pedagogy and student welfare discourses. This proof to parents that Aboriginal cultural knowledge had legitimacy within the school sent a powerful message to students too. They responded by becoming more involved in the school, which in turn saw evidence of student improvement in attendance and teachers reporting a substantial

improvement in student achievement and a consequent change in their self-efficacy (Bandura, 2001).

Donald's commentary on the outcomes from the school's engagement in this 'experiment' were interesting, as its success highlighted what communities had said on many occasions, that the localisation of policy was critical to successful implementation. Even after five years at the helm as principal, Donald was unsure which elements of the school program had effected the greatest success with students, but he was aware that what had been created was significant. He said:

Donald: *I'm very much against the missionary zeal and I know that what works here doesn't work everywhere. What works here is because of the influence of Finn. So for me I don't pretend to have any answers for other people. But the results tell me the sort of things that we're doing here, works for our community* (Karrajong, Term 3, 2012).

The spectre of the mission manager controlling the affairs of Aboriginal people was never far from the minds of many Aboriginal communities, especially those who had directly experienced the de-humanising routines and the debilitating capacity to rob communities of self-respect and the resilience to rise above it (Babidge, 2010; G. Foley, 2000; Kowal, 2011). The changes that Donald had a hand in establishing were being equally driven by the likes of Finn, who had a broad vision for the decolonisation of their community (Gover, 2011) that included sharing its unique knowledge with all students and with willing partners with whom they could relate and work (Cavino, 2013).

9.4 Conclusion

These two chapters provide evidence of the journeys taken in these four discrete communities as they worked and engaged with varying success with their children's teachers in the common space of their schools and towns. These interactions have been telling, as they have held the kernel of a possibility for significant change in what up to now has been a relationship constructed on conflict and resistance, school and teacher indifference and intergenerational underachievement; all parties have played their part in these enforced interactions where sadly, the results are all too commonly known.

These four narratives expose other potentialities; through the realisation that these communities, have through the exercise of their own agency, shone a light on the

makings of a transformative educational environment in which the education of Aboriginal students can take place. At their centre within the dynamic environment of the cultural interface, these narratives highlight the possibilities of change, where old beliefs and attitudes are challenged, where relationship-constructed knowledge shapes reflexive discourse and where teachers' acquired professional knowledge about Aboriginal education is disputed.

These four interlocking narratives have shown that the cultural interface is a dynamic environment where teacher and community narratives from Karrajong and a lesser extent Wurtindelly identified a small but diverse group of teachers and Aboriginal people who were able to establish authentic relationships. In each case these relationships facilitated both pedagogic and cultural activities that supported the schools' broader capacity to more effectively respond to student and community concerns. Secondly it had also shown that efforts to genuinely establish school situated language and cultural programs both requires and fosters authentic engagement and whole-school change. Thirdly it has demonstrated that both school and community leadership is critical in effecting an environment that is both resourced and based on high aspirations and expectations and in which families and teachers can meet and exchange ideas. Finally it has been shown that it is critical for schools to understand and engage with the ever-changing standpoint positions found in each site if they are serious in wanting to establish learning partnerships with Aboriginal people to effect long-term change.

These four findings are central to the following analytical discussion in Chapter 10, in which interactions between the multi-dimensional stakeholder groups is analysed as they dynamically intersect at the cultural interface. It will be argued that the interplay and their responses that emanate from these interactions will affect the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students.

Chapter 10: Effecting teacher change – authentic engagement and teachers’ professional knowledge

10.1 Introduction

Much of what was said and observed over the twelve months of this study focuses on two issues. Whether schooling could be reconstructed to better serve the educational needs of Aboriginal students, and what role if any, can students’ families play in assisting in this endeavour. Whilst this task was universally acknowledged as being complex and fraught with histories of racism, assimilation and intergenerational resistance, it has also highlighted that in the midst of Aboriginal exclusion, there were moments in these schools when families and a limited number of teachers were successful in their intervention in the educational trajectory of Aboriginal students.

Though many issues arose in these broad-ranging discussions with Aboriginal educators, as well as non-Indigenous teachers and principals, several stood as being significant to this question of how to improve the educational success of Aboriginal students. These revealed what teachers thought they understood of their students, their educational needs, their views and attitudes of Aboriginal people and the consequences of these beliefs on everyday pedagogic decisions. Of particular interest to this analysis, has been the general paucity of knowledge upon which teachers relied to make judgements about the Aboriginal students for whom they were responsible. Yet buried within these narratives were instances of significant success, where teachers pushed through the mire of indifference and failure to make substantial in-roads into students’ engagement in their classrooms. The relations between Kelly and Kirsten in Mayanbri and Christopher and Vivienne in Tubbagah each demonstrated the shifts in these teachers’ professional knowledge about the community and educational needs of their students. It is this dynamic of the cut and thrust of community and school interaction and relationship formation that forms the basis of this analysis.

This evaluation draws on the previous five chapters and reveals that successful engagement rests on how teachers, parents and administrators have constructed their response to the transition of Aboriginal people from controlled subjects to empowered peoples since the 1967 referendum. These chapters laid out four

interwoven journeys, which led each Aboriginal community and school to an understanding of, and then responding to, the widely publicised admissions of the failure of schools to educate Aboriginal students for success.

The narratives within Chapters 5 to 7 highlight the emergence of a community standpoint that surfaced and morphed from within their unique discursive historical experiences of colonisation and how these have affected each community's propensity to engage government agencies productively. Central to this struggle was how these standpoint positions both constructed their responses and dynamically shifted as a consequence of it. At the cultural interface, these communities evidenced attempts to seek to shift the focus from indifference and deficit theorising to a re-construction of their titanic struggle for legitimacy within the school space. It was here that we saw evidence of communities standing strong, with their resistance, agency and activism being executed in their attempts to influence school decision-making in ways that afforded education justice for their children.

The exposition of these contextual standpoint positions enabled an analysis in Chapters 8 and 9 whereby the community and a small number of teachers were able to affect action that impacted upon the form and function of community engagement with schools. In particular, the evidence identified in Karrajong and to a lesser extent in Wurtindelly demonstrated how these standpoint positions emerged and changed as a result of challenging the schools' authority over them. In each case, they sought to effect school change through a re-alignment of its curriculum to one that was culturally responsive to the incorporation of local epistemologies and language. These efforts stand in contrast to the narratives elicited from Tubbagah and Mayanbri. These were shown to exemplify the realities of communities who have long been ignored, disempowered by circumstance and history and unable to effect such change. In both instances these narratives highlight that effective engagement requires an empowered community, able to negotiate with the school, and teachers who are similarly enabled to reflect on practice and form new possibilities from knowledge created from within this dynamic interrelationship.

This chapter focuses on highlighting the points of intersection between the received perception of authentic engagement between schools and communities, and teachers' professional knowledge about Aboriginal students and their communities. This analysis cascades through four inter-related discussions. The first identifies the issue of authentic engagement, as explicated through the observed interactions

between teachers and Aboriginal educators. A second discussion evidences teachers' beliefs and attitudes, their impact on pedagogic practice and teacher's everyday decision-making. A third identifies issues from within the school engagement literature and describes those issues said to underpin its potential to impact positively on teacher knowledge and action. This then refers back to the research data, identifying evidence of authentic engagement and its impact on teachers' professional knowledge about their students and communities.

10.2 Authentic community and school engagement

Although educational jurisdictions have placed considerable faith in policies authorising school collaboration with Aboriginal communities, there is little evidence that these policies have had traction in schools. Yet, these policies have touched the nerve of anticipation among parents impatient to see better educational success for their children. For those Aboriginal parents who have felt systematically marginalised by schools, these policies provide the promise of change to both form and structure of schooling, that curriculum would reflect their historical experiences (Gonzalez-deHass, Willems, & Holbein, 2005; Kao & Tienda, 1998; R. Mason, 2008) and that pedagogic practices would be apprised of Aboriginal ways of knowing (Cherubini & Hodson, 2008; Guenther, Bat, & Osborne, 2013).

These were the expectations of Aboriginal parents, many of whom had themselves suffered greatly at the hands of the state schooling system into which they had been forced and to which they now gave up their own children (Moran, 2005). They are all too well aware that their educational experiences have only served to perpetuate the 'gap' of disadvantage and underachievement, and which is unlikely to close until schools learn to genuinely meet the broader educative and cultural needs of students (Vass, 2013). The right of Aboriginal students to be educated, and that of their parents to inform this education, were raised by Aboriginal communities from as early as 1938 (Patton, 1938), then more broadly in negotiations with school systems and governments from the 1970s (Tripcony, 2000). This concept of active parent involvement was later understood in the broader Australian sociological literature (Michele Lonsdale & Anderson, 2012; McInerney, 2009; Muller, 2012) as a particular strategy to address the issue of systemic underachievement of students from cultural minorities. That peak organisations like the NSW AECG prosecuted the development of the Partnership Agreements in the late 1990s and again a decade later (1999, 2010) evidences an unequivocal desire to become active partners with schools and in doing so, challenge practices of discrimination and assimilation with

the consequence of improving student achievement (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). While parents pushed for these agreements to be enacted on the presumption that they would assist in creating a responsive educational environment, school systems have operated on a different presumption.

Analysis of these documents has shown that schools have sought to harness parents' legitimate aspirations on the promise of affording their children educational success (Lowe, 2011b; NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2010). However, the cost of their acquiescence has not translated into the successes promised by educational authorities (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013). This is born out in recent critical reviews of the Australian Curriculum, which was shown to largely trivialise Aboriginal knowledge (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013). These highlight the systematic failures of both state and commonwealth government policies in 'closing the gap' on educational underachievement of Aboriginal students (Audit Office of New South Wales, 2012). Research continually demonstrates that Aboriginal students' underachievement are the result of deeply embedded policies and structures that have discriminated against them, and will continue to do so while ever racism, cultural denial, and pedagogic practices remain unchallenged (Ford, 2012; Klenowski & Gertz, 2009) and parents are not authentically engaged in school decision making.

I maintain that parent involvement within schools must go beyond their mere participation in low level school activities (Piekarski Loughlin, 2008). Community and school interaction must instead be developed within a framework that is cognisant of each community's historical and socio-economic experiences and the importance of language and culture to an Aboriginal person's sense of identity. The evidence would suggest that genuine relationships that are mindful of these factors are more likely to bring about a purposeful and productive interaction. This in turn facilitates and empowers parents to be involved in school decisions and activities.

Consequently, school and community partnerships must be authentic in purpose and practice, genuinely partnering families and schools in delivering responsive and relevant education (Auerbach, 2012), and where action is underpinned by critical understanding that challenges those impediments to student achievement. It is against the concepts embedded within this definition that the following analysis is made.

Across the four research sites, there was a general undertone of disinterest, verging on teacher resistance, in ignoring opportunities to participate with departmental staff on the implementing 'Aboriginal 8-Ways'¹⁵ strategies (Yunkaporta, 2009a, 2009c). This program, which held great promise for schools looking to better provide for their Aboriginal students, was built on direct and ongoing cooperation with local communities. In each instance, principals such as Donald in Karrajong and Jack in Tubbagah said that while they were mindful of the need for staff to develop more effective and responsive pedagogic strategies, they reported a general dissatisfaction with the quality of the provided professional development, the low levels of teacher uptake and the limits to their ability to effect teachers' longer-term commitment to change their teaching practices. While this appeared to be the prevailing undertone in at least three of the four schools, in each site there were several exceptional examples of deep and enduring relationships between staff and Aboriginal people and of programs that addressed the cultural aspirations of students and parents. It is to these relationships that I will now turn and discuss in more detail, highlighting particular aspects of their collaboration and its impact on teacher knowledge.

There appeared to be a general malaise amongst many of the staff in Mayanbri, a fact acknowledged by both Jesse the relieving principal and Kelly the mathematics head teacher. Jesse's temporary twelve-month appointment and the complex task of unwinding many of the previous principal's ill-advised policies was a major distraction that stopped him from enacting substantive change to the school's existing relationships with the Aboriginal community. It wasn't until late in Term 3, that Jesse turned his attention to this task when he asked Raelene who was soon to lose her position as Aboriginal Community Engagement Officer, to facilitate some meetings with families. These observations place in context earlier comments made by the Lands Council, of being sidelined in discussions about the school and its relationships with the community, and the school's refusal to discuss a more conspicuous presence of local culture.

Early in Chapter 8 Jesse discussed the school's response to the upcoming NAIDOC week celebrations. Though lauded by the Aboriginal workers for its genuine approach in addressing the import of the Mabo decision, it became clear that the

¹⁵ This Professional development program was being rolled out across western NSW during 2011-12. On several occasions I was invited to attend and participate in discussions with staff. Based on my attendance, I invited principals and staff to comment on its potential impact and the likelihood that it would gain traction with teachers.

staff had little appreciation of the impact of the oft-stated 'Acknowledgement of Country' and what these few simple words actually represented to this community. It exemplified the broader level of teachers' misunderstanding of the importance and integrity of Aboriginal place and space, especially in a community dispossessed of them. Fran, Raelene, Julie and Kirsten, who were the Aboriginal support staff at the school, noted the teachers' limited understanding of the significance of Country to Aboriginal people and the negative impact that this had on the community's sense of identity (Wexler, 2009; Zubrick et al., 2010). Jesse, who was aware of some of these discussions, was of the view that the school only had a responsibility that ended at the school gate. He failed to see that narrowing his sights over what he could control severely limited his capacity to understand, let alone broker, a different relationship with these workers and Aboriginal families. Other than Kelly, the life-long resident, soon to be retired maths head teacher and a lifetime's friend to nearly the whole Aboriginal community, the school was seen by those like Kirsten and Julie to be unable to generate any great traction in establishing a meaningful and broad-based dialogue with Aboriginal families.

Although Kirsten had spoken of the great regard the Aboriginal parents had for Kelly, there was little evidence that the school itself had learnt from his experiences garnered out of a lifetime of deep personal interactions with these families. Even the potential of the small but effective 'Men's program' that the school had established in the previous year appeared to have had little broader effect on the school. This project saw the Elders link with Julie the AEO and Adam the Deputy Principal to effect a significant attitudinal change with many of the socially and culturally disconnected boys in Years 10 – 12. This program had many of the critical relational elements that could have more broadly informed other programs, but it remained isolated within the school's student welfare system and consequently appeared to have little traction with other staff. These experiences highlighted that without strong school leadership, a community's attempts to reach out to the school were unlikely to meet any great success.

The position in Tubbagah, the large bustling regional centre had many similarities to those discussed above. In Chapters 5 to 7, Glen the IYLP coordinator and Vivienne the AEO represented the views of the Aboriginal staff, whilst Zahra, Christopher and Tegan, three of the teachers and support staff spoke of their concerns about the school and its general apathy and indifference to the needs and aspirations of many of the Aboriginal students. Over the course of the year they highlighted the paucity

of the staff's knowledge about this large and diverse community, its history and experiences of colonial disruption and its ever-present ontological connection to the Country on which the city is situated. However, these concerns were tempered when they spoke of Jack, the school principal and his commitment to affecting a relationship with the community. In Chapters 7 and 8, Jack, the principal in Tubbagah was at pains to highlight that his understanding of issues that impacted upon student success was largely learnt as a result of Aboriginal generosity in sharing knowledge and experiences with him, and their subsequent advocacy of him to the broader community. This generosity struck him, when he later realised the level of his own latent and unreconciled racist and stereotypical views of Aboriginal people. This engagement challenged his 'learnt professional knowledge' about student and community capacity and showed him the need to challenge the assumptions that many teachers brought to the classroom.

It was Glen, vocal champion of these students at the Senior Campus and ever critical of the school's real understanding of them and the families, who in Chapter 8 spoke of the school's duplicity. He exposed the self-promotion of its 'successes' when it hid the real position of the graduation of the school's Aboriginal students. Within this discourse, completion rates were emphasised over attainment and teachers' resistance to change, together with their woeful understanding of the socio-economic realities of Aboriginal families was ignored together with a refusal to engage with local epistemic knowledge. Though not directly stated, these comments were juxtaposed within a broader discussion about school leadership and the capacity of schools to effect teacher change. Although Jack's strength lay in his personal commitments to students and parents, he had not mastered the required leadership capacity needed to enact the necessary transformative change with the staff.

If Mayanbri and Tubbagah were representative of where many schools sat in regards to effecting an engagement with Aboriginal families, it was in Karrajong that I first encountered evidence of the impact of the purposeful exercise of a community's agency and actions and a principal in Donald who articulated both a commitment to improve students' outcomes and the means to give this effect. At its heart, this school's experiences were transformed through the establishment of a sustainable Aboriginal language and cultural program, the employment of a uniquely equipped local Aboriginal man to teach it, with key experienced staff, especially Nikki and Olivia who were committed to practically support the

Aboriginal students and who were humble in their interactions with the Aboriginal language teachers and parents. These elements proved to be critical to the success of the program, and to the ensuing relationships that underpinned the school's partnership with families and the community.

The unbridled enthusiasm and commitment of both Eddy and Finn was such that over several years, they were able to deeply embed themselves within the culture of the school, establishing a whole-school program and facilitating regular pedagogic engagement with staff and students. Initially there had been some staff who had expressed concerns about the program, but the principal's very public support, the increasing public kudos that the programs generated, and the level of broader advocacy from Nikki and Stefan, all resulted in the program's greater acceptance among the staff. These two teachers were an essential component of the program's success, being involved in its development and participating in many of the adult community language classes.

Eddy's lessons, which were full of music, language, Dreaming narratives and a good dose of rough country humour, provided a backdrop where Aboriginal epistemology was not only acknowledged and celebrated, but legitimated in that it informed much that was local and authentic in the school. Further, as evidenced in both Chapters 6 and 7, the advent of the language classes was a direct challenge to the claims of localised terra nullius that were still doing the rounds in 2012. The effect of these relational interactions went deeply across the town, elevating the work of the school and its broader educational programs and giving the school a platform to engage expansively with parents.

Wurtindelly may have been the most remote of the four sites, but it provided the most unique example of engagement between the principal, a small number of the young teaching staff and the Aboriginal community. Unlike Karrajong, where Donald, the principal had elevated his authority and management of the school on the back of the school's successes, Aaron, the principal in Wurtindelly for the last seven years, mused that at best, he held a shared leadership position with the town's Aboriginal community. The women with whom he had clashed years in 2007, were now the 'keepers of the gates', who saw that the school was responsive to the particular needs of this remote community. The women, propelled into action by Aaron's attempt to exercise his positional authority, had learnt of the power they were now

able to exercise in challenging school decisions, but now their accepted presence enabled them to persuade the school in the adoption of alternative policies.

These matters, explored more fully in Chapters 6 and 7, provide direct evidence of the extraordinary impact of community agency in challenging how schooling was understood and the role that families could play in effecting the educational opportunities for students at the school. Evidence from the previous chapters, of not only the challenges they threw at the school, but their willingness to seek solutions to the historic levels of student under-achievement. While Eddy and Finn's approach had been non-confrontational, Jan's statement of the '*Dos and Don'ts*' first described in Chapter 6, set out without equivocation the community's expectations of teachers, how they were to behave and what parents expected of them. This unsolicited document set out to challenge the attitudes of teachers who for too long had taken the Aboriginal community for granted. Similarly, Lara's narrative in Chapter 6 of the Aboriginal workers wresting control of the school's celebration of Aboriginal cultural events, serves as an example of the exercise of their new found capacity in taking direct action in challenging the power relationships between themselves and teachers. These actions were representative of a reformation in community and school engagement; one that grew out of the community's own agency-driven actions and the standpoint that they had embraced, as members of the Aboriginal community and as advocates for the rights to a quality education. This was clearly going to be dependent on the capacity and willingness of teachers to take on the task of engaging parents and being equipped to challenge the task of effecting significant change to teachers' professional knowledge.

Authentic engagement goes to the question of how the processes that underpin the interaction between Aboriginal people and agencies address the inherent inequalities that have historically bound the relationships between the Aboriginal families and the school. Fundamentally, relationships between Aboriginal communities and the state have hinged on the exercise of power that has stripped them of sovereign capacity to make informed decisions over their lives. Over time, the state exerted its authority through the use of its many instruments of colonial power to subjugate Aboriginal peoples' political, social and cultural aspirations through the denial of access to language, culture and land (Altman & Hinkson, 2007; Maynard, 2007). These inherited policies and practices propelled schools and Aboriginal communities on a collision course where policy and history collided, but where counter-forces of social justice attenuated the excesses of the state and in

their mitigation, provided a glimmer of genuine accommodation between those enabled by circumstance, capacity and good faith to negotiate at the cultural interface (Ardill, 2013).

Yet, even with these impediments, earlier chapters provided evidence of Aboriginal people's resilience and hope that their efforts to engage schools within the relational cauldron can assist in re-fashioning new relationships that positively affect students' experiences at school. This space is complex, where negotiation and reflexivity reorientate relationships situated on power, in favour of those based on equality and rights. These engagements have demonstrated the potential of individual and collective agency to rise above this background and illuminate other ways where change is dependent on achieving authentic local engagement, and that realigns the power/knowledge dynamic towards genuine inclusion (Nakata, 2007a).

Clearly the evidence suggested that within each site there was of a small number of exceptional teachers who stepped up and sought out the advice of the Aboriginal workers and parents to establish powerful two-way relationships with Aboriginal people. Even in Tubbagah there was evidence of powerful relationships between Tegan and Zahra who directed their programs to support both parents and students. Likewise, Kelly's relationships with the Mayanbri Aboriginal community were a mainstay of the school's tenuous relationships with the Aboriginal parents. As significant as these relationships were, their impact had little effect across the school as a whole. However, it is possible to identify a range of key attributes that appeared to underpin the success of the relationship in each of these interactions.

The following relational attributes were distilled from these authentic interactions between the key collaborators in each site. These interactions were deeply invested in the creation and maintenance of personal relationships and demonstrate a range of attributes that align with those identified in the broader literature on social capital (Burnett & Saunders, 2014). These include:

- Community and teacher agency that challenges those practices that in particular rest on the exercise or imbalance of power, and policies that exclude Aboriginal people from key decision making (Babidge, 2004; Black & Richards, 2009)
- Mutual respect and trust. These are attributes that are acknowledged within the broader research on social capital. It is of little surprise that these relational attributes are seen as a key indicators of the quality of engagement (Auerbach, 2012; Tonkiss, 2004)

- Shared responsibility and leadership within the school. The concept of shared leadership has proven difficult, especially when the relationships to power and hierarchy are deeply embedded within school structures. These discussions are becoming more vocal as proponents are seeing a convergence in the ideals of shared leadership, professional community and schools as communities (Auerbach, 2012; Gordon & Louis, 2009).
- Purposeful engagement that addresses issues affecting student achievement. It has been commonly stated that if parents are to become actively involved in their child's schooling, then the interaction must have purpose and the likelihood of achieving its stated goals (McInerney, 2009; Weiss et al., 2009).
- Reciprocal sharing of knowledge and mutual advocacy. This is an ongoing collaboration that sustains family engagement practices both in and out of the classroom. It is also argued that the strength of these relationships is significantly improved when participants feel enabled to advocate for the work, policy or individuals involved in the collaboration (Tran, 2014).
- Advocacy for the inclusion of local cultural and language programs. The explicit inclusion of language and culture within the school's core social and curriculum activities is seen as critical to the long-term success of relationships between Indigenous families and schools (R. Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, & Peter, 2012; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Ladson-Billings & Brown, 2008)
- Authentic understanding and inclusion of local Aboriginal histories, community standpoint positions, and access to local epistemic and ontological knowledge is seen as essential by Aboriginal parents (Lowe, 2011a).

It was Bob who said that these attributes of authenticity needed to reside in the everyday activities and conversations that occurred between teachers, parents and students, and that the exercise of their agency was born out of resistance to the recycling of past practice. Bob surmised that the judgement of teachers' actions came down to whether they were purposeful, outcomes-driven, and fostered the community's capacity to work collaboratively with teachers. These actions highlighted the challenges in affecting teachers' professional knowledge about the task of educating Aboriginal students.

10.3 Teacher Professional knowledge

Having identified examples of local authentic engagement between schools and Aboriginal families and communities, this second discussion focuses on seeking to

understand those underpinning beliefs and attitudes that influence teachers' professional knowledge. This discussion examines the evidence of this knowledge and its impact on the decision-making by teachers in the education of students (Friedal, 1999). Further, this discussion highlights the veracity of Auerbach's (2011) assertion that meaningful engagement with parents goes 'beyond the cake sale' to address issues of substance that are collaboratively identified as substantive and that focus of the school's core business of educating students.

Bob, who was an acute observer of the teachers at Wurtindelly, commented on how many of the staff that cycled through the school with considerable regularity had little understanding or sympathy for the local families or their knowledge. He saw this evidenced in their simplistic classroom representations of Aboriginal connectedness, Dreaming images and spiritual presence and their failure to commit to the township. Glen commented on this issue of teacher' knowledge, when he observed that they constantly ignored the impact of tribal diversity within the Tubbagah community and its impact on identity and community conflict. Lara's comments came out of several instances when teachers had railed against parents taking students out of school to attend important cultural events because these same teachers had no understanding of the importance of those events to the community's ontological traditions. It was not lost on her that these same teachers spent an inordinate time celebrating Christian festivals, while complaining about students attending similarly important Aboriginal events.

Zahra and Tegan mused that teachers were largely ignorant of the level of poverty in the Tubbagah community and the impact that this had on their capacity to comply with many of the demands made on them by teachers, including the completion of schoolwork when many students had neither a computer, Internet, nor a space to study. Ivan, the most senior Aboriginal teacher interviewed over the twelve months, identified that teachers in his new school appeared incapable of making curriculum adjustments even when it was obvious that students were unable to engage in lessons. Neither were they able to contextualise learning so that it was inclusive of the local environment.

Glen's contention was that many of his school's staff consciously made decisions about assisting students based on their racial identity and family histories. Kirsten also commented that it was nearly always Aboriginal students who failed to fit the mould of the 'perfect' or 'model' student. She, like all of the AEOs, understood how

notions of race and Aboriginality were intimately connected to student underachievement. This discourse on student resistance turned on teachers' collective 'evidence' that argued that students' underachievement was the outcome of family and community deficit, (Comber & Kamler, 2004; Hattam & Prosser, 2008; Luke et al., 2013) and/or an unwillingness to participate within the 'normal' classroom environment (Vass, 2013).

The last words on this belong to Aaron, who as the retiring principal, with more than thirty years' experience as a principal, suggested that many of the young teachers appointed to the school had either arrived with, or quickly acquired deficit theories about students, their families and remote schools. These theories, he said, were hard to dispel, and he mused that his replacement would need to identify these teachers and challenge them before they could further influence students and their colleagues.

Aaron said in this commentary that teachers needed to reflexively challenge their racial and city-centric views before they could understand the community's historical experiences and cultural traditions. He said that armed with this knowledge and understanding, teachers would be able to play their part in assisting schools to achieve the goal of improving student educational achievement (Delgado-Gaitan, 1991; Friedal, 1999). Russell Bishop et al (2007) noted the capacity that lay in community-driven change, in their decade long project with schools participating in the Te Kōtahitanga project (Marie et al., 2008; McKinley, Stewart, & Richards, 2010). These findings suggested that long-term teacher professional change occurs over time, where teachers move through a number of phases towards deeply embedded and systematic change in practice. It was argued that a critical mass of teachers needed to engage and respond to significant ongoing quality professional development and targeted engagement with students and their families. These were seen by Bishop et al (R. Bishop et al., 2009; R. Bishop et al., 2007; R. Bishop, Berryman, Tiakiwai, & Richardson, 2003) as being essential precursors to effecting teacher change in pedagogic practice and in the long run, their underpinning professional beliefs. It is to this nexus that we now turn in this analysis. Even in Karrajong, there was no evidence of such a whole school commitment to effect change and consequently this school's change was largely dependent on a small number of staff that learnt the importance of deep and genuine engagement with the students and their parents.

10.4 Community engagement and teacher professional knowledge

This third section now looks to pull the two previous fields of investigation to a common point within the literature, to examine whether authentic engagement between schools and parents has been shown to have an effect on teacher's professional knowledge about how best to educate the students in their care.

Evidence regarding teacher professional knowledge has shown that many of the beliefs held by teachers about Aboriginal students have been based on inappropriate historical constructions (Gay, 2010; Solomon, Battistich, & Hom, 1996). Jorgenson et.al (2010) and Howard et.al (2006; Howard, Perry, & Butcher, 2006b) argue that Aboriginal students' historical realities are largely ignored within school-based curriculum. Shields et.al (2005) have further argued that teachers' socio-cultural and political ignorance of students from minority communities are largely simplistic renditions of what she has describes as 'pathologising practices' that are pervasively racist, while masquerading as informed commentary on student behaviour and capacity.

What the evidence highlights is that although there was proof of constructive engagement between a handful of teachers and Aboriginal workers and families, this had little chance of effecting a sustainable change without whole-of-school structural reform, critical school leadership and strong community-driven agency and activism. The evidence for these claims draws on the commentary from these four sites and recent state and commonwealth reports on Aboriginal education, which have identified the overwhelming failure of school systems in Australia to effect a change to the current trajectory of educational underachievement for Aboriginal students (Abbott, 2014; SCRGSP, 2014). Critiques by the NSW Auditor General (2012; 2008) of government activity, which applied an economic analysis on the value of departmental expenditure on specific literacy and numeracy strategies, have called into question the efficacy of programs and questioned departmental assertions of their ability to effect an improvement in Aboriginal student outcomes.

The failure of many of these systemically developed educational programs for Aboriginal students has forced governments to question their own capacity to achieve their targets for sustained student improvement. The Prime Minister, in a press release in Jan 2014 (Abbott, 2014) identified these failures and added weight to the calls from peak community bodies for schools to partner Aboriginal parents in

the task of responding to the rights of Aboriginal students to equitable education outcomes. Yet, as has been recently identified (Lowe, 2011b), these policies have largely failed to have an impact upon schools. These policies have been constructed on the back of a social agenda of smaller government and community responsibility (Deeming, 2014; McMullen, 2013). They have been structured such that politically disempowered groups have little ability to input into the core business of service delivery. In this case, there is little evidence of schools facilitating parental involvement in school-based curriculum delivery and culturally positioned pedagogic practices (Lowe, 2011b).

Teacher professional knowledge can be defined as foundational beliefs and values that teachers both bring and/or acquire over time and that impact on their intellectual, personal and developmental theories about the students they teach (Dickson, 2007). Research by Timperley, Wilson and Barrar (2007) and Nespore (1987) has suggested that those beliefs and knowledge concerned with the functional instruments of schooling, such as school-based curriculum knowledge and programming, are more open to change than those values and attitudes that inform their subjective ideas about student learning, or student capacity. Solomon, Battistich and Hom's (1996) research on parental social capital, noted that teachers in schools servicing low SES communities were more likely to have low expectations and to emphasise the need for teacher authority and control to manage classroom behaviour and learning. These views were seen to be very different from those in schools with higher SES levels and where parents were able to exercise greater influence over the school and its staff.

Anderson (1998) and later Auerbach (2011, 2012) also picked up on these tensions when they noted that a successful collaboration between schools and parents needed to go beyond instrumental rationalisations around improved achievement, to one that sought to address the deep structural impediments that act to hinder or repel community engagement with schooling. Both Anderson and Auerbach have suggested that without this critical element, school and community engagement programs did little more than solidify the interests of schools and teacher power and leveraged parents into forcing their resistant children into the classroom.

Auerbach (2012) has suggested that there are several key attributes that define the discourse of authentic parent participation with schools. This list of relational attributes sits comfortably with those elicited from the research on social change

and critical pedagogy (Flynn, 2012; Giroux, 2007; Gruenewald, 2003) and culturally responsive schooling (Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Demmert, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2014). Auerbach (2012) has identified the following attributes as critical to authentic relationships that had the possibility of having an impact on teachers' professional knowledge about Aboriginal education:

1. Respect and trust where schools honoured parents' knowledge and co-educative role, as was seen in Adam's evolving close relationship with Julie when they worked to establish the Men's education program, or the relations that underpinned the establishment of the language programs in Karrajong and Wurtindelly. As (Burnett & Saunders, 2014) affirmed, the act of successful establishing cultural programs is underpinned by trust development between institutions and local communities.

2. Challenging deficit thinking: Auerbach (2012), Russell Bishop and Mere Berryman (2006) and Tripcony (2000) have all argued that deficit thinking frames both the schools' and teachers' perceptions of minority cultures and student capacity, and impacts on teacher willingness to engage in the education of all students. Vass (2013) and Solorzano and Yosso (2002) have also noted the clear link between teachers' racist behaviours and their beliefs about student capacity. This was an issue that was raised publically with staff, when in Chapter 6, Jan promulgated the community's '*Dos and Don'ts*' for staff. They challenged the school staff to treat the students professionally and not to indulge in simplistic judgements about their capacity or worse, by the colour of their skin or where they came from. Similarly, in Chapter 5, Glen and Bob spoke of staff whose actions were motivated by beliefs about students' disability of being 'black' and from the bush.

3. Relationships: Auerbach argues that the value of relationships cannot be over-estimated. She submitted that if parent participation is to occur, it must be genuine and built on the notion of reciprocity, which is defined when teacher, learner and parent each challenge the learning status quo to create a community of learning practice. Others have also noted the positive influence of family and community collaboration on both student (Friedal, 1999; McInerney, 2009; Muller, 2012) and parent engagement (Abrams & Gibbs, 2002; Caplin, 1998). This dynamic of authentic partnerships was seen to underpin the relationship between Eddy and Nikki in Karrajong, Kirsten and Kelly in Mayanbri, and Lara and Colin in Wurtindelly. In each case, the relationship was deep, personal, based on trust and respect and not least, centred on acknowledging local Aboriginal culture and languages.

4. Power-sharing: It is suggested that the most challenging component of authentic relationships for educators is sharing power with families and community groups. Auerbach argued that schooling is constructed around the dynamic exercising of authority and until this is reoriented, schools are not in a position to suggest they have an equal, authentic or genuine relationship with parents. Young and Warren (2003) and Gordon and Louis (2009) claimed that the notion of shared leadership between parents and schools was a key strategy in affecting an authentic engagement. The impact of this was most clearly seen in the actions of the group of women in Wurtindelly, when they first challenged Aaron and then established a collaborative partnership with him. This powerfully positioned the parents, such that they were enabled to effect the development of significant school programs, including the Boys mentoring scheme and the music program, funding priorities especially the funding of language training, and staffing.

Auerbach's framework provides the tools to assess the impact of Aboriginal community and school engagement on teachers' professional understanding of the students in their classrooms. The following section focuses on these diverse and discursive relationships as witnessed in each site, and their impact on those teachers who were party to them.

10.5 Effect of community school engagement, and teachers' professional knowledge

The final element of this synthesis identifies evidence where engagement was seen to have affected the knowledge, values and/or beliefs of that small number of teachers about the Aboriginal community in which they are resident. Figure 10.1, represents the potency of engagement between the three participant groups; parents, teachers and principals. What is described in this diagram is how their diversity of interests operates, both within and across each group. These gradations of opinions that morph across time and events are clearly linked to participant standpoint positioning. They have been shown to be constitutive of their histories – personal and collectively, experiential and imagined; and of the position, power and authority that are self-perceived and acknowledged at the cultural interface.

While it is clear that there are degrees of cohesion within each of the participant groups, they are also as likely to differ in their knowledge of and about the particular contexts in which education is being provided; and in their capacity to influence how schooling is undertaken. In particular, it was shown within the previous

chapters that these groups developed a repertoire of understanding about themselves, their beliefs and attitudes, and of how they variously constructed the notion of a community of successful learners. These elements have each influenced the participants' underpinning core beliefs of thought and action while they participated in this research.

In their current state, these groups are on a perpetual collision course within this space, as they seek to affect the structures of schools so that they better represent their interests through their influence on the discourses of knowledge. However, what occurs at this interface is not locked in place, but clearly open to unique possibilities.

Figure 10.1: Multilayered, dynamic and organic intersections at cultural interface

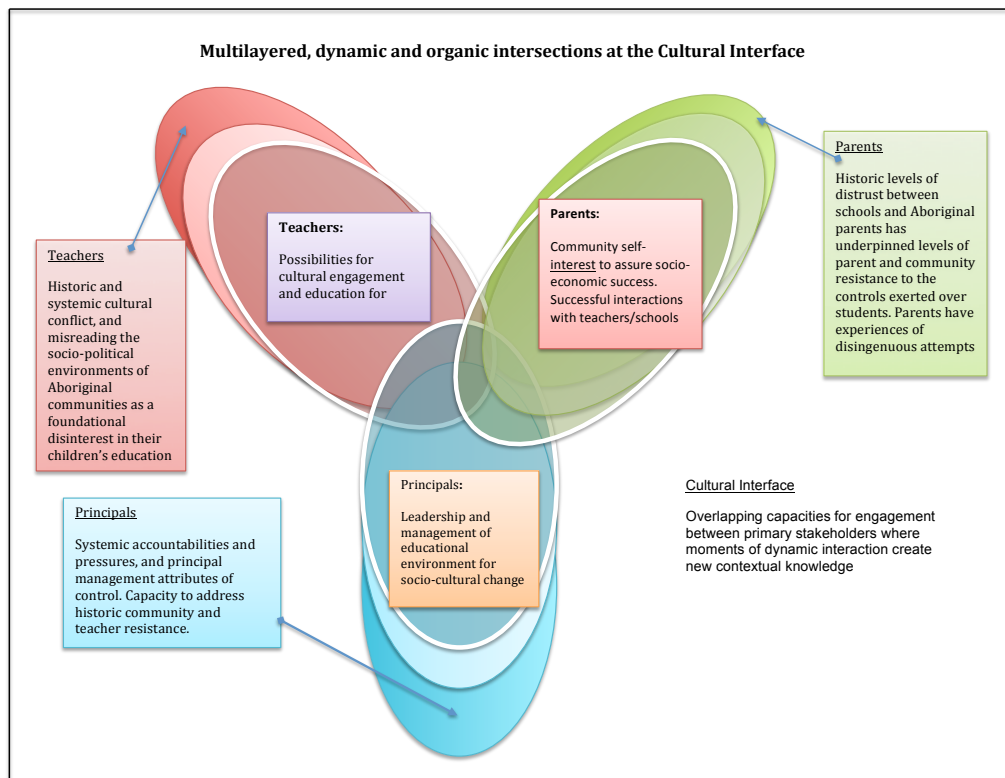


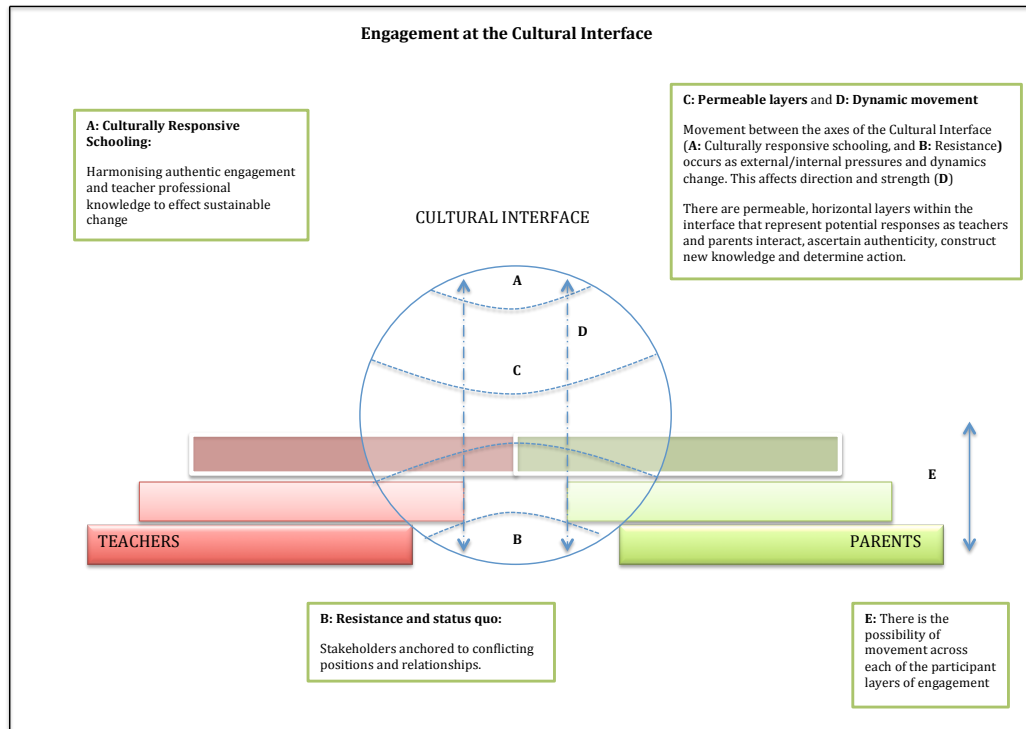
Figure 10.2 represents the points of contestation and engagement between two of the three participant groups, revealing how their respective capacities and interests in seeking to work with each other are directly linked to the attributes of authentic engagement above. It is clear that parents and teachers construct their willingness to explore these attributes of respect and trust and power sharing possibilities

within the crucible of the cultural interface, and that they develop new understandings within this space.

One of the key elements demonstrated in Figure 10.2, is the level of variability that exists within each of the participant groups. In particular it is worth noting that within each participant group, there are layers or differences between those represented, in particular, their propensity to engage. It is suggested that these differences can be measured by the variability in the beliefs and actions of each player within the cultural interface. It is further argued that these personal and / or collective attributes and endorsed actions either enable or hinder the interactional outcomes and the establishment of new understanding. A further element within the diagram is the representation of the dynamic nature of cultural interface. It is posited that engagement within it can elicit the production of knowledge that is contextually dependent on those who participate, its purpose, and the level of authenticity of the relationships between those engaged within it. Further, it is these potentially highly productive interactions that are linked to the standpoint positions of those who enter into these discursive interactions, and as such, are responsive to the exercise of participant agency and/or resistance.

The material presented in Chapters 5 to 9 opened the possibilities of demonstrating that activity at the cultural interface was unique to each site and thus explicitly contextual and responsive to the particular standpoint positions activated from within it. As such, they were dynamic, with responses differing, dependent on the level of authentic engagement, the sense of common purpose and its outcomes. As described in Figure 10.2, it was also observed that staff and parents' responses ranged widely from resistance and the perpetuation of conflict, to collaboration and innovative engagement that provided opportunities for schooling success. In circumstances in which the latter were observed, schools and their staff were empowered to reflect critically on the structures of schooling that hitherto have epistemically impeded Aboriginal student engagement in their learning.

Figure 10.2: Engagement at the cultural interface



10.6 Dynamic school and community engagement’s impact on teachers’ professional knowledge

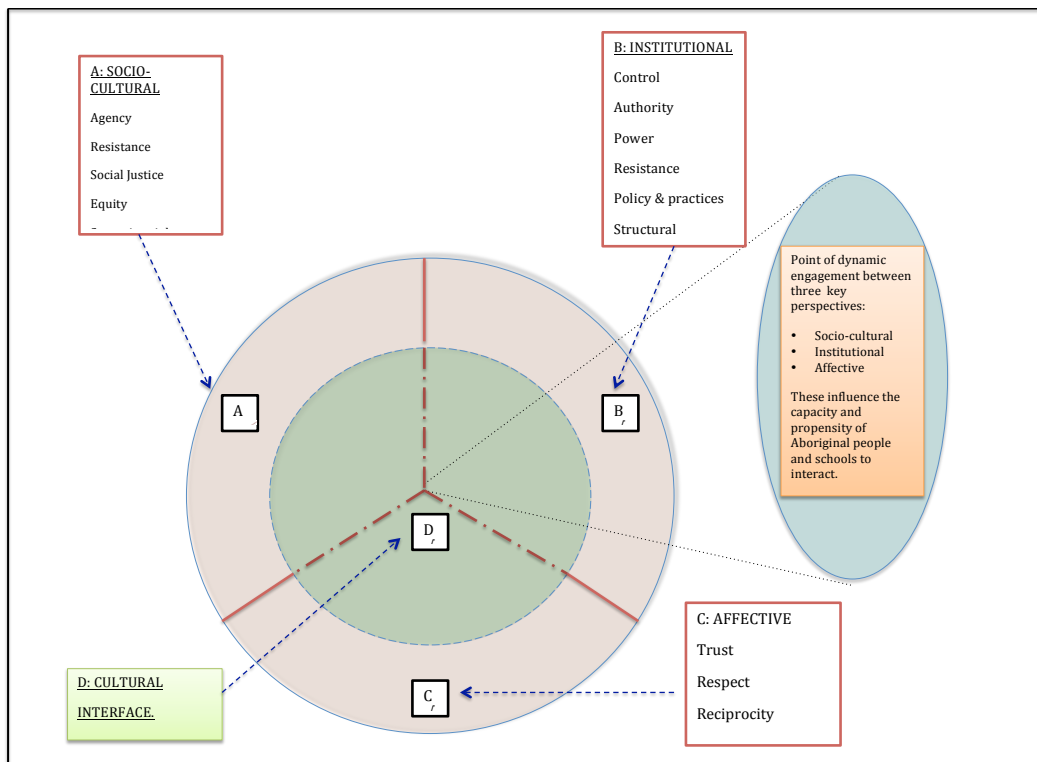
This final section is based on evidence of community and school engagement and an analysis of its impact on teachers’ professional knowledge. Figure 10.3 *Interactions across competing and overlapping relational elements within the cultural interface* represents possibilities for the dynamic interplay of key imperatives that underpin the structure and the range of outcomes of this engagement.

While evidence suggests that each participant group demonstrated a range of socio-cultural attributes and a connection to the outcomes identified in the affective domain, both teachers and community informants identified that the elements within institutional domain (see Figure 10.3), represented the primary points of conflict between Aboriginal people and schools. These organisational elements are representative of the structures; policies and practices that underpin schools’ institutional authority. Contemporary education occurs within a broader social dynamic that mandates schools’ authority to socialise and educate all children.

In addition to this general authority, public schooling of Indigenous students is particularly empowered by colonial legacy, curriculum policy and professional

practices to assimilate and control resistant Aboriginal students and by implication, to limit the influence of those cultural attributes that are seen to hinder this process (Armitage, 1995; Dockery, 2010; Rizvi, 1993). However as Giroux (1983b) had speculated almost a generation ago, evidence from this research identified a counter possibility, where the exercise of community action has centred on their deliberative efforts to develop authentic collaborative partnerships with teachers. As shown in the figure 3, their purpose was to challenge current discriminatory practices, establishing teacher understanding of their educational and cultural aspirations and affect teacher effectiveness. The potential for this exchange is explored using the relational schematic in Figure 10.3, where these narratives of collaboration are situated and then understood against the background of these various socio-cultural, institutional and affective domains.

Figure 10.3: Competing and overlapping relational elements within the cultural interface



This understanding of the dynamics of the cultural interface provides a richer view of how the socio-cultural and affective domains can be channelled to support collaboration, but also illustrates the multiple tension points that exist between these and the institutional domain, which act to control and direct the work of schools and teachers and by implication, students' experiences of schooling.

The following comments draw directly from those teachers who self-identified and observed as having close participatory relationships with Aboriginal workers and families. These interactions were captured in collaborative interviews in term 3, when teachers and Aboriginal workers sat and yarned about the nature of their collaboration and its potential to affect more broadly the educational opportunities of students. These narratives have been interpreted from their earlier telling to highlight salient issues that relate to the nature and consequence of these interactions, and as evidence of the constitutive elements identified within three relational domains in Figure 10.3.

It was Lara, more than any other in Wurtindelly, who spoke of the recent school production of *'Weeping Cloud'* and its impact on students and the community. Todd, the school and community music co-ordinator, wrote and directed the performance of a socio-cultural narrative accompanied with songs, which was based on the life of one of the townships most revered Elders. The performance, which involved many in the community, including the establishment of a woman's choir and parent-working bees, told this elderly woman's life story. These experiences, which included being 'stolen' as a young child, her 30-year struggle to overcome the traumatic impact of her institutional care and her eventual return, played to families who themselves had to be resilient, as they were witness to, or had directly experienced these or similar events (Kirmayer, Dandeneau, Marshall, Phillips, & Williamson, 2011). The performance was cathartic, not just in its telling, but also due to the energy it unleashed within the community members as they collaborated to bring about this production.

Lara noted three significant outcomes that came from the telling of this event from their recent history. The first was the direct exercise of community agency, in influencing the establishment of this music therapy program and now holding the school to account for its role in hiding the truth of the stolen children from generations of students. A second outcome was that they were able to perform the program more broadly thus being able to render their own history and its impact of this event and their resilience to a wider audience. Lastly, the performance was deeply cathartic in that it stood for the survival of this woman and this community. Central to this community was the exercise of their agency, of standing and facing their detractors and then changing the ground rules that had to date structured their relationships with the world that for too long had controlled them.

The story of Karrajong, with its success in turning around the town's perceptions of this under-performing school, is a narrative of considerable fantasy, in which an unemployed Aboriginal man, suffering severe bouts depression, arrived on the doorstep of his local school and convinced them to allow him to introduce his language Wiradjuri to the students in the infants' school. This decade long relationship between the school, its teachers and the Aboriginal families was the mainstay for the development of a range of associated cultural programs that could not have been imagined at its commencement.

At its heart, sat the relationship between Finn, the Wiradjuri Elder and the primary instigator of the language program, Eddy his nephew and language teacher, Donald, the principal and Nikki, the teacher. Though I had earlier opportunities to witness the dynamics of this relationship, my lengthy residences at the school over the course of the project afforded many opportunities to unpack the sincerity and impact of this connection.

In Term 3 2012, I was determined to ask Nikki and Eddy to participate in a three-way dialogue with myself, where they discussed the issue of community collaboration. Prior to this discussion, Eddy had asked if I would like to sit in on a language lesson in Nikki's Year 6 class. After the lesson we sat down and digested what had only just occurred. Eddy had stumbled in the lesson and Nikki had interposed, restored its direction and then handed the lesson back to Eddy. After the lesson we spoke and unpacked the lesson, musing broadly on how teachers and the Aboriginal community could collaborate in this evolving cultural space.

Nikki had attended many of the initial weekend community language classes, making links to Finn and Uncle Stan, the most senior tribal language teacher referred to in Chapter 6. She had heard Finn's desire to 'get the language into the school' (2010) and with assistance from the high school, they worked to support the initial consultations with the principal, who had promised to provide pedagogic support to the language team. The relationship was close, based on an acknowledgment of the impact of language and culture on the students. Nikki noted that the students demanded to have their Aboriginality acknowledged, wanting to be immersed and to appreciate its significance (Fettes, 1999) to their identity (Alfred & Corntassel, 2005; Schouls, 2003).

This relationship was in its essence based in the confidence that there was an implicit trust between Eddy and Nikki (Lowe, 2011b; Tonkiss, 2004). The program

flourished with Nikki and Eddy being seen working closely in planning the school and community programs and her vocal advocacy (Ruffins-Adams & Wislon, 2012) of the students' rights to be exposed to local epistemic and ontological knowledge. It was on the back of these productive interactions that programs were developed; student engagement and their outcomes surged and parental positive perceptions of the school grew.

While the relationships in Karrajong between Nikki and Eddy, and Finn and Donald, stood them in good stead in the establishment of the language and cultural programs, this did not appear to be the case in Mayanbri, where Kelly's interactions with the Aboriginal staff and students' families appeared to have little impact on the staff's broader engagement with the townsfolk. The school had once had a reputation for curriculum innovation and community collaboration, but a series of principals had dismantled programs, squandered opportunities and lost momentum and credibility with parents. A worrying tendency had emerged with an increasing number of white families choosing to send their children to high school in Tubbagah, while Aboriginal parents began to agitate for greater school commitment to the partnership charter they had signed two years previously. Jesse, who only had a one-year tenure as acting principal left the issue of collaboration in the 'too hard basket', as he wrestled with severe budget problems and a fractious staff. It was in this climate that Adam, the deputy principal, and Julie, one of the two AEOs, began working on establishing a men's education program, first described in Chapter 8. Although Kelly's lifelong association with the community had been the yardstick for the school's collaboration with Aboriginal families, Adam slowly and methodically worked on establishing a socio-cultural program to re-engage these young men in Years 10 – 12 with their community Elders. Adam, who had been at the school for nineteen years, had little of Kelly's kudos or understanding of this community, but he could see the school working with these Elders, addressing their concerns about the lack of respect and the paucity in these young men's cultural knowledge. Adam approached Julie to assist in developing a collaborative program that at its heart sought to effect a change in their engagement with their community and their own futures. The success of this program, grounded on effecting a change in the levels of student trust and respect, depended on Adam's advocacy and drive to push slowly through the many hurdles and setbacks in bringing this program together. Julie, the ever-critical AEO, worked closely with him, pulling Elders into the project, talking to

students, co-designing strategies and ensuring that the program met the community's expressed outcomes.

Adam's recounting of this period appeared to focus on the prosaic - its planning and establishment and of adventures in attending a football match in Sydney, but hidden within these conversations, he divulged evidence of a deeper and more personal impact that overwhelmed him in its re-telling. He was confronted by the depth of his ignorance of the power that just resided in being white, European and a teacher, all the while feeling comfortable in his residence amongst those very families who had suffered grievously following the effects of colonisation (Moreton-Robinson, 2004; Standfield, 2004). He was left bereft by the community members' generosity in their rendition of their dispossession (Finnane & McGuire, 2001). His emotional response was cathartic, coming to a head at the recounting of the lives transformed by the community's enforced transportation to the new mission at the Pines in 1955, and the subsequent treatment of these families that still operates in this town (H. Goodall, 1996).

The final element of this larger story of collaboration and change focuses on interactions between the Aboriginal workers and parents and the few non-Aboriginal staff with whom we came into contact. This school of 550 senior students had seen the Aboriginal enrolments creep upwards to 25 per cent of the total. As described in Chapters 7 and 8, the school had attracted significant grants to assist in lifting the numbers of students graduating from Year 12. Several of these programs required staff induction resulting in the employment of Glen, the Aboriginal ex-footballer, and Zahra, the country girl from Bourke who joined Tegan, Christopher, and Heath and Vivienne, the school AEOs. These five, who formed the core of the Aboriginal student support staff, found themselves located well away from the seat of power and isolated from those who influenced the principal.

Their isolation, and their strong sense of commitment to the students, saw them bond, developing a close friendship where Tegan and Zahra were able to draw upon their expertise as they forged successful relationships with students and their families. As noted earlier in Chapter 9, Zahra's induction into the Aboriginal world was forged in Bourke which was a hothouse of racism, social disaffection and community resistance. Joy, herself a young Aboriginal teacher, took Zahra into the heart of her world, forging a relationship based on working together after school and on weekends with kids who needed care. This 'in your face' relationship, had a

deep impact, as these events continually confronted Zahra's own family's myopia to the discrimination that occurred under their very eyes; scandalised by the depth of racist comment on those Sundays when she ventured to church and heard the pious parishioners scorn the disenfranchised Aboriginal families (Moreton-Robinson, 2004).

Joy had taken Zahra in hand and without sermonising, led her to the many dark corners in a town of only 2000 souls, schooled her on Aboriginal aspirations and stood together behind families exercising their right to resist policies that disadvantaged them and their kids and celebrated with them on the discharge of community action to affect change.

Fast-forwarding fifteen years found Zahra, now an experienced teacher, appointed to assist students' transition to post-secondary study or employment. She recognised her limitations, for though she had lived there for many years, she now needed assistance in reaching beyond the school gate to link students and their families with post-schooling opportunities. Zahra understood that the community's schooling experiences were negatively skewed by their intergenerational experiences of underachievement and employment discrimination; but also knew that she must work closely with these very same families to break this cycle of poverty. She turned to Glen and in him she found an ally who could advise, and critique her ideas, backing her with key introductions and attending family meetings with her. Glen provided a keen edge to this relationship, sharpened by his studies that provided him with the language and book knowledge that supplemented his own life's experiences. In the critique of the town and its non-Aboriginal community, Glen came to the view that racism and its rippling impact across the whole community, was at the heart of much of the staff and students' interactions. Zahra in a moment of reflection, during our last conversation, concurred with Glen's fierce critique of her colleagues, when she noted that the staff largely lived in a world of racial stereotypes in which they would posit that Aboriginal disadvantage was an outcome of their own making, and where teachers had little facility of how to effect a different outcome (Zahra T4, 2012)

These observations are similar to those in Luke et al's (2013) review of the Queensland-based *Stronger Smarter* program. They too highlighted a correlation of community observation and teacher's self-assessment of the prevalence of teacher's deficit thinking about Aboriginal students and the marginalisation of Aboriginal

education workers in schools. Yet, though this team largely sat outside the classroom, and though their influence was considerable in supporting each other's programs, many of the Aboriginal students and their extended families, it was clear that without a shift in the school's leadership, there was little likelihood of effecting a long-term change in the school.

These vignettes have been told as evidence of the capacity of authentic partnerships between these few teachers and Aboriginal families and the effect that these had on the teachers' deeply held views about Aboriginal students, their families and communities. They have not been stripped of their messiness nor of the complex environments in which they were born and enacted. Yet there was success and substantial change in how these teachers became involved in programs, gained insight and knowledge and how these became the backbone for amazing progress. At the heart was a dependency on teachers being enabled by their own reflexivity and community generosity to become active partners with Aboriginal parents and education workers and of the community of Aboriginal activists who exercised agency and activism in fashioning and supporting these relationships.

Chapter 11: Walanbaa warramildanha (we are) standing strong¹⁶

11.1 Introduction

I want to commence by going back to that point when I realised that this research had borne witness to the achievement of a deeper understanding of how the schooling of Aboriginal students is structured around the twin processes of cultural assimilation and intergenerational underachievement. While this was not a surprising realisation I became conscious that juxtaposed with this imperative, were hidden but parallel discourses of community agency, deliberative action and acts of defiance and yet an optimism and generosity as Aboriginal people have sought to effect real sustainable educational change.

If this story is to stand for anything, it is that within each of these sites were a small number of informative examples of community and teacher resilience, of acting with intent, of taking a stand and of seeking to find real alternatives to the education that is 'offered' as the collective reward for the loss of Aboriginal sovereign freedoms.

Such has been the impact of these stories, that it is only right that this study directly bears witness to these struggles and recognises that Aboriginal people have stood with a clear intention and with the heart for wanting to affect a change in teachers' understanding and how this must affect the task of teaching.

Walanbaa warramildanha: Mariguwaay ngamila, maarubala dhirraldaygu ¹⁷.

This is not a study of indolent, dispirited or accommodating peoples but of families actively engaging in the inter-generational task of challenging schools and teachers to generate change.

This report provides opportunity to learn from these participants and so understand the aspirations, fears and challenges that affect the educational opportunities of Aboriginal students. These stories are replete with the community histories and aspirations of these Gamilaraay, Wiradjuri, Paakantyi, and Ngiyampaa people and the non-Aboriginal teachers and principals whose participation was critical to this study.

¹⁶ Walanbaa warramildanha (are) standing strong and looking out (at something) Gamilaraay. A statement of agency and of latent capacity to affect that, which is the object of our gaze.

¹⁷ 'Standing their ground: Honouring Aboriginal standpoint to affect teachers' professional knowledge'.

Each chapter represents a milestone in this journey and is structured as a conceptual map to unpack the data in a way that deepens our understanding of the particular dynamic and contested interactions with schools. I intend to go back along this route, identifying those instances that assist in discerning what sits at the heart of this research.

I had identified that the primary purpose of this research was to understand the nature and dynamics of community and school engagement. In particular I asked whether it is possible to comprehend how teachers' deeply held beliefs impact on their capacity to develop pedagogic practices that are simultaneously responsive to the socio-cultural needs and aspirations of Aboriginal students while supporting long-term improvement in student educational outcomes. I will unpack this task by reaching back into each of these chapters and teasing out the overarching narratives within them, which assist in understanding the possibilities of affecting teacher knowledge through authentic local engagement with Aboriginal people. At its conclusion I will draw some connection to the key findings discussed in Chapter 10, and then briefly discuss both the limitations of this research and the implications of these findings for the key stakeholders and for further research.

11.2 Mapping back to the question

Each of the previous chapters sought to methodically unpack the complexities of the interactions between teachers and Aboriginal families, a story that of itself is only part of a larger and more complex narrative of neo-colonial histories and the struggles of Aboriginal communities to both defend themselves and also locate opportunities to more equitably engage with the state.

These stories are but a small slice of a larger history that has informed and in turn is informed by the innumerable micro engagements occurring in the everyday interactions that occur between Aboriginal people and schools. Central to the overarching narrative in this research is that these events as described and acted out, are elementally part of the larger monumental mosaic that is colonialism. Chapter 1 sets out this larger landscape, identifying the enormity and scope of the challenge that is the 'education' of Aboriginal students and by reason of its form and designated task, the site of ongoing resistance. The challenge is made that the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students are unlikely to change until such time as either the Aboriginal community is assimilated, or fundamental reforms to the delivery of such education are made.

Issues canvassed in Chapter 1 highlight the breadth of issues needing to be addressed. In particular these included the paucity of teacher knowledge about the nature of Aboriginal education, the impact of family histories and experiences on students' learning, resilience and aspirations, and the importance of access to local language and cultural programs to support student long-term wellbeing. Chapter 1 wrapped these issues together into two substantive questions: How can Aboriginal communities and schools establish and maintain authentic and purposeful collaboration and; do these collaborations have an impact on teachers' knowledge, beliefs and attitudes about the students and communities in which they work?

Many of the issues raised by community participants speak of the impacts of colonialism, of the sense of trauma and loss, of educational failure and the level of socio-cultural marginalisation of these communities and an ensuing dissonance between them and governments. These issues are seen to swirl around this research, buffeting those who live and work in these communities, leaving its mark on all of those within the space.

The wider literature introduced in Chapter 2 looked to identify what is known about the critical issues that have informed this research. The review was undertaken through an investigation of four key topics that provide insight into what is known about the nature of the relationships between schools and parents. It highlighted the narrow understanding of much of the research about relationship building between schools and marginalised communities and identified that these relationships were school- driven and assumed a one-way focus from schools to parents. These assumptions are problematised throughout this study as Aboriginal parents and educators in schools question the range of underpinning assumptions about community and student deficit and school and teacher capacity to effect a change in their beliefs and attitudes. There was limited literature that addresses these issues within the environments of Aboriginal parents and schools; what little there was confirmed the findings of the wider literature on the importance of relational attributes such as trust, two-way respect, purposeful dialogue and the schools' ability to appreciate the community's deep ontological needs in connecting to Country.

Chapter 2 also examined an emerging body of literature on Indigenous agency and standpoint. This proved pivotal in navigating the related issues of how these particular community standpoints are developed and enacted and the impact on cross-cultural dialogue with schools. This relationship between the development and articulation of each community's standpoint position is more fully explored in Chapter 7. The discussion in Chapter 2 explores the broader genesis of this theory and then locates it within a broader

discussion of its understanding within an Indigenous context. It was observed that there appeared to be an unequivocal link between the phenomenon of Indigenous agency and the development of an in-depth social critique within these four communities on the socio-cultural and economic issues that impact on them, and the form that their particular standpoint positions take.

Much of the literature about school and community partnership building was predicated on an underlying assumption that facilitating parent access to the school enhanced parent's social and cultural capital and knowledge to support their children at school. Other than the emerging literature on culturally responsive schooling, there was little research that has questioned what the underpinning assumptions were about the capacity of schools to effect a quality education for minority, marginalised or at-risk students.

Chapters 3 and 4 outlined the methodology and the attending research methods used in this research. It explored how the defining elements of a critical Indigenous ethnographic methodology could provide a key to understand the socio-political and cultural complexities of these communities. I looked to use this methodology to unpack both the broader social, cultural, economic and political worlds in which Aboriginal people have been forced to operate and how this has affected their capacities and interests when engaging with government. This methodology needed to be both robust and theoretically centred such that it could investigate the consequences of colonisation from within a socio-political and economic frame, as well as the context specific environments of culture and localised ontology. It is in this local context that critical theory meshes with a relationally rich Indigenous research theory to facilitate an understanding of the complexities of community engagement with schools and teachers.

I adopted this methodology so that I could move across the threshold of these two theoretical domains, allowing me to proceed with the research in the comfort that these communities of Aboriginal people had clearly expressed a concern that they wanted to participate in the broader economy while remaining situated within their community. Chapter 4 unpacked the methods that explicate this methodology as it was enacted across the four research sites. This chapter explored how the data from the three participant groups were initially analysed using an overarching critical framework to then ground this data within five meta themes. Following this, the data were again analysed to find deeper and more nuanced themes to further facilitate our understanding within and across the sites.

Chapter 5 proved to be a pivotal chapter as it is here that I set out to investigate how Aboriginal knowledge and socio-cultural connectedness are constructed within post colonial histories and how these are treated within school developed discourses of invasion and dispossession and Indigenous cultural knowledge. It was in Chapter 5 that I commenced the investigation of the discrete Aboriginal community responses to these socio-cultural, historical and moral narratives that embedded the stories of the 'shared histories' of colonisation. Each stage of this discussion further uncovered a community critique of the efforts of schools and teachers to corral student resistance to their marginalisation. There was significant discussion among Aboriginal participants about how their historical experiences were misrepresented by schools and curriculum, and the subsequent impact that this had on student identity. They spoke of the variety of means used by schools to culturally, epistemically and ontologically assimilate their children and how parents in turn developed a repertoire of agentic responses to bolster student resilience. These issues of community agency and resistance and standpoint positioning commenced to unfold within subsequent chapters.

Community comments and reflective critique pinpoint how they understand the processes of knowledge misappropriation and the tendency of schools' to reify the normalised construct of the 'authentic Aborigine' in opposition to real communities of Aboriginal people who sat at their doorstep. Within schools, these discourses were seen to be highly debilitating as their legitimacy was sorely tested by curriculum that has lent itself to tokenising Aboriginal experiences and identity, and teaching practices that are characterised by a lack of knowledge.

Chapter 6 progressed this discussion as it witnessed the actions of Aboriginal people in each of these sites as they sought to ameliorate the impact of programs and practices that have underpinned the parlous state of Aboriginal education. The chapter looked to capture these efforts and to understand how they sought to address localised concerns that have beset schools in their delivery of education to Aboriginal students. Myra's efforts to bring to the attention of staff the community's concerns about everything from teacher behaviours and relationships outside the school, to the impact of deficit theorising on student achievement, provided powerful insights into the attempts of these women to articulate their concerns and expectations of the teaching staff. Likewise, the less confrontational, but equally powerful efforts of Finn and Eddy, to use the relationships forged in their learning relationships with both Stefan and Nikki to support plans to extend the language program. The chapter identified how the exercise of both community

agency and resistance were intimately related actions exercised by Aboriginal communities in their attempts to garner a desired outcome from schools. What these examples identified was that in many instances, the exercise of community agency was directly born out of their collective experiences and excesses of colonisation and present day practices that continued to deliver unequal outcomes to their communities. It is noteworthy that the exercise of community agency proved to be a key factor in determining the success of the projects that unlocked the potential of the community and school collaborations to affect a shift in these practices. A final finding of the chapter focused on the particular potential of school centred Aboriginal language and cultural programs as being powerful sites of collaboration by communities. Experience seen in both Wurtindelly and Karrajong demonstrated that the development of these programs had the effect of building strong bonds between the school and community. It further identified that an ongoing professional relationship between key staff and the community language staff underpinned the any broader success that these schools had in establishing relationships with Aboriginal people. Not surprisingly, both principals acknowledged this even when they commented about the difficulties they had in resourcing these projects. These interactions, as evidenced in both schools proved to be the mainstay of their broader relationships.

Chapter 7 saw the first phase of the data analysis end with a detailed discussion about the identification of the standpoint positions in these four communities. The chapter draws together the overlapping narratives of community participants across Chapters 5 to 7 as they speak of how each had evolved a sense of their relationships with the wider non-Aboriginal world. It was in Tabbagah that we again met Glen, the straight shooting ex-footballer who was employed by the school to run the IYLP program. He spoke of the impact of the levels of socio-economic disadvantage among many of the Aboriginal families, of the consequent social dysfunction and the ongoing impact of family relocations from even more disadvantaged communities. His comments on the ghetto mentality that was firmly established among many of those families that had been pushed literally to the margins of the township were linked to its debilitating impact on students' capacity to succeed at school and in particular, the many teachers who chose to remain ignorant of the lives of a quarter of their students. Glen had vocalised what other Aboriginal staff had said more quietly which was that Aboriginal people had to develop a thick skin to survive the prevailing levels of racism and where parents had to work constantly with their children in building student resilience to help them survive. While Glen spoke of the community and teachers attempts to engage in a genuine critique of what was happening

in the town, the community language teams from Karrajong and Wurtindelly spoke of the remarkable influence that their language and cultural programs had on the students and community, and the strength that these projects provided in situating the learning 'on Country'. These programs were initiated by and for these two communities and the role they played was integral in their success. The greater the kudos the programs received, the more empowered these small groups became in extending the programs beyond the school. Discussions within each of the communities identified the complexity of the standpoint positions that drove these community actions and encouraged real dialogue between those directly involved and the wider town communities. The commonality in these projects was that they were highly contextual in nature; they all took discursive routes and that the trials and successes of each program had an evolving influence in reframing their unique standpoint positions.

Chapters 5 through to 7 had the task of introducing the four communities and the teachers who often appeared to be captive in them. These chapters saw how schools had been given the task of nation building and, as many Aboriginal parents would claim, with the task of assimilating Aboriginal students. We saw these four communities respond to these tasks and the depth of social dysfunction that continue to cloud the relationships between Aboriginal people and schools. In Chapter 6 we witnessed how Aboriginal parents and communities exercised their considerable efforts in seeking to effect change that would better situate school understanding in meeting the particular needs of these children in these environments. We then stepped back to view the depth of the communities' understanding, its insight into the many forms of disadvantage and the collective efforts of resistance and agency to effect change. These issues were then brought together in a broad discussion in Chapter 7, where we witnessed how these communities had not only developed but clearly articulated an understanding of the discursively derived conditions, that impact their lives. These standpoint positions become the lens through which the community and school interactions highlighted in Chapters 8 and 9 were interrogated.

Chapters 8 and 9 are written as parallel narratives of the four sites and their relationships between the schools and the Aboriginal communities in these towns. We are able to view the articulation of community standpoint positions and how these variously underpinned each Aboriginal community's capacity to negotiate with teachers and the schools. Chapter 8 viewed in detail these interactions in both Tubbagah and Mayanbri, while Chapter 9, juxtaposed these in comparison with events in both Wurtindelly and Karrajong.

These chapters provided a rich investigation of the dynamics of the various attempts at establishing an environment in which community and school collaboration could take place. The underpinning narrative in Chapter 8 focused on instances of the impact of the socio-cultural disconnect between these schools and their surrounding communities. Glen's commentary about the teachers' limited understanding of the symbolism embedded in the Aboriginal art works so prominently exhibited around the school opened a discussion about cultural awareness and education. Glen, the IYLP coordinator, surmised that without cultural education, teachers would continue to tokenise Aboriginal knowledge. Glen had already drawn a line between the tokenistic manner in which many teachers treated Aboriginal knowledge and the staff's' apparent indifference to the levels of socio-economic distress in the community. His comments were supported by the AEOs and the other support staff who spoke about the levels of racism within the school. This was an enduring theme pervading much of the commentary and to which Zahra returned to in our final discussion. She commented that if the staff couldn't see what was plainly there to view, there was little chance that they could ever understand what it was like being an Aboriginal kid in that town!

While there was evidence that some of these factors such as socio-economic distress, under-employment and low level racism were identified in Mayanbri, there were other factors also at play that resulted in the Aboriginal staff and community being sidelined and largely unable to affect key decisions that impacted on their children. One of these was the enforced closure of the mission in 1955 and the consequent separation of families and the loss of access to significant sacred sites. Even though the community had long suffered under its colonial history, there was ample evidence of their willing and even generosity in seeking to participate in school programs. One of the more interesting but very much understated programs was the 'Men's education project' that saw the deputy principal and the AEOs work to establish a very successful community mentoring project with culturally and educationally at risk boys. However though the program received significant community and external recognition, it failed to garner wider traction or acknowledgement in the school even when it had a real possibility to positively affect the learning and retention of this cohort of students.

If Chapter 8 was characterised as being a representation of the norm in school and community engagement, then Chapter 9 stands as an evocation of the rich potential of an empowered community and how it sought to facilitate the development of unique relationships with the school and its teaching staff. The narratives from both Wurtindelly

and Karrajong highlighted the impact of a community standpoint that has at its heart, an intention to effect substantive long-term structural and pedagogic changes in favour of their children. The chapter also shone a light on the issue of school leadership and how in these two very different locations, the principals were drawn to facilitating an opportunity for each local Aboriginal community to partner the school in setting the broad directions for the education of their children. These two sites provide examples of how staff capacity was enhanced through their direct engagement with and involvement in programs that were primarily focused on the teaching of Aboriginal knowledge.

What set these two sites apart from Tabbagah and Mayanbri, was that both Karrajong and Wurtindelly communities had cajoled and/or applied what pressure they could exert to convince each school to implement a local language program within its curriculum. The implementation of these programs brought with it a set of complementary protocols that assisted both schools to: open negotiations with parents and Elders; facilitate community language training, language learning and resource development; establish a space for language learning within the school's curriculum, and employ community language teachers. The establishment of these programs rested on resolving issues which had been a point of significant tension in the past. Eddy's experiences in this story are salutary, for without much more than a whisper, his weekly forays into the classroom to co-teach with Nikki and other staff deftly situated Wiradjuri epistemology beside 'mainstream' curriculum. Further, his and Finn's mere attendance in the classroom was itself an important statement of ontological presence.

In uncovering these narratives we have been able to witness the extraordinary potential of this collaboration to make significant inroads into effecting a change in teacher's underlying thinking about the structures of schooling and how the involvement of the community could impact on student success and well being. Evidence from these participants in Karrajong highlighted the potential of working environment founded on a local model of shared leadership to establish an environment that overtime became increasingly responsive to students' needs. This relational model, first established between Finn and the principal then filtered to key staff such as Nikki, Olivia and Cathie and underpinned key discussions on important decisions that involved the advancement of Wiradjuri epistemology and axiology into the school's education and welfare programs. These stories highlighted the potential of these acts of collaboration to facilitate the development of new knowledge that appeared to underpin the school's transformative change.

11.3 Drawing the threads

The analysis in Chapter 10 demonstrates that there is some evidence successful and purposeful engagement between Aboriginal people and schools is not only possible, but proved to be of significant benefit to those teachers involved, the school and more generally, to their Aboriginal communities. This analysis identified key underlying relational attributes of these authentic engagements between schools and Aboriginal people. This analysis then went on to discuss the evidence concerning teacher's beliefs and attitudes and how these appeared to explicitly inform these teachers' pedagogic practices. Thirdly, the chapter unpacked the range of issues that inform community and school engagement and identified particular instances of authentic engagement that now assist in conceptualising the framing of successful community interactions,

These findings go to part answering the underpinning proposition that authentic engagement between Aboriginal people and schools can impact positively on the teachers' professional knowledge about Aboriginal students and their communities. The ongoing analysis throughout this study has develop a nuanced understanding of how in each site authentic and unique relationships between a small number of staff and Aboriginal people could be more generally framed. The analysis further identified the considerable variability of interest and capacity within each of the three participant groups (Aboriginal community, teachers and principal) the considerable tension that still exists between them and the need for a deeper and systematic program that empowers Aboriginal communities and schools to engage in a model of sustained change.

Further it was surmised that the greater the propensity for engagement, the greater the opportunity for individuals and groups to interact and the deeper the level of engagement that took place between them. This was explained in greater detail when looking at the intensity and potential of these interactions as they seen to occur between teachers and Aboriginal people. These interactions were seen in a small number of cases to be highly productive, personal, knowledge focused and dynamic in the manner in which they formed and self-regulated their activities. These collaborations proved to be foundational in the relationships between the teacher participants and community language advocates in Karrajong and Wurtindelly, but were also evident in the relationships that developed between Christopher, Zahra and Tegan with Glen and the two AEOs in Tabbagah. Yet, as highlighted in Mayanbri even widely acknowledged relationships between Kelly with the community could not in itself underpin wider staff or school collaboration.

Although several community members commented that they had seen little evidence of teacher change, others pointed to the changes that occurred over time with teachers who developed subtle relationships with Aboriginal people. Patti's attempts to establish a pre-school music play group, and her ongoing efforts to engage with other mothers outside school hours evidenced her deep desire to interact more widely with other young women and mothers in the town. This demonstrated that there was a range of opportunities that occurred outside of the school that had the possibility of bringing staff and community members into the same relational trajectory.

The findings

In conclusion, I want now pull together the overarching findings of the research. These have been crafted out of this discussion and the particular findings that emanated from the analysis in each of the Chapters 5 to 9. The first three of these focused on the discursive manifestations and strategies used by state and its agencies to continue the task of dispossessing and assimilating Aboriginal communities from their home estates, and provided a backdrop to the following discussions.

The investigations in Chapter 5 centred on the many means by which the state and its various agencies have seen to the larger colonial task of delegitimizing epistemic knowledge and cultures of the local communities within this study. In particular it posed that schools were specific sites of contestation as they had been vested by the state with the task of developing teaching that systematically embedded misappropriated knowledge about 'aborigines' into classroom pedagogic discourse. Furthermore it was seen that schools had become a virulent location in which these colonial versions of history and culture has had the effect of replacing localised epistemic knowledge.

Chapter 6 focused on community responses to these efforts, noting the continuation of policies and practices that had the impact of further distancing communities from their homeland's and assimilating then into the broader multicultural and neo-colonial state that is Australia. The chapter identified the significance of the empowerment that came through engaging in the school language and cultural reclamation programs, noting in particular how these communities had centred these activities as an unequivocal response to their cultural marginalisation. These tasks were seen to strengthen community connections to Country and provide a greater clarity their importance to their survival.

Chapter 7 focused on the empowerment of community standpoint and that the deep

understandings that reside within these standpoint positions are the consequence of and reflections on the unique experiences of each community. The chapter found that these standpoint positions were critical in understanding how each Aboriginal community exercised these positions in fashioning their responses to teachers and schools. It was shown that these standpoint positions underpinned the form, function and long-term success of their own and the school's efforts in establishing substantive and authentic community and school partnerships.

Chapters 8 - 9 saw the interplay of these key-underpinning findings within each school site. Particular reference was given to the exercise of these standpoints positions within the interactive space that was referred to as the cultural interface. It was here that schools, teachers and Aboriginal people engaged on a day-to-day basis fashioning and creating new knowledge in these moments of engagement. These chapters also highlighted our understanding the need for explicit school and community leadership in constructing these relationships and driving through change to deeply embedded school practices that were seen to diminish the capacity for genuine and/or sustained collaboration. These findings were synthesised into the four primary findings identified in Chapter 1. These were:

- That these Aboriginal communities' unique histories and experiences have deeply impacted on their understanding and experiences of schools and schooling. Further that community capacity to successfully negotiate their engagement with schools is clearly linked to the exercise of their own conceptualised standpoint position. These standpoints were seen to be unique, complex and constantly evolving and were deeply rooted in each community's colonial experiences and their historical relationships with schools and teachers.
- That there were a limited examples of teachers who have been able to effect close authentic relationships with Aboriginal communities. It was found that these teachers had developed a strong two-way relationship with Aboriginal people, and that these relationships had significant influence on their knowledge and understanding of the community in which they worked. Further it was seen that these interactions are prized within Aboriginal communities as they provide a two-way conduit and advocacy for families and students. These relationships have been shown to be instructive in unpacking the dynamics of these relationships and their impact on teacher knowledge and practice.

- A third finding focuses on the general paucity of teacher knowledge about Aboriginal communities, their histories and their cultural knowledge, particularly highlighting the level of fear and /or indifference of many teachers to understand the importance of acknowledging the centrality of Aboriginal culture to community well-being. Evidence across these sites pointed to the importance of teachers understanding this connection, its influence on establishing their own relationships with students and parents and their pedagogic practices.
- A fourth key finding was the fundamental importance of schools being able to deliver culturally relevant programs especially those that embed quality local language and cultural programs that lead to real cultural situated outcomes for students. The findings demonstrated that those two schools that had sought to genuinely implement these programs were able to establish a framework to support deeper and more robust community and school partnerships.
- A fifth finding was that there were a small number of instances where engagement between Aboriginal people and teachers was seen to have effected a change in teachers' professional knowledge about the community in which they taught. Though evidence from Karrajong was tantalising in providing a glimpse of a wider impact across the school, there was no clear evidence that these changes had a broader effect with a critical mass of staff.

11.4 Limitations

While I have been documenting this journey, I was mindful that there were a range of limitations that had in various ways impacted either the research structure or the way in which the research was conducted. Some of these limitations were put in place to constrain the boundaries or the scope of this research. These included:

- Limiting the number of research sites within one of ten educational regions in NSW. This constraint was put in place for reasons of cost and timing. The sites are representative of schools that have a significant percentage (defined as greater than 25 percent [$>25\%$]) of Aboriginal students and having largely discrete or clearly identifiable populations of traditional owners residing within each township.
- All sites were situated in rural locations – either in large rural, small rural or rural remote, as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). In NSW schools in 2012 Aboriginal students made up approximately 6.3 percent of total enrolments (Department of Education and Communities, 2012). Each of these four sites had an Aboriginal student enrolment larger than 25 percent

(>25%). This ensured that schools had Aboriginal staff to facilitate direct access to participants.

- A third issue was the choice of participant selection, with all participants self-selecting their involvement. This had the consequence that they brought with them different characteristics from those who may have been randomly chosen to participate. The flow on effect of this is its impact on possible claims of the generalizability of the findings beyond these four sites. This is somewhat countered with the actual selection of the sites and the significance of the identified commonalities in their historical experiences and relationships with schools.

In addition to those limitations that were explicitly included within the development of research methods, there are other limitations that reflect the fact that this research is always going to be a work in progress. This research provides insight into the dynamics of community and school interactions and their capacity to affect the formation of teacher's professional knowledge about Aboriginal students and education. However it does by no means provide an answer to the more significant question of how to develop and implement an authentic and responsive educational environment that is reflective of Aboriginal parents' educational aspirations for their children. This larger work will continue into the future as researchers, working in collaboration with Aboriginal communities, peak organisations, and teachers, collaborate in constructing a transformative model of education that constructs an environment in schools that is both epistemically and culturally centred, but also provide students with the tools to engage in the wider non-aboriginal world.

11.5 Implications

These research findings have significant implications across the four areas. There are implications for parents and communities, teachers and principals, and universities responsible for training pre-service teachers. The following briefly outlines these implications and possible future strategies.

- **Aboriginal Community:** The findings identified the importance of community standpoint and agency in developing an informed understanding of the issues that impact on the establishment of a responsive education for their children.
 - It is suggested that community based peak bodies take a more active role in facilitating training with communities on strategic community planning, shared leadership, cultural inclusion.

- Key community based bodies need to develop with parents, a clearly articulated long-term vision for Aboriginal education, especially if the community Elders and language exponents look to schools to deliver local language programs.
- The community and school leaders should look to establish targets and strategies that identify long-term school improvement in Aboriginal student outcomes.
- The school, in collaboration with community should look to co-host and actively support programs that will enhance parent activism. The aim of such programs would be to assist parents and community members to become politically engaged in partnering the school in whole community change.
- Pre-service training: A greater emphasis needs to be given to the development of teacher's professional knowledge – especially the development of professional identities and ethics in pre-service training.
 - It is suggested that more effective training models need to be developed that better mentor pre-service teachers including the requirement to undertake training in rural environments.
 - Professional practice programs need to be more cognisant of the cultural diverse classroom environments in which teachers will be working.
- Teacher professional learning: The retrofitting of training that looks to effect a change to teacher's beliefs and attitudes has been shown to be counter-productive.
 - It is suggested that while these teachers are less likely to change, they are also more likely to need access to quality training and development.
 - It was also shown that community mentoring is a precursor to purposeful collaboration. On reflection it is clear that schools and communities need examples of model programs and community and school support staff to assist in the establishment of these collaborations.
 - Teacher professional development needs to be clearly linked to whole school planning. Support needs to be provided to teachers to situate opportunities to collaborate with parents and community members within a productive needs-based model of engagement.
 - Support for teachers to become actively involved in cultural and language specific programs would be of significant value. Teachers should be strongly encouraged to become actively involved in learning local language and participating in significant cultural events.
- Principal and whole-school strategic planning: The findings clearly indicated the importance of whole school engagement with Aboriginal parents. It was seen that the

most successful programs emanated from those schools that developed a shared leadership model with parents. It was seen that the greater the level of parent involvement, the greater the synergy and the level of community buy-in to the school and its programs.

- Principals need to be mentored in developing a mindset that is open to genuine community partnerships with the school. Schools with significant Aboriginal student enrolments should be encouraged to develop programs that share leadership responsibilities with community leaders.
- It was also seen that the most effective programs centred on the development, resourcing and teaching of an Aboriginal languages program. However the effectiveness of these programs is dependent on the principal forging a close working relationship with parents and Aboriginal workers and language advocates in the community.
- Principals also need to strategize the development of effective programs that include genuine and authentic engagement with Aboriginal parents.
- That further research is undertaken as part of a systemically supported program of whole-school and community professional learning and community engagement that looks closely at charting the changes in teachers' professional knowledge about Aboriginal education and their consequent teaching and assessment practices.

11.6 Concluding commentary

I conclude by noting that this work is limited by its unfinished nature; however, I'm comforted by the fact that Aboriginal parents and community members have overwhelmingly stood and clearly articulated their concerns with the education that their children receive and some possible ways forward. Their voices on this showed great unanimity in their critique of those policies and practices that for too long have delivered the same results for Aboriginal students.

As is the way with a conclusion, we have the luxury of being able to look anew – and like Janus we are able to view this journey from its source in the innumerable events of colonialism, to this point - which too is a transition to yet another phase in this seemingly endless contest between Aboriginal people and schools. The question is whether we are locked into this way of operating or are we able to change the dynamics of these relationships. On this I am more sanguine than I was six years ago when I commenced this investigation.

I return to the title of this thesis: *Walanbaa warramildanha*¹⁸: *Standing their ground: honouring Aboriginal standpoint to affect teachers' professional knowledge.*

I, like many others, had looked to schools and systems to do things for us – and yet as a criticalist I should have known that the 'haves rarely give to the have nots' – and all we get are policies that are built on keeping us quiet, welfare dependent and emasculated.

For all the soul searching - the answer was in front of us. For all the while we have looked to schools to reach out to us, I have realised that we don't *have* the answer- we *are* the answer. The reclaiming of our freedoms is within our grasp; all of these sites evidenced that capacity of drawing a line in the sand and, with a clear intention, they stood strong: *Walanbaa warramildanha.*

Maaru Yanaya
Yaluu Ngali Ngamilay
(Go well until I see you again)

¹⁸ Gamilaraay 'literally translated as 'They stood their ground, and looked out' (Provided by Br. John Giacon 1 November 2015) A full rendition of the title in Gamilaraay could be:

Walanbaa warramildanha: Mariguwaay ngamila, maarubala dhirraldaygu

'They have stood their ground, and in honouring their histories and their ways, they sought to influence teachers' work.

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