

**'Moving deeper into difference'**

**Developing meaningful and effective pathways into teacher education  
for Indigenous adults from remote communities**

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## Declaration

I hereby declare that the work herein, now submitted as a thesis for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the Charles Darwin University is the result of my own investigations and all references to ideas and work of other researchers have been specifically acknowledged. I hereby certify that this work 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 this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being made available for loan and photocopying online via the University's Open Access repository eSpace.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Lina Hall". The signature is written in a cursive style and is positioned on a light yellow rectangular background.

Signed

23<sup>rd</sup> August 2016

Dated

## **Abstract**

The purpose of this thesis was to explore why there are so few young Indigenous people from remote communities in Central Australia pursuing and completing a teacher education pathway. This problem is explored primarily through listening to the experiences of remote Indigenous teachers, including the barriers and supports they encountered in becoming qualified teachers themselves. The stories of the teachers are set against the historical, political and policy context of remote Indigenous teacher education in Australia with particular reference to the Northern Territory.

The study was conducted using a qualitative methodology, specifically narrative methodology. The intention of the researcher and teacher participants was to inhabit a Post-Colonial Knowledge space where the process of doing the research work together was equally as important as the research outcomes. What emerged was a generative research method, named here as 'participatory narrative'. This new method generated specific insights into how to do research together in 'good faith'. The method itself used a collective analysis process drawing on the teacher narratives. The thematic findings from this collective analysis were then further explored through theoretical and philosophical lenses with a specific consideration of the colonial legacy in Australia and the neo-colonial reality.

The research concludes that if we are to responsibly encourage young Indigenous people from remote communities into teacher education pathways then teacher education itself needs to move into a Post-Colonial Knowledge space. The thesis concludes with a proposed framework for conducting teacher education within this kind of knowledge space.

## Dedications

Many of us who have worked in remote communities for long periods of time have one special community of people who first opened up to us new ways of knowing, being and doing. For me those people were the Eastern Anmatyerr families of Mulga Bore and Angkula in the Utopia region of central Australia. In particular I want to acknowledge the Bird and Purvis families. You looked after me and ‘grew me up’ when I was your school teacher and you slowly and patiently taught me so many of the things that have enabled me to go on and do work such as this research. I hope that I have honoured your investment in me with the work I have undertaken here. Kel mwerr!

and

To the remarkable teachers whose stories are the beating heart of this research, this thesis belongs to you and would not exist without you. Thank you for choosing me to tell your stories to. I hope that I have honoured them and you. I hope that we have told them in such a way that people will listen with open ears. Palya, kala marra, ngurrju!

## **Acknowledgments**

Work towards this thesis was conducted on the land of many different Australian Aboriginal language groups including Central Arrernte, Western Arrarnta, Luritja, Warlpiri, Pitjantjatjara, Eastern Anmatyerr, Larrakia and Quandamooka. I want to pay my respects to the ancestors and Elders, past present and future, of all of these lands for the contribution the spirit of your country made to the completion of this research. In particular I want to thank the families and communities of the teacher participants in this research for allowing us the time required to enable us to do this work together.

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While the PhD is often cast as a solo journey, I have not found this to be the case. I have tremendously valued the support and collegiality of the other PhD and Masters students with whom I have shared the past 5 years and particularly want to thank Dr Nia Emmanouil, Debbie Hohaia, Dr Kathryn Gilby, Dr Jenny Taylor, Sue Field, Jeanie Bell, Robyn Ober, Teresa Alice, Janine Oldfield, Marg Carew, Dr Josie Douglas and Kylie Crabbe.

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### **A note about nomenclature**

I am aware of the differing opinions, beliefs and feelings about the words used to refer to the first nations people of Australia. There is a great deal of debate about which terminology is best. It is my belief that where possible people should be referred to according to their language and cultural identity. The teacher participants in this research are Warlpiri, Luritja, Pitjantjatjara and Western Arrarnta women of Central Australia. Wherever possible I have used these words as descriptors. However, at times it has been necessary to make broader references. While I was torn between using the terms 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' and 'Indigenous' I have ultimately chosen to use the term 'Indigenous' based on the understanding in the 2015 AIATSIS Ethical Publishing guidelines (<http://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/docs/asp/ethical-publishing-guidelines.pdf>) that suggest that 'the term 'Indigenous Australians' can be used to encompass both Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people, though preferably not for one or the other when it is known which group is being spoken about'. It is used in this thesis where it is possible but not necessary that both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are present. I apologize to anyone for whom this term is offensive. That was never my intent. There are others authors who have chosen to use the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' in their work and I have respected that choice by keeping those words when referencing their work.

## Glossary

Common words and expressions used throughout this thesis:

Warlpiri	Luritja	Western Arrarnta	Pitjantjatjara	Yolngu matha	Rak Mak Mak Marranunggu	English
yuwai	yuwa	awa	awa			yes
lawa	wiya	itchya	wiya			no
yapa	anangu		anangu	yolngu	tyikim	Indigenous person
kardiya	tjulkura			balanda	padakoot	non-Indigenous person
ngurrju	palya	marra	palya			Good
ngurrjunyana	palya lingku		palya lingku			Really good

Other words used in this thesis:

Word	Language origin	Approximate translation or meaning
Jakamarra	Warlpiri	One of eight skin names for men that make part of the kinship system for the Warlpiri people of central Australia
Jampajimpa	Warlpiri	One of eight skin names for men that make part of the kinship system for the Warlpiri people of central Australia
anma	Western Arrarnta	wait
marlpa	Warlpiri, Luritja and Pitjantjatjara	company
ngapartji-ngapartji	Pitjantjatjara and Luritja	you give something to me and I give something to you
Ngurra-kurlu	Warlpiri	Ngurra-kurlu is a representation of the five key elements of Warlpiri culture: Land (also called Country), Law, Language, Ceremony, and Skin (also called Kinship). It is a concept that highlights the primary relationships between these elements, while also creating an awareness of their deeper complexities.

		For a more detailed explanation see Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes and Box, 2008
purami	Warlpiri	The path or the way
blekbala	Kriol of Ngukurr (Roper River) area	Aboriginal person
Kaltja	Kriol of Ngukurr (Roper River) area	culture

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

In this chapter I provide an overview of the full thesis. Initially I will explain why this research is needed and will provide a statement of the research questions at the heart of the work. In order for you to better understand where these questions came from I have provided an explanation of the origins of the research. I have also given an overview of the methodological choices, the research design and, importantly, the process undertaken. This explores some of the epistemological challenges and opportunities of working between knowledges. Finally, this chapter will conclude with a simple overview of the remainder of the thesis chapters.

### **1.1 The need for this research**

Both Australian and international educational research with Indigenous communities demonstrate the positive impact of Indigenous or language minority students being taught by members of their own community who intrinsically understand the language, culture and learning styles of the students (Batten et al 1998; Bourke et al 2000; Buckley 1996; Christie 1985; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist 2003; Rosas 2001; Santoro & Reid 2006; Santoro et al. 2008; Woods 1994). The recent 'Report into the Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in Initial Teacher Education' (Patton et al. 2012) completed as part of the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Teachers Initiative (MATSI) stated that '...language is an 'invisible fence' or barrier for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote areas' which places a high need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers from these same communities (Patton et al. 2012, p. 9). The MATSI report also raises the issues that:

*Qualified (and quality) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers are seen as crucial in current discussions about the Australian Curriculum, and the requirement of the national Professional Standards for Teachers to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges in the curriculum (Patton et al. 2012, p. 9).*

The fact that in 2015 there are still so few fully qualified Indigenous teachers working in schools across Australia is a matter of national concern. One of the main purposes of the MATSITI initiative, which has been in place from 2011 to 2015, was to explore some of the reasons why, despite the fact that the call for more Indigenous teachers has a long history, this research suggests that Australian teacher education programs nationwide are struggling to retain and graduate students from these backgrounds (Patton et al. 2012, p. 7). The MATSITI report also notes that:

*Although the need to increase the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers has been highlighted for many years, little has changed nationally since the 1980s when Hughes and Wilmot (1982) called for 1000 Indigenous teachers by 1990 (Patton et al. 2012, p. 9).*

This is a point that is repeatedly highlighted in research done in the Indigenous teacher education space the early to mid-2000s (Herbert 2002; Santoro & Reid 2004). The MATSITI report suggests that one of the barriers to change is the resistance to understanding that this is a complex space in teacher education and there is no 'one size fits all strategy' (Patton et al. 2012, p. 14). The report notes that there are at least three groups of teacher education programs that serve particular groups of Indigenous teacher education students. There has been considerable investigation of the regional and rural Indigenous teacher

education realities in Australia (Reid et al. 2004; Santoro & Reid 2006; Santoro et al. 2008). However in recent years there has been considerably less investigation around 'remote community-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher education' (Patton et al. 2012, p .14), less still of the remote Northern Territory context. If we delve down to the level of Central Australia there is next to no research in this area. This study is therefore necessary and long overdue.

### **1.2 Remote community-based Indigenous teacher education**

The pathway into teacher education has proven a particularly difficult one for Indigenous adults from remote communities in Australia to pursue, particularly if they speak their own language primarily and English is an additional language. Those who have succeeded have often done so in spite of the educational system they are working in rather than being supported by it. The aim of this doctoral research study has been to explore this important national issue, with a specific local focus on the remote Central Australian context, through posing the following research questions:

- What have been the experiences of Indigenous teachers from remote communities in Central Australia who have completed teacher education?
- What are some of the elements that supported them and what are some of the barriers these teachers encountered?
- What are the benefits to students, schools and the wider education system of having a greater number of qualified Indigenous teachers in remote schools?

- How can meaningful and effective pathways be created to support teacher education for future generations of Indigenous teachers from remote communities?

### 1.3 A personal origin

The idea for this research has grown out of relationships and partnerships between myself and a group of Indigenous teachers from remote communities in Central Australia who have been successful in their ambition to become fully qualified teachers according to the requirements of the Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board and the Northern Territory Department of Education. Through two and a half years of working together during the final stage of their teacher education I was privileged to hear the stories of how these mature-aged women became teachers in the first place. Similar to the concerns expressed at the national level through MATSITI, I witnessed first-hand the sadness and fear these teachers felt for the dearth of young Indigenous teachers being educated to take over from them one day. I felt strongly that their stories held much value, both as testaments to the teachers themselves and their determination, commitment and dedication, but also as signposts to the 'systems' they work in – the University system that educated them and the school system they were becoming qualified to work in.

In some ways it felt like those stories were being entrusted to me to hold onto, to remember, to contextualise in my work with these women and their respective communities, and to differentiate from my own story and journey to become a qualified teacher. But it also felt like the women were giving me those stories to DO something with

them. In many ways this description by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999, p. 197) best describes this feeling,

*I found that people entrusted me with information about themselves which was highly personal, I felt honoured by that trust, and somewhat obligated as well – in the sense of having to be very careful and very respectful about how I handled such information.*

The stories were revealed to me in the broader context of the reasons why these teachers had chosen to come back to study to ‘upgrade’ their qualifications despite having been deemed to be fully qualified under previous teacher education certification requirements. Their motivation was intrinsically linked to their agenda, and now mine – to ensure that a new generation of teachers from within their home communities were being supported and equipped to follow on behind them; or to explore why they are not? I have no proof or evidence that this is what the teachers were asking me to do with their stories, other than their enthusiasm for helping me with this research now, and an intuitive understanding that has not diminished over time. So the idea for this research was born, to use the PhD process as a vehicle to explore the wider learning that might be gleaned from these stories about the elements that support and those that hinder success when remote Indigenous people embark on the journey to become a qualified teacher.

#### **1.4 Teacher narratives – methodological choices**

As stated previously the common concern at the heart of this research was to look at pathways for people from remote communities into teacher education. The key vehicle for exploring this concern was the stories of seven Indigenous teachers from remote

communities in Central Australia who had successfully completed this pathway to become fully qualified classroom teachers. The obvious choice given that we were dealing with stories was to use a narrative methodology and then more specifically use a method such as 'yarning' (Bessarab and Ng'andu 2010; Williams 2007) which has been developed in recent years by Indigenous researchers as a culturally congruent way of undertaking narrative research with Indigenous participants . A detailed decription of the methodological choices and methods used are provided in Chapter 4 of this thesis.

### **1.5 Thinking about process - Research, relationships and reciprocity**

An important element of understanding this research and what is written in this thesis is understanding that it has focused as much on the process as it has on the product. In this way we, myself and the teacher participants, have tried to explore and embody Post-Colonial Knowledge Work which will be explored towards the end of the thesis. For now, I would just ask your indulgence as I outline some key elements of our process together before outlining the overall structure of the thesis itself.

In considering how to do this research respectfully and effectively I had to place the relationships I have with the teacher participants at the centre of it all. To step back from those relationships in order to do the research would be, I believe, incoherent to Indigenous ontology. Veronica Arbon (2008) talks about 'Being as Reciprocal' and 'reciprocal relatedness' (p 34). Arbon notes that for Arabana people, the language group to which she belongs, 'becoming who you are is accomplished by knowing your reciprocal relationships' and that 'Reciprocity is ... a foundational ontology and its core role is to seek balance within the related Arabana life world' (Arbon, 2008, p 34). Arbon talks about this

reciprocal relatedness being the way that all things were worked out between all entities in the local area and she makes a distinction between the 'local' and what was 'beyond'. She notes that: 'Beyond, strangers exist and cordial relations are maintained through ceremonies or the right to pass through Country' (Arbon, 2008 p 34). It is for this reason that I qualify the reciprocity that exists between myself and the teacher participants. Our relationships do not fit neatly into the 'reciprocity' that is part of the ontology that Aboriginal people share. Neither does it fit into my Western ideas of reciprocity, which have traditionally tended to focus more on the 'interchange of privileges' ('reciprocity' Oxford Modern English Dictionary 1996, p. 844). These reciprocal relationships have had to find a third space of understanding, one that is flexible and open enough to embrace different understandings of reciprocity. It is for this reason that I have called them 'ongoing negotiated reciprocal relationships', because it is up to those of us in the relationships to negotiate the way these relationships play out in our ever-changing interactions.

### **1.6 A collectivist approach to Post-Colonial Knowledge Work – disconcertment and discovery**

To acknowledge and explain our collective process is not to deny the complexity of it and the disconcertment (Verran 2013) we experience in how this works in practice. Questions of obligation, accountability, balance, power, oppression and equality are all part of that ongoing process of negotiation. Kathryn Pyne Addelson (1994, p. 5) calls this process the continual generation and regeneration of the 'we' and suggests that it is a natural part of all collectivist acts. She believes there is great value in exploring and uncovering what it is we do together to navigate all of these dilemmas in the creation of a 'we' (p. 6). For my part, I have been very aware of the need to remain conscious and alert to the assumptions

I make based on my position as a non-Indigenous person from a white, middle class English speaking background. To use Addelson's words I have had to become conscious of,

*...the society that we act and enact every day, that we generate and regenerate through our acceptance and reinforcement of the authoritative 'norms' and 'standards' (Addelson 1994, p. 11).*

In the Australian experience these 'norms' and 'standards' are born of the original act of colonial land theft and dispossession, the ramifications of which continue to shape contemporary society. This results in the 'norms' and 'standards' of Australian society being based on the experiences of one group over and above all others and consideration only being given to one way of knowing. So-called 'objective' views and models of norms, rules and principles are biased towards the dominant group. They ignore the relationships of authority and power (Addelson 1994, p. 14). Freire's terminology is that of the oppressors and the oppressed but he too highlights the instinct of the dominant or oppressor group to maintain their power and authority by doing what is in their own self-interest, including acts of false generosity to maintain the status quo (Freire 1972, p. 29). In the Australian context the most evident example of this exists between the European colonising power and the original Indigenous inhabitants. Arbon (2008) writes,

*The majority of Australians still cannot accept that the knowledge and philosophy of our people.... are as legitimate as their own beliefs or that such knowledge can be rightfully compared to their privileged and powerful scientifically based ideologies and philosophies. These scientific and ideological positions, often inherited from a past beyond our borders or inclusive of the invasion, are conspicuously pervasive*

*within contemporary Australian society, creating an environment of submersion and control for Arabana Nharla and other Indigenous people* (Arbon 2008, p. 18).

These issues of hegemony, power and disparity are often the subject of examination through the critical theory stream of social science research. Freire (1972) is one of the giant voices in this field particularly in the area of education. Foucault (1977) is another key voice particularly in relation to the way that systems and institutions entrench, reinforce and maintain power. In areas that relate specifically to issues of race, particularly in Indigenous/coloniser contexts, there is a growing body of work that relates to 'Whiteness Theory' and 'Critical Race Theory' which endeavours to unpack and understand the underlying causes of racially-based inequity. These theories will be drawn upon in a later chapter of this thesis in the discussion of both the literature and the research findings from the teacher narratives.

But understanding how things are is not the same as doing things differently. Addelson (1994) talks about the need for 'responsible work' or 'responsible research' which, rather than ignoring these issues of authority, power, norms and standards by which we enact the world, forces the researcher to explore 'their relationship with those others and the part they play in maintaining, generating and regenerating the norms and rules' (p. 16). To do this we must first overcome the falsehood that we are some kind of 'judging observer' (Addelson 1994, p. 18). The positivist view of knowledge creation is that as researcher we can somehow step out of the process of life and be objective, observing the phenomenon we are exploring then creating some detached and objective analysis of it. However this is contrary to how we actually act as human beings, where meaning comes from relationship

and connectivity and our decisions and actions are measured by what we perceive to be our norms and beliefs. In living life we answer the question of how we should live – it is in the doing that we discover how to do. This is because we are reading, responding, internalizing, adjusting all the time based on the subtle but ever present accepted social norms that are around us. For those who are in positions of power and authority the norms will be based around solidifying and protecting one's place within that social order.

As researchers we need to be hyper-conscious of how we are acting to protect the existing positions of power and privilege, and must consciously step away from making decisions that generate and regenerate the social order, by stepping into a space where we can do 'morally responsible' work, work that has as its focus the creation of a 'we' (Addelson, 1994). I am part of this story already and to pretend otherwise is not possible. This research cannot be a detached space of judging observation. The empirical question with the focus of doing 'responsible work' then becomes 'how do 'we' embark on this action together in a way that we are all responsible to each other, and in a way that generates some knowledge that is 'ours' about what we have done here?' This question and the response generated by the process of this research are explored further in Chapter 5.

### **1.7 Epistemological challenges of working between knowledges**

The choice to use a PhD journey as the frame for this work, a frame which is in essence an individualist task that carries my name forward as the author/cognitive authority, created epistemological challenges. I have had to question if it is possible to fulfil my contract with the University to complete this work while still embarking on morally responsible work that is respectful of the creativity of others as they create meaning and knowledge. Is it

possible to do work within a PhD that is cognizant of and makes space for the collective action required to do it well? My response to these questions was to make the process as important as the product in this research. Kathryn Pyne Addelson (1994, p. 1) suggests that 'Answers to how we should live are created in the process of living'. In this vein I suggest that answers to how we should do 'morally responsible' research work are answered in the process of doing research together.

Parker Palmer (2009) calls paying attention to the process 'the work before the work'. It is what we must do if we are using a relational epistemology. It is about coming to terms with and understanding our inner landscape, honestly, so that we enter into the process of doing the work in front of us relatively unencumbered. We are then able to enter into a 'live encounter' with each other that permits the work that emerges to be trustworthy and 'true' from the perspective of the participants. By paying attention to this 'work before the work' we ensure that when we actually sit down to do the 'work', the experience is good for all who are involved, and the feeling we are all left with at the conclusion is 'right'. It is a process of uncovering and discovering together; it is, at its core, creative and generative. Addelson (1994) also advocates for this type of work in her collectivist theory saying 'I believe that uncovering what we do together might leave, as a gift, all the freedom of creation that is in fact our own' (p 6). She also acknowledges how difficult this type of work is for institutions to accept or permit. She points to the challenge of doing this kind of work:

*...within an institution that is an official enactor of truth and a producer of official*

*meanings, an institution that hides what people do together as part of its task of regenerating the social order (Addelson 1994, p. 8).*

She argues that in order to create knowledge together we must put aside the dualism of 'organism and environment' as well as the idea of the 'objective and judging observer'. She advocates a position where the research community must acknowledge that,

*Human beings are, after all, living organisms who create their environments – who even, in that sense, create both society and nature...Scientists are participants in the process and the knowledge that they produce ought to reflect that (Addelson 1994, p 3).*

Palmer (1999, pp. 100-103) also calls into question the illogical obsession in Higher Education and research with objectivist ways of knowing, stating that 'Objectivism, obsessed with the purity of knowledge, wants to avoid the mess of subjectivity at all costs' (p. 100). He suggests there are two problems with objectivism; firstly, it falsely portrays how we know, and secondly, it has profoundly deformed the way we educate. Both Addelson (1994) and Palmer (1999) argue that knowledge is created and enacted collectively through relationships and that in paying attention to what people in fact do together helps us to understand greater truths about the created knowledge itself.

Verran (2013) comments on what actually happens at a human level when people from different epistemological understandings come together to do knowledge work. She talks

about the need to learn to live in what she calls a space of 'existential panic' (Verran 2013, p. 145) when working in intercultural spaces or the space of difference. She says it is to be expected that we feel moments of epistemic disconcertment when people from different ontological and epistemological origins try to work together. In her own words,

*Epistemic disconcertment...a moment of existential panic...implies that our taken for granted account of what knowledge is has somehow been upset or impinged upon so that we begin to doubt and become less certain ...cultivation of epistemic disconcertment is crucial for post-colonial knowledge work (Verran 2013, pp. 144-145).*

How we react to those moments of disconcertment and panic define how we are able to move forward together in 'good faith' or 'bad faith'. Verran (2013) suggests that if we want a way forward that moves beyond colonizing reduction then we need to become aware of and welcome these moments as evidence that we are witnessing epistemic disconcertment and engaging honestly in the moment in Post-Colonial Knowledge Work. To do this we must go 'deeper inside' what is happening at an epistemological level for those involved.

### **1.8 Research design and process – participatory narrative and interrupting tools**

All of these elements meant that the research design, the methodological choices and the research process itself had to be carefully thought through if we were actually wanting to do good Post-Colonial Knowledge Work together. As important as anything else in this research, collaboration was our conscious attempt to do the 'work before the work'. This was done by allowing for a long 'conversational phase' at the beginning of the research process, some intentional conversations about the research process at specific stages

throughout the period of active research 'data' work and an intentional coming back together to analyse the research data as a group launching the research 'data analysis' work. We consciously and intentionally chose to talk and think together about what we were doing and how we were doing it. In Verran's language we were cultivating the 'collective disposition to interrogate the familiar' (2013, p. 159). This intentional interrogation of what was happening as we worked together generated new understandings and these new understandings of how we do knowledge work together sit alongside the research findings as equally important new knowledge arising from this doctoral research. What we were in fact doing was co-creating our own method of working together, which I have called 'participatory narrative'. This method acknowledged the teacher participants as having authority and knowledge well beyond just being the tellers of the narratives central to this research. As knowledge authorities in this field, the teacher participants became the co-creators of the process and co-contributors to the analysis work. How this happened is explained in full detail in Chapters 4 and 5, but it is important to understand this element from the outset as it affects the tone of the entire thesis.

### **1.9 Thesis overview**

The thesis itself follows a fairly simple structure of literature review, methodology, research findings, discussion and conclusion.

Chapters 2 and 3 locate the research within both historical and political contexts of teacher education more broadly. Chapter 2 gives an analysis of historical literature with relation to formal schooling and remote teacher education in the Northern Territory. This is important as it contextualizes the journey that the teacher participants talk about in their narratives.

In Chapter 3 the focus is on the evolution of the political and policy context of teacher education at the Australian and Northern Territory levels, and the impact of this on remote Indigenous teachers such as the Central Australian based teacher participants in this doctoral study.

Chapters 4 and 5 deal with methodological questions. Chapter 4 outlines the pre-methodological questions considered in the research design process. It also explains the narrative methodology and then sets out the specific participatory narrative process followed by the researcher and teacher participants. Chapter 5 is an analysis and discussion of the merits of using this participatory narrative approach when working in an intercultural knowledge space. It is included in the body of the thesis as it points towards the importance of paying attention to and intentionally interrupting the research process as a way of working together in difference and in 'good faith' (Verran 2013). These chapters combine to give emphasis to the fact that the teachers who participated in this research were not just the tellers of the narratives, but the co-constructors of the research design and co-participants in the analysis and discussion stages.

Chapters 6 and 7 contain the analysis of the teacher narratives themselves. Chapter 6 is the group analysis of the seven teacher narratives and the inductive proposal of key themes. This process is reflective of the importance placed on finding a method of analysis that was inclusive of more than myself as the University-recognized 'principal researcher'. It was important to ensure that themes in the narratives were not identified solely by one non-Indigenous person, but were inclusive of the knowledge authorities in the field; that is, the teacher participants themselves. Chapter 7 then uses the seven proposed key themes as an

analytical frame to examine the individual teacher narratives. At this level the depth and breadth of examples relating to each theme are explored in greater detail.

The discussion in Chapter 8 is divided into two parts. The first part discusses the findings from the teacher narrative analysis through the lens of race and whiteness. The second part examines the examples of good intercultural knowledge work represented in the teacher narrative analysis. Chapter 9 then presents the new knowledge and insights that have been generated by this doctoral research, namely a suggested process for doing Post-Colonial Knowledge Work and the implications of this for remote Indigenous teacher education. Finally Chapter 10 summarises how the thesis answers the original research questions as well as specifically addressing the claims for new knowledge made by this research.

## **Chapter 2 – The historical context of formal schooling and remote teacher education in the Northern Territory – A review of literature**

### **2.1 Introduction**

The recent national report into the retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in Initial Teacher Education (Patton et al. 2012), as part of the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Initiative (MATSITI) reminded us that although the need to increase the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers has been highlighted for many years, little has changed nationally since the 1980s when, in 1982, Hughes and Wilmot called for 1000 Indigenous teachers by 1990 (in Patton et al. 2012, p. 9). This same trend is true for Indigenous teachers from remote communities in the Northern Territory. It is hard to gain a sense of the actual number as there is so little data gathered on this demographic. The most recent indication from the Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory is in 2011 which estimates the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers registered as classroom teachers to work in schools as around 3% of that year's total registration of 6151 teachers (Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board Annual Report 2011). This puts the estimated number at around 185 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers across the whole of the Northern Territory. At the time of its inception in 2005 through until 2008, the Teacher Registration Board recorded the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander registered teachers. In 2005, 156 out of 3992 registered teachers in the Northern Territory identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. By 2008, the last year when there was an actual number recorded, this had gone up slightly in number to 164 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

teachers, but had gone down as a percentage of the total of 5086 teachers working in the schools of the Northern Territory (Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board Annual Reports 2005-2008). There is only anecdotal data available on how many of this small number of registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers live and work in very remote<sup>1</sup> communities in the Northern Territory.

Yet there is ongoing and persistent rhetoric around supporting and encouraging Indigenous Teachers to become fully qualified classroom teachers. The literature reviewed in this chapter is based on the following question: How does exploration of the historical context of Indigenous teacher education in the Northern Territory help shed light on the current low numbers of people from remote Indigenous communities becoming qualified teachers? The literature about this question will be explored through two key lenses. Firstly, I will take an historical look at the development of formal schooling in the Northern Territory and the connected work of Indigenous people as teachers in these schools. The second lens will be a more detailed exploration of the literature available about the specific historical development of training courses and teacher education for Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

The aim of this chapter is to contribute sufficient background and context so as to understand the teacher narratives examined in later chapters. This is strongly in keeping with a central theme of Critical Race Theory (CRT) which challenges ahistorism and insists on contextual and historical analysis with specific focus on the role of race in any given

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics classification:  
[http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/4a256353001af3ed4b2562bb00121564/6b6e07234c98365aca25792d0010d730/\\$FILE/ASGS%20Remoteness%20Structure%20-%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf](http://www.abs.gov.au/websitedbs/D3310114.nsf/4a256353001af3ed4b2562bb00121564/6b6e07234c98365aca25792d0010d730/$FILE/ASGS%20Remoteness%20Structure%20-%20Fact%20Sheet.pdf)

problem (Gillborn 2006; Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006; Matsuda 1995). This theory will be explored further in the discussion in Chapter 8. For now this review of literature is offered as a way of beginning to provide some historical explanations for the present reality.

## **2.2 A history of formal schooling for Indigenous students in the Northern Territory**

Any exploration of Indigenous teacher education in the Northern Territory (NT) must first be contextualized against the backdrop of the history of formal schooling system in the NT. Pre-invasion education for Indigenous people in Australia was well established within family groups and communities. Price (2012) notes that 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have always had their own education and this education began as soon as the child moved in the womb, as soon as it was known that there was a new responsibility' (p. 4). This system of learning based on 'embodied distinct practical teaching styles, observation, imitation, repetition and practical activity' (Russo & Rodwell 1989, p. 1) also included the role of the teacher with Price (2012, p. 4) observing that 'for each child there was a teacher, a mentor and a peer with whom to learn. There were 'tutors': wise women and men who ensured that history and the essentials of life were taught'. The purpose of this education was to prepare 'the child for his/her role in the life of the tribe, in personal, social, economic and spiritual terms' (Russo & Rodwell 1989, p. 1). This period of time, unfettered by colonial settlement and its trappings, is still within living memory of several generations still alive today in the Northern Territory.

However, as noted in the MATSITI report, any discussion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in higher education must take into account disadvantage and the broader issues of social class. This means the consideration of barriers related to the

historical effects of colonization, social disadvantage and the historical exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in schooling (Patton et al 2012, p 10). Initially after colonization education was not even a consideration for the Indigenous population of Australia. This was based largely on the attitude of the time which saw early anthropologists offer the following descriptions:

*'the Australian aborigines are the most primitive or backward race' on Earth*

(Spencer 1904, p. 376)

*Relics of the Stone Age, they were doomed, and little more could be done other than make their 'path to final extinction...as pleasant as possible'* (Spencer and Gillen 1899, pp. 17-18)

European style schools in any form were not systematically established until the 1950's. Willis (1985) suggests that the history of 'Aboriginal Education' in the Northern Territory can be broken into four periods namely:

1. up to 1950s – which can be characterized as a period of neglect with some token examples of schools emerging;
2. the 1950s-1970s which roughly corresponds to the policy of assimilation;
3. a period of 'cultural adaptation' between 1972-1975; and
4. the period from 1975 onwards which has oscillated between policies of cultural adaptation and assimilation.

When considering other sources, a more appropriate definition of the third period might be from 1967, which was the year of the Federal Referendum that gave the National government the power to legislate for Indigenous Australians in the States and for

Indigenous Australians to be counted as Australian citizens, until 1979 which was the year the Northern Territory began self-government.

### 2.2.1 Before 1950

Across Australia, in the early days of European colonization, schools were generally established by the church, with the understanding that they were there to cater for the white children only (Russo & Rodwell 1989, p. 1). The prevailing attitude of the time was heavily invested in Social Darwinism and any minimal efforts at schooling for Aboriginal children were based on notions of 'civilising and Christianising the primitive savages' (Russo & Rodwell 1989, p. 1). By the mid 1800's even these 'civilising' efforts done in a spirit of 'benevolent protection' were being challenged by groups such as the Eugenics movement who were calling for greater 'segregation' and a funding focus on the 'education of the white settlers of the colony' and 'protecting society from contamination of the lower orders'. This attitude was prevalent when the first school was established in the Northern Territory in the mid-1870s (Oliver & Rodwell 1989, p. v; Willis 1985, p. 47). An example of this attitude is the 'Mental Deficiency Act of 1913' which aimed to 'segregate and control the movements and fertility of the feeble-minded in order to protect society'. This definition of 'feeble-minded' extended to Aboriginal people at this time with words such as 'savage, low order, primitive, barely human, barbaric, dying race, blacks and mentally inferior' being variously used to describe Aboriginal people during this period (Russo & Rodwell 1989, p 2). Moreton Robinson (2004, p. 76) expands on this list suggesting that Indigenous people in Australia have been variously labelled as 'treacherous, lazy, drunken, childish, cunning, dirty, ignoble, noble, primitive, backward, unscrupulous, untrustworthy

and savage'. This language gives a strong sense of the overt ideology at that time, but is also a signpost to some prevailing contemporary attitudes that are often less overt.

The commonly accepted public myth at the time was that Aboriginal people were 'uneducable' (Price 2012). Price attributes this to a kind of social glass ceiling that was placed on Aboriginal children who were seen by many as 'only fit to learn to sew, launder, cook, clean, garden, build fences, tend livestock and generally participate in more menial tasks' (Price 2012, p. 4). These limitations were built into the early education systems which were almost exclusively run by church missions, taught exclusively by white teachers or clergy whose purpose was to indoctrinate into the cultural norms and values of the colonisers (Green & Reid 2002). Aboriginal children were expected by the completion of their schooling 'to attain the level achieved by a ten-year-old child in the state education system, with an emphasis on preparing the children for a future as unskilled workers within the government or mission communities or as cheap labour in the wider community' (Price 2012, p. 4). For the most part, however, Aboriginal children were deliberately excluded from attending school. In 1929 J.W. Bleakley wrote a 'Report on the Aboriginals and Half Castes of Central Australia and North Australia' and in it he suggested that 'Until the Territory is further developed and facilities for the education of white children are provided, any attempt at compulsory education (of Aborigines)...would be out of the question. The rescue of half-castes from the camps and education in institutions should be compulsory' (Bleakely 1929, p. 38).

Only in very few instances where the numbers of Aboriginal children in one place were large enough would special segregated schools be set up, usually by church missionary

organizations (Russo & Rodwell 1989, p. 3). An example of this in the Northern Territory is the Hermannsburg Mission School established in the early 1880s, perhaps the first example of bilingual schooling in the NT. The curriculum was based on scripture and the 3R's and encouraged a protestant work ethic and discipline (Russo & Rodwell, p. 4). Examples such as this led to increasing pressure in the late 1800's on the South Australian Government, who had responsibility for schools in the Northern Territory at that time, to provide secular education for Aboriginal children. However the Government 'was reluctant to act on recommendations that necessitated additional expenditure of funds' (Russo & Rodwell 1989, p. 4). Some rare examples existed of segregated schools being established for the education of Aboriginal children in places such as Kahlin Compound in Darwin (Urvet 1982; Russo & Rodwell 1989) and Bagot Aboriginal Reserve in Darwin (Urvet 1982).

However, increasingly the development of educational opportunities for Aboriginal children were linked to the policies of removal of 'half caste' children from their families. In the Northern Territory children of mixed parentage were being taken from their families and communities and placed in compounds in places such as Melville and Croker Islands, Alice Springs and Pine Creek generally managed by Catholic and Methodist missionaries. It was then generally up to the missionaries what kind of 'schooling' was provided (Russo & Rodwell 1989, p. 5). In Alice Springs the first school was established in 1914 (Willis 1985, p. 47). European children were schooled in the mornings and 'half caste' children in the afternoons until a change of school Matron saw the Aboriginal children removed entirely and sent to Jay Creek 45 kilometres to the west of Alice Springs (Urvet 1982, p. 6; Willis 1985, p. 47). This notion of education of 'mixed bloods' as opposed to 'full bloods' is echoed by A.K. Elkin's comments in 1937 in the journal of Oceania:

*The present policy is to educate aborigines (mostly mixed- bloods) up to what might be called a "useful labourer's standard", for to do more, if it were possible, would not help them ... aborigines (full and mixed blood) should not, and cannot, be assimilated by the white community. They must live apart ... they cannot become equals of the white race. (Elkin as cited in Gray and Beresford 2008, p. 205)*

The year 1940 saw the policy of assimilation adopted by the Commonwealth and States conference on Aborigines. However, as noted by Russo and Rodwell (1989, p. 6), 'after more than sixty years of segregation, public opinion did not necessarily change in harmony with the legislation'. This led to the 'swift compromise' of 'special classes' or annex schools effectively continuing the practices of segregation for a further ten years (Russo & Rodwell 1989, pp. 6-7). Up until 1950 a dual system of schooling existed in the Northern Territory where the responsibility for schooling for non-Indigenous children was shared between the Commonwealth and South Australia, and Aboriginal education was the responsibility of the Welfare Branch of the Northern Territory Department of Territories (Russo & Rodwell 1989, p. 7; Urvet 1982, p. 25; Willis 1985, p. 47). Policies around access to education were changing but systems, structures and attitudes ensured that the quality of education available to the Indigenous population of the Northern Territory remained unequal. Even though by the 1950s access to education for Indigenous children was generally well established 'this did not mean equality of educational opportunity or that, because policy had changed that this was reflected in the general public's attitudes and behaviour' (Russo & Rodwell 1989, p. 7). Campbell and Proctor (2014) reinforce this point stating that the 'obstacles facing Aboriginal children remained considerable', that 'the removal of formal

enrolment bars did not necessarily make the schools welcoming places' and that 'the attainment of 'European' education was likely at the expense of Aboriginal culture' (p 205).

### 2.2.2 1950s- 1967

Campbell and Proctor (2014, p. 203) suggest that education in the second half of the 1900s was characterized by two broad strands of reforms. The first was the reform of what was happening inside classrooms in response to the progressivism of the post war period. The second addressed the social and economic inequality experienced by a number of groups including Indigenous children. However, Campbell and Proctor (2014) also note that there were competing visions for change in 'Aboriginal education'. While some took an activist approach focusing on human citizenship rights and economic inequality, others remained within an assimilationist or even paternalistic paradigm. Urvet (1982, p. 25) notes that 'prior to the Second World War, except for the steps taken to educate part-aboriginal children in special institutions, no attempt had been made by the Government to develop special education programs for Aboriginal children'. Many children living in remote areas of the north of Australia, first encountered schools in the 1950s and 1960s (Campbell and Proctor 2014, p. 203). In the late 1940s concerns were raised and research done into the 'problems of educating full-blood Aborigines' which ultimately led to an agreement in 1950 resulting in the education of all Aboriginal children becoming part of the broader Commonwealth policy of assimilation, which was previously aimed only at 'part-Aborigines' (Urvet 1982, p. 26). Willis (1985) points out that this push for assimilation happened 'despite the fact that it was no longer favoured in other parts of the world concerned with the development and education of Indigenous peoples' (p. 48). In response to this verve for

assimilation new Commonwealth schools were established in the 1950s in the Northern Territory at Delisaville (Belyuen), Bagot in Darwin, the Bungalow in Alice Springs and Yuendumu. According to Urvet (1982, p. 27) in 1950 a six-week training course began for new teachers heading to the Northern Territory. The course was conducted in Sydney where the teachers learned Anthropology, Tropical Medicine, History and Aims of Native Education and Teaching English as a Foreign Language.

By 1956 there were fourteen government special schools and fourteen mission schools catering for 1633 Aboriginal children in the NT (Northern Territory Department of Education 1982, p 13) with schools now also operating in places such as Santa Teresa, Finke and Papunya (Willis 1985, p. 48). By 1968 it was estimated that schooling was available to 90 per cent of the potential primary school age group (Urvet 1982 p 28). Willis notes that the assumption behind this expansion of schooling for children in the remote settlements was that 'Aboriginal people would learn western cultural ways in the relatively protected environment of the settlement and then would move into the mainstream of society' (Willis 1985, p. 48).

As this system expanded the recruitment of qualified teachers became increasingly challenging and despite specialist teacher training schemes being established in Brisbane, Perth, Adelaide and Geelong supply did not match demand (Urvet 1982, p. 29). It was this challenge that in fact gave rise to the training and employment of 'Aboriginal Teaching Assistants' from the late 1950s onwards (Urvet 1982, p. 31). The Commonwealth control of the 'Aboriginal Education' system in the Northern Territory created separation between types of schools, with 'Aboriginal' schools under the control of the Commonwealth and

mainstream schools under the control of South Australia. This meant that a unified system and philosophy of education did not evolve as it did in the States and furthermore the provision of education issue became divisive with scarce resources having to be split between two systems and this split relied on the good-will, common sense and co-operation of senior officers in both systems (Urvet 1982, p. 32). Huxley notes that by 1966 only three 'full-blood' Aborigines were in secondary school in the Northern Territory (Huxley 1967, p. 257). The Watts and Gallagher report of 1964 focused on this issue of student progression amongst other issues. This report ultimately led to the development of 'Transition Colleges': Kormilda College in Darwin opening in 1967 with similar institutions being established near Nhulumbuy (Dhupuma) and Alice Springs (Yirara) in late 1973 (Urvet 1982, p. 29).

A powerful turning point in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education happened in the form of the 1967 Federal referendum. Until this point Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia had been classified according to the law as 'fauna'. This was in large part because the attitude since colonization had been that as an irredeemably primitive race, they were deemed incapable of exercising the rights of citizenship or appreciating its responsibilities (McGregor 1997). Moreton Robinson (2004, p. 77) points out that this 'racialized distinction between the animal and the human...operated to normalize whiteness as the measure of being human'. Until this point this faunal classification along with 'The White Australia policy' combined to make Anglo centric whiteness the definitive marker of citizenship in Australia (Moreton Robinson 2004, p. 79). So this legal shift that saw Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accorded full citizenship rights for the first time was significant in overtly addressing an issue of race. As will be discussed in later

chapters however, a legal shift does not necessarily indicate an ideological one. These citizenship rights included important rights related to education (Burridge & Chodkiewicz 2001, p. 16; Price 2012, p. 6). This 'YES' vote, supported by over 90% of the Australian population, led to an intense period of rapid change in Indigenous affairs both federally and in the Northern Territory.

### 2.2.3 1967-1979

The 1967 referendum led to much greater control of Aboriginal Education by the Commonwealth and more resources being put into consultation with communities and other stakeholders. It also led to the development of National Aboriginal Education policies for the first time (Burridge & Chodkiewicz 2001, p. 17) and the Aboriginal Consultative group, a committee of the Schools Commission (Campbell and Proctor 2014, p. 205; Burridge & Chodkiewicz 2012, p. 17). The first half of the 1970s also saw a significant growth in the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in education (Price 2012, p. 8), at least at the Federal level. While on the surface this marked an end of sorts to the assimilationist era, it is worth noting that in 1969 the ideology remains largely unchanged. For example,

The fundamental assumption is that the Australian state educational systems and their values should be taught to Aborigines: one must teach the Aborigine how to become a white Australian, then teach him a trade, and then expect achievement in the white Australian sense of the term (Tatz 1969, p. 6)

However some important structural changes happened in this period. The 1970s saw the effective end of the dual education system in the Northern Territory. In 1973 South

Australia withdrew from its involvement in the Northern Territory education system (Urvet, Heatley & Alcorta 1980; Willis 1985). On the 12 February 1973, the ALP Prime Minister Gough Whitlam announced that he had endorsed an agreement whereby education for Aborigines in the NT including adult education would become the responsibility of the Commonwealth Minister for Education. All schools at this point, which had previously been labelled as Community schools or Special Aboriginal schools, became 'Northern Territory Schools' and the NT Educational branch became responsible for a much larger system. This was part of the Whitlam government's platform to 'restore to the Aboriginal people of Australia their lost power of self-determination' (Campbell and Proctor 2014, p. 204). The Commonwealth retained control over the Northern Territory education system until 1979 when the Northern Territory was given the right to self-govern (Urvet, Heatley & Alcorta 1980, p. 18; Willis 1985, p. 47).

This era of 'self-determination' brought the local context back into focus in the Northern Territory. One example of this is the 'Outstation movement' which began during this era. This was a movement of Aboriginal people back to country away from the mission and settlements to living on their ancestral lands. In 1974 there were 8 outstations, but by 1978 this number had grown to 40 outstations across the Northern Territory (Urvet 1982, p. 42). Another significant development during this period was the formal establishment of bilingual schools in 1973 (Urvet 1982, p. 40). The language being used to announce the bilingual initiative and the educational aims in the statement below is a fascinating reflection of the shift in attitude taking place during this period:

*One of the most significant Australian Government innovations in Aboriginal*

*education has been the introduction this year of bilingual education in certain Northern Territory schools. The policy is to introduce this program, as circumstances permit, in schools where the necessary prerequisites are met. These are schools in distinctive Aboriginal communities where an Aboriginal language is the mother tongue of the children....the aim is for these children to commence their schooling in their own language, proceed to the acquisition of literacy skills in that language, then acquire literacy in English and have most of their subsequent schooling in English. The educational aim of such an approach is the development of children who are thoroughly competent in their own language and able to read and write it, who are more proficient in English than they would have been under the previous system and who are better at all their school subjects because their schooling, and their early schooling in particular, has been more interesting, enjoyable and meaningful to them. One would also expect psychological benefits from this recognition of the children's language and culture, and more enthusiastic support from the parents for the schooling their children are offered. (Tandy 1973, p. 21)*

It is worth noting the significance of this announcement and the philosophical underpinnings as the bilingual schools movement gave great impetus and momentum for the training of local teachers who could teach the first language of the children in their own communities. It was during this period that the first national targets for the training and education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander classroom teachers were established (Price 2012 p 8). The Report by O'Grady and Hale (1974) into 'Bilingual Education in the Northern Territory' also added weight to this support of education for Aboriginal staff with some of their recommendations focusing on a broadening of the Aboriginal base of the

bilingual education staff and provisions to be made for the temporary replacement of bilingual education personnel who are on leave for various courses of study. Bi-lingual education commenced in five Aboriginal school at the start of 1973, two in Central Australia – Areyonga and Hermannsburg - and three in the Top End – Angurugu, Goulburn Island and Milingimbi. Over the following few years the program expanded rapidly with sixteen schools participating by 1976 and then a further six joining the program to make a total of twenty-two bilingual schools by 1978 (Urvet 1982, p. 41).

The expansion of bilingual education provided the key impetus for the development of the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program, an on-site teacher training program for Aboriginal teachers, which commenced delivery in Yirrkala Community in North East Arnhem Land in 1976. This meant that for the first time Aboriginal people who wanted to do teacher training did not have to leave their home community (Urvet 1982, p. 41). Many of the teacher participants who are the focus of this thesis, who went on to complete teacher education came from bilingual schools and started their teacher education with the RATE program. This is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

#### **2.2.4 1979 – present day**

Willis (1985) points out that while much of the 1970s are labelled as being a time of ‘self-determination,’ a more applicable label would be the term ‘cultural adaptation’ (p. 48). She points out that the official policy of ‘self- determination’ was connected to the short lived period of the Whitlam government and that it was never adopted as a policy by the newly formed Northern Territory Government which came into existence in 1979. Willis argues that while this was a period of great change often these changes were not implemented

with adequate consultation or viable structures. In particular she notes that 'control of educational services and funds was not in the hands of Aboriginal people and no viable structures were established to bring this about'. Even the introduction of bilingual education 'was implemented without prior consultation with Aboriginal parents' (Willis 1985, p. 48). Rudolph (2013, pp. 209-210) notes that during this period while there was rhetorical support for difference, supporting it in practice proved more difficult in a society still heavily rooted in Anglo-centric institutions and ideology.

The period from the 1980s through to the present day can be best characterized as one of policy overload. Many national policies about Aboriginal education were developed in the 1980s and have subsequently undergone review after review and revision after revision, often in concert with the political agenda of the National government of the day. For example, the first Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP) was developed in New South Wales in 1982 (Aboriginal Education Unit 1995). This policy was then superseded by the National Aboriginal Education Policy, known as the AEP, in 1989 (Price 2012). Another example is the 'Aboriginal Education and Training action plan' introduced in the 1980s, revised in 2009 and relabelled the Aboriginal Education and Training policy (Burrige & Chodkiewicz 2012, p. 18). Despite these policy directions there were often very passive responses to the policies, examples of intentional or selective ignoring or failure to implement policy.

Burrige and Chodkiewicz (2012) refer to this phenomenon as subliminal prioritization of which educational policies were important and which could be ignored. Adding to this policy environment were two major reviews of Indigenous education conducted by the Northern Territory Education Department, the 'Learning Lessons Report' (Northern

Territory Department of Education, 1999) and the 'A share in the future' report (Wilson 2014).

These reviews were supplemented by the Ladwig and Sarra (2009) 'Structural Review of the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training', and the review by Nutton and others (2012) entitled 'Recruitment, retention and development of quality educators in very remote NT schools'. Not to be outdone, the Commonwealth Government, in conjunction with State and Territory governments, revised its Aboriginal policies several times during this period carrying out 'major investigations into improving the educational attainment of Aboriginal students at all levels of the educational spectrum' (Burrige & Chodkiewicz 2012, p. 19). All this culminated in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 with six priority domains, one of which is 'Leadership, quality teaching and workforce development' (Burrige & Chodkiewicz 2012, p. 19). This most recent period's main characteristic is the significant gap between policy, subsequent changes in practice and any kind of beneficial outcomes (Burrige & Chodkiewicz 2012); in other words, questionable achievement.

In summary, Willis (1985) asserts that '(d)espite differences in policy each of the four stages has been characterized by failure to involve Aboriginal people in decision making; failure to learn from overseas experiences; a concentration on child-based education and low morale in the school system' (p. 46). Russo and Rodwell (1989) also comment on the limitations of any change that took place. 'Aboriginal education has suffered from neglect, indifference, antagonism, prejudice and the cultural domination of the wider society' (p. 7). Price (2012) levels a criticism of a different kind suggesting that the introduction of the

western education system created a polar opposite experience of learning for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children compared to the learning they experienced in their own cultural system. 'Western education introduced regulated rather than staged learning, and enforced participation – as well as 'non-compliance': failure, truancy and non-attendance. These are all negative words associated with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' (Price 2012, p. 4). BurrIDGE and Chodkiewicz (2012, p. 20) suggest that 'many of the early policies were laden with preconceived colonialist, ethnocentric and civilizing notions of race and culture, their implementation proved very detrimental to the well-being of Aboriginal people'. In contrast they assert that 'the policies of the latter part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century were developed in a more consultative way, inclusive of Aboriginal voices, and were therefore more responsive to the needs of Aboriginal children, communities and protocols' (BurrIDGE & Chodkiewicz 2012, p 20). While this may well be true with respect to the *development* of more recent policies around Indigenous education, it continues to be worth asking some hard questions around the roll out, implementation and enforceability of such policies. While the tone and language of the policies may have changed, is there still selective ignoring and passive resistance to the implementation of these ideas and is such resistance still firmly embedded in the colonialist and ethnocentric views of the past?

## **2.3 Training programs and teacher education for Indigenous staff in remote schools in the Northern Territory**

### **2.3.1 Early days**

According to the MATSITI report there are early records of untrained Aboriginal teachers in mission schools and on stations (Patton et al. 2012, p. 10) but that these 'Aboriginal teacher aides' were often exploited, underpaid and delegated menial duties (Patton et al.

2012, p. 13). Ingram (2004) notes that approval for Aboriginal Teaching Assistants to work in Northern Territory Schools first happened in 1953. However very little was written on the topic of teacher training or teacher education for Indigenous people working in remote schools before the 1960s and even then the literature is sparse. Both Patton and others (2012) and Ingram (2004) suggest that the first training course for Aboriginal Teacher assistants was conducted in the 1960s. The Watts and Gallacher report into Aboriginal Schools in 1964 also makes mention of the need to extend training programs in light of the incomplete education of the teacher assistants themselves. The Watts and Gallacher report (1964) talks about the 'Master of Method' approach. In particular the authors note that,

*new possibilities for the training of assistants should fall into two main areas – training courses and follow-up work in the schools.*

and

*The Master of Method, inspectors, head teachers and teachers should cooperate in their efforts to give maximum guidance to the teaching assistants with a view to increasing their efficiency.*

Already we can see the origins of what came to be known as the 'mixed mode' or 'block release mode' approach to remote learning (Asmar, Page & Radloff 2011). There is also The 'Special Schools Bulletin' of 1967 which talks about the implementation of one such training course stating that:

*During the Christmas school vacation twelve women and eight men attended a Teacher Assistant's Course held in Darwin at the Berrimah Training Centre. Sixteen of these students had been nominated by the Missions. All nominations received*

*from Welfare Branch schools were accepted...During the course a diverse training programme was followed in which the rudiments of teaching an academic study occupied much of the day. This was normally followed by art, music or physical education taken by the specialist teacher concerned....Top attainments are still much lower than desired, but there would be many teachers' colleges in emerging countries that would appreciate a class that had the qualities and abilities shown by these teaching assistants. (Special Schools Bulletin 1967)*

The national literature on this topic really begins in Australia in the 1970s when Indigenous people began to be more formally included in teacher education programs. These programs were located in the TAFE or community education systems and it was often more community based and involved great community engagement and Aboriginal leadership (Patton et al. 2012, p. 13). It is at this time that people begin to analyze the benefits of having local people on staff in schools in the role of 'Aboriginal Teacher Aides', to use the terminology of the time (Budby & Young 1976; Cameron 1973; Dyer 1973; McClay & Bucknall 1973), or, as termed by Allen (1979) and More (1978), 'Aboriginal Teacher Assistants'. The writing comes mostly from the Northern Territory, Queensland and South Australia with some writing from New South Wales and, in the later stages, remote parts of Western Australia. The main benefits these authors identified for having 'Aboriginal Teacher Aides' or 'Assistants' in the classrooms and schools, particularly in remote communities, were to give the students adults in the school they could relate to, to increase the use of first language in class to improve engagement in learning, to facilitate the use of group work in class, to lower truancy, to help non-Indigenous staff better

understand the children they were teaching and to improve communication between the school and the parents (Cameron 1973; Dyer 1973; McClay & Bucknall 1973; Santoro & Reid 2006; Valadian & Randall 1980).

The success of these initial roles was very much measured by external indicators such as student attendance data (Cameron 1973, p. 2) and a perceived greater engagement by both students and community members, although the latter is largely characterized by the parental enforcement of school behaviours (Dyer 1973, p. 2). Another measure of success was the interest in and uptake of the positions within communities (Dyer 1973, p. 2) and the ongoing stability that these staff members provided to the schools, many having begun working in the school environment back in the mission days (Valadian & Randall 1980). Greater participation of Indigenous adults as staff members of schools led to the need for and development of training programs.

Commentary on the training of 'Teacher Aides' and 'Teacher Assistants' emphasized that the Aboriginal appointees 'grew' into these school roles (Allen 1979; Budby & Young 1979; Cameron 1973; Dyer 1973; McClay & Bucknall 1973; Valadian & Randall 1980). Much of the training at the 'Assistant' or 'Aide' level was very successful as it was developed according to the specific needs of the classrooms and schools in which people worked. Courses were often staged with multiple entry and exit points and obvious career progression (More 1978). By the mid to late 1970s concern was raised for the limited career pathway of Indigenous staff members as well as a strong sense that fully trained Aboriginal teachers would be of great benefit to schools, particularly in schools in Aboriginal communities

(Metcalf 1983; More 1978; Valadian & Randall 1980). While fully trained Indigenous teachers were seen as being hugely beneficial to creating stability, engagement and success in schools, by 1978 there were only 100 Indigenous teachers in training in the whole of Australia (Valadian & Randall 1980, p. 11).

### **2.3.2 The era of community based teacher education**

The following decade saw a large increase in the number of programs set up across Australia to train Indigenous student teachers beyond the level of 'Teacher Aides' or 'Assistants' through to qualified classroom teachers. It was during this time that programs such as the Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Teacher Education Program (later RATEP) in Queensland (Loos, 1986), the Aboriginal Teacher Education Program (ATEP) which later became AnTEP in South Australia (Adelaide College of the Arts and Education 1981), the Traditional Area Teacher Education (TATE) program in Western Australia (Metcalf 1983) and the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program at Batchelor College (Kemmis 1988) which later developed into the Deakin-Batchelor Aboriginal Teacher Education program (D-BATE) (Henry and McTaggart 1987) in the Northern Territory and the Koorie Teacher Education Program (KTEP) at Deakin University in Victoria all came into being. These programs built on what had been done at the paraprofessional level and many courses kept the staged approach to training. Participants went through the course with a cohort of their peers and much of the delivery was offered on site in their own communities with lecturers and tutors being located onsite in the community as well. Students were also required to attend brief campus-based workshops in a delivery mode known as 'mixed mode'; a form of course delivery which decreased the need for students

to have to relocate as full time on-campus students (Arbon 1998, p. 17; Bat 2011, p. 122).

This era of remote teacher education became a politically and ideologically contested space. The celebration of the success of these programs tempered by the work still needing to be done is perhaps best encapsulated by an Address to the D-BATE graduation (Lanhupuy 2002) at Batchelor College (now Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education) in 1987 by Wes Lanhupuy who highlighted the importance of having graduates from remote communities, but also the responsibility these graduates had to those communities. Coupled with this community expectation of graduates, the community based cohort programs came under a lot of scrutiny and often criticism. Statistical success was often measured in terms of graduates versus dropouts or by the longer timeframe that was required for people to complete the course (Adelaide College of the Arts and Education 1982; Kemmis 1988; Loos 1986). For those who were close to completion or had graduated and were working in classroom their success was often tempered by questions raised over proficiency in English and their ability to take on all of the roles expected of a classroom teacher (Buckley 1996; Harris, Odling-Smee & Graham 1985). In the literature available it must be pointed out that these latter questions were being raised only by non-Indigenous researchers and authors. In fact with the exception of Bunbury and others (1991) there is very little literature available in the 1980s and early 1990s that contains any experiential reflections from the Indigenous teachers themselves. Program success is most often voiced through official reports (McGarvie 1991) or through non-Indigenous philosophical position papers that seem to fall on a continuum of extremes.

### 2.3.3 Articulation of Indigenous knowledge positions on remote schooling

By the mid to late 1990s and early 2000s however, the literature is starting to contain some Indigenous voices articulating their experiences of their own learning journey and their role as teachers in schools. An eloquent example of this is Dr Raymattja Marika's article 'Milthun Latju Wana Romgu Yolngu: Valuing Yolngu Knowledge in the Education System' (1999). There she speaks of her foundational knowledge in the Yolngu belief system as taught by the Elders, attending a mission school, beginning work at the school in 1976 where her job was to type stories the old people had made and transcribing them. She speaks of the significance of the introduction of bilingual education under the Whitlam government, the initial staircase model, the shift from bilingual education to bicultural education and the development of a 'both ways' curriculum involving the Elders. In her own words the significance of this shift was that:

*Education means more than just having print literacy in two languages – it means having strong emphasis on Yolngu knowledge as well. In doing this we are trying to get away from the 'Three Little Pigs in Gumatj' idea and bring proper cultural knowledge into the school. (Marika 1999, p112)*

Significant work was done in many remote schools in the NT during this period to develop truly bicultural curriculum that drew strongly on local language and knowledge systems. This work gave true meaning and purpose to Indigenous teachers from the local community working in these schools. The book 'Aboriginal Pedagogy: Aboriginal Teachers Speak Out' (Bunbury et al 1991), in which D-BATE graduates contribute a chapter each, is an important collection from that era where Aboriginal teachers published their own action

research and reflections on education in their own communities. Other graduates of these programs such as Ober and Bulsey (1998), also DBATE graduates, share their own reflections based on their experience as graduates about how students can best be supported and developed during their tertiary educational experience. The book 'Strong Voices' (Blitner et al. 2000) released almost a decade after 'Aboriginal Pedagogy', brings together another group of teacher education candidates from remote communities in the NT to share their views and reflections on Indigenous education and pedagogy. However, while these important conversations, deeply rooted in epistemological and pedagogical understandings about education, are occurring there are simultaneously alarming developments in the national education agenda that is undermining the work these schools and teachers are doing. In particular the introduction of standardized testing (MAP), literacy benchmarks and language profiling (Marika 1999, pp. 10-11).

Meanwhile Batchelor Colleges' RATE delivery model continued to be a politically contested space. One non-Indigenous teacher educator at Batchelor during the 1990s reflected the following about this era:

*Both Ways education was what we grappled with in the course of our daily work in an endeavour to make the space between Western and Indigenous knowledge and education systems a vibrant place for new and meaningful learning. In those years I learnt over and over again what it means as an educator to listen to all perspectives and attempt to respond with humility and integrity in a mutual search for a greater quality of life. I left with just as many if not more questions about what it means to*

*work in education in a way that opens options for people in their lives and does not close them. (Gillespie 2003, p. 60)*

Indigenous academics such as Veronica Arbon (1998) pointed out that at Batchelor while 'strong notions of transformation exist in the 'both ways' concept....no paradigm of dialogue and contestation of knowledge exists' (p. 18). While this philosophical debate was occurring within the leadership and staff, funding and delivery models were also changing during this period with the first signs of a shift towards the Vocational Education system appearing.

#### **2.3.4 Recent years**

More recently some attempts at what these programs have achieved over the last three decades have been made. Bat's 2011 thesis, in addition to providing a comprehensive literature review focusing in part on the development of teacher education in the Northern Territory, particularly at Batchelor Institute, provides some personal evaluative narratives from graduates of the teacher education program, although not specifically from candidates from remote communities in the Northern Territory. Hall and others (2010) report on the progress and success of the Indigenous Teacher Upgrade Program (ITUP) conducted in the Arnhem and Central Australia regions of the NT. This program offered many former RATE graduates a community based option to upgrade from a three year qualification to a four year Bachelor Degree. At the same time a process of evaluation and reflection has occurred particularly for the RATEP program in Queensland (Bethel, 2006) and the AnTEP program in South Australia (Osborne & Underwood, 2010). The latter is of

particular interest as this review made significant use of conversations with Anangu participants to evaluate the program.

However, based on the literature available there has been no intentional listening to the graduates who have come from remote NT communities and progressed through different incarnations of remote teacher education programs about their experiences as students of the programs. This has left many questions unanswered, for example: where is the space for the students/ teachers' own perceptions of their success and what helped and hindered them in achieving this success? What learning and understanding could potentially be developed by the educational institutions by listening to these stories of success as experienced from the inside of the journey?

Additionally, the number of new teachers coming through and graduating from remote communities has dropped dramatically in recent years. Bat (2011, p. 132) suggests that the early to mid-1990s should be considered the most successful period of remote teacher education for Batchelor with 'large numbers enrolled across all three years (stages 2, 3 and 4) of the program, with most of these students coming from the Aboriginal communities of the Northern Territory'. However, Bat (2011 p. 133-135) points out that by the end of this decade, while the teacher education enrolments at Batchelor were still high, completions were dropping and there was a shift in the community-base of enrolments with enrolments coming mainly from Interstate communities instead of from communities in the Northern Territory.

Bat (2011) attributes these trends to a number of factors, namely a shift away from community-based delivery and an increased focus on-campus based delivery due to

funding and difficulty recruiting staff. She also notes that a more regulated Higher Education system at the time forced courses to develop standardized assessment measures such as the Graduate Attributes, which perhaps constricted the flexibility and contextual applicability of the teacher education courses (Bat 2011, p. 136). This more highly regulated, nationalized and standardized system of teacher education that emerged in the late 1990s had significant impacts on small, context specific, flexible delivery models such as had been developed in the Northern Territory by Batchelor College, now the Batchelor Institute for Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE). The nature and consequences of this shift will be explored in Chapter 3 as part of a detailed policy analysis.

## **Chapter 3 – The evolution of the political and policy context of teacher education in Australia and the impact on Indigenous Teachers – a review of literature**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will explore the evolution of the political and policy domains of teacher education at the national level in Australia and how these changes have impacted on Indigenous teachers and their career pathways. It will specifically look at the nationalisation of teacher education and the shift to an outcomes based, standards approach to accreditation at the National and Northern Territory levels. Additionally it will explore paradigm shifts in thinking, the positioning of teachers through the use of terms such as ‘quality teaching’ and the intense focus in recent years on ‘literacy and numeracy’. Through an analysis of policies, reports and review documentation this chapter will examine the environment within which remote teacher education in the Northern Territory sits and the ways these external factors have impacted on the work of Indigenous teachers in remote community schools and their ability to pursue teacher education as a career pathway that leads to full qualification.

This type of policy based analysis is important because as Critical Race theorists (for example Gillborn 2005, Vass 2015, Leonardo 2009) remind us the educational policy framework tends to be built on what has come before it, with contemporary policy assumed to be improving on and adapting to evolving circumstances and demands. This policy behaviour is associated with a ‘sanitized (White-washed) version of history (that) envisions policy as a rational process of change, with each step building incrementally on its predecessor in a more-or-less linear and evolutionary fashion’ (Gillborn 2005, p. 486).

This approach to policy development serves to ‘deflect attention from engaging with the racialized foundations from which they emanate’ (Vass 2015, p 381) and relies on ‘race-neutral’ assumptions that pave over the political and socio-historical events that created and now sustain the race-based inequities (Leonardo 2009). The impact of this approach to policy in the area of Indigenous teacher education will be explored in greater depth in Chapter 8.

This chapter is again divided into a number of parts. Part one looks at the evolution of the politics and policy of teacher education in Australia. It covers the origins and historical development of the teacher education system in Australia, the various significant political paradigms shifts that have occurred within teacher education, as well as the national reviews, regulation, increased emphasis on teacher accountability and the ‘Quality’ agenda that has risen to prominence since the 1990s. Part two looks at the implications of the nationalisation and standardisation of the teaching ‘profession’ including how the term ‘quality’ has become a kind of invisible binary when talking about teachers. Part two also explores the impact of the introduction of Professional Standards for Teachers at the national level and the evolution of the requirement for National Literacy and Numeracy testing in teacher education. Part three asks the question ‘Where are the Indigenous teachers?’ in this national conversation. It explores the historical and political positioning of Indigenous teachers as the system has become more nationalised and standardized. It examines the initiatives taken at the national level to increase the number of Indigenous teachers, as well as exploring why these initiatives so often fail. Part four brings the conversation more specifically back to the focus group of this doctoral study, the Northern Territory and the remote Indigenous teaching workforce. It looks at the ‘smoke and

mirrors' effect of successive reviews and reports that have all drawn the same conclusions about the number of Indigenous teachers in Australia while never actually improving the outcomes. Finally it explores the impact of regulation and streamlining of teacher education in the Northern Territory on remote Indigenous teachers.

### **3.2 The evolution of the politics and policy of teacher education in Australia**

In the conclusion of the latest federal review into teacher education in Australia, its report entitled 'Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers' (2014) states:

*The Advisory Group acknowledges that initial teacher education in Australia has previously been the subject of a large number of reviews, the outcomes of which have had limited impact on the policy and practice of developing new teachers. The Advisory Group is determined that the proposals in this report make a real difference to the Australian teaching profession (Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers 2014, p. 49).*

Precisely what will make this report different to all of the others is not exactly clear. The thing that is clear is that teacher education is one of the most scrutinised, examined, reported, debated and analysed areas of government policy (Aspland 2006; Dyson 2005). Since 1990, Aspland (2006 p. 141) names no fewer than nine reports and reviews into teacher education in a 16-year period. The 'Top of the Class' report contains an appendix listing 103 separate teacher education inquiries at National and State level between 1979 and 2006 (Top of the Class 2007, pp. 169-179). In the period since then there have been at least three additional national reviews. This intense interest in the work of schools and teachers is often used as political leverage and takes into consideration the widespread

commentary and opinions from parents, politicians and members of the general public. To understand how this extraordinarily scrutinized system has come into being it is important to briefly trace the roots back to the origins of teacher education in Australia and observe its development and the political agendas and philosophical developments that have influenced the shifts and changes.

### **3.2.1 The origins of teacher education in Australia**

Both Aspland (2006) and Dyson (2005) give a comprehensive description of the origins of teacher education in Australia. They both identify the initial apprenticeship based system where the school and the classroom were seen as the primary site of learning the role of being a teacher. They also note that a move towards a more formal college-based educational approach to teacher preparation did not emerge in Australia until the early 1900s with a mandated minimum requirement of one year formal teacher preparation and a more theory based approach rather than the previous practical model (Aspland 2006; Dyson 2005). Dyson (2005) talks about the post-World War Two era as having a vocational approach to teacher training when teacher preparation happened primarily at State controlled and funded Teacher's Colleges with an emphasis placed on basic knowledge and skills. Hyams (1980) also denotes the important expansion of the 'Teacher College' system in the post war 'baby boom' era to meet the teacher shortage. Before World War II there were nine Teacher's Colleges nationally, but by 1964 there were twenty-nine throughout Australia. The shortage of teachers was also solved by standards of entry being lowered and the duration of courses shortened. Dyson (2005) points out that this type of changeability in standards and expectations can be seen throughout the history of teacher

education in Australia with what is expedient and cheap for the state governments becoming the accepted practice. This has created a conflict between meeting a demand created by a teacher shortage but also keeping the 'teacher quality' high which has become an entrenched discourse in teacher education in Australia.

A binary system of tertiary education existed for many years in Australia. Teacher Colleges were part of the advanced education system, which was seen as preparing the vocational or service providers of society, while universities, with their research orientation, were there to prepare graduates for work in the 'professions' (Dyson 2005, p. 44). In the 1970s this discourse began to change and teaching began to be talked about as a 'profession'. For example:

*As it is 'of the mind' teaching has to be studied, thought about and discussed. ...As teaching is a creative art, it must be practised, analysed, re-thought and practised again. This requires observation and practice teaching in schools and the time and equipment necessary for close, sophisticated analysis of this observation and performance (Swanson 1973, p. 11).*

By the late 1970s it was apparent that teacher education had become a fully integrated component of the Australian tertiary education system ultimately being brought into the university arena and included into the national system of higher education (Aspland 2006; Dyson 2005). The recent MATSITI report points to questions at the time around the ability of universities to deliver courses that had traditionally required a great deal of community engagement stating that, 'the involvement of universities led to concerns about the

responsibility of universities for tertiary preparation, given the limited schooling of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who sought entry in the program.

Universities could provide 'real' credentials but had less experience with community engagement' (Patton et al. 2012, p. 13). Connell (2009) talks about the significance of this major paradigm shift with the development of the idea of what constituted a teacher from the 'obedient servant' model (Connell 2009, p. 215) to the more 'reflective practitioner' and 'scholar-teacher' models (Connell 2009, p. 216) as teacher education became the purview of universities. She also notes the shift again to the current 'competent teacher' model (Connell 2009, p. 217) where the role of the teacher is connected with the growth of a market-oriented political and cultural order.

### **3.2.2 Political paradigms of teacher education**

Teacher education in Australia cannot be separated out from the broader political shifts that have occurred with regard to education. In 1973 the Karmel Report produced under the national Whitlam government was underpinned by a commitment to promoting equality of outcomes in schooling by making the 'overall circumstances of children's education as nearly equal as possible' (Karmel 1973, p. 139). Welsh (1999), notes that this position was consistent with the progressivist educational philosophy of the 1960s and 1970s, which focused primarily on the needs of the individual child and on social justice within society. This correlates with the period of 'self-determination' (Willis 1985, Campbell and Proctor 2014) and 'Aboriginalisation' (Rogers 1991, Reaburn 1989) policies in relation to remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. However, as Fogarty, Lovell and Dodson (2015, p 5) point out, Indigenous education has always been at the

whim of political shifts and as a result has oscillated between locally, self-determined educational control and the more statistically driven pursuit of standardized educational norms. All of these more contemporary shifts were of course happening in the shadow of the unresolved historical legacy of institutionalized racism (Fogarty 2012).

The economic climate in the 1980s, namely the diminishing rather than expanding resources, and an increasing concern to ensure 'value for money', meant that governments were increasingly focused on the connection between education, the labour market and the economy (Welsh 1999). The year 1985 saw the report of the Quality of Education Review Committee (QERC), *Quality of education in Australia* (Karmel 1985). This report marked a shift to a greater focus on outcomes rather than inputs in the provision of funding, and on the effectiveness and efficiency of programs (Welsh 1999). Lokan (1997, p.1) describes this period in the 1980s as the 'paradigm shift from focusing on individual students as learners to an economics-driven concern with achieving pre-specified outcomes'. This marked the move to a focus on outcomes-based education, the development of national curriculum frameworks, and a common set of generic competencies to underpin the increased participation in Years 11 and 12 (Welsh 1999). Connell (2009) asserts that this move to outcomes based, more accountable education systems was part of a broad shift towards neoliberal policies and assumptions connected to the shift towards globalization as well as by the spread of economic-rationalist ideology. Part of this shift was a push for 'competencies' for teachers. The teacher-competency model was connected with the 'growth of a market-oriented political and cultural order'

(Connell 2009, p. 217). It is against this paradigm shift that teacher education began to be reviewed more directly at the national level.

### 3.2.3 National reviews, regulation, teacher accountability and the 'Quality' agenda

The first nation-wide review of teacher education known as the National Inquiry into Teacher Education (NITE), or the 'Auchmuty report' happened in 1980 (Dyson 2005). The main focus of the report was to shift teacher education 'from a narrow trade-based vocational approach to a broader more professional approach and from certificates and diplomas to degrees in education' (Auchmuty 1980, p. xxv). In 1987 under the Federal Minister for Education, Dawkins, the binary system of tertiary education was replaced by the unified national system of tertiary education that still exists today (Aspland 2006 p. 152; Dyson 2005 p. 45). It was at this point that the 'quality' discourse began to emerge when talking about teachers and teacher education.

In 1988 Dawkins is quoted as saying:

*The quality of teaching is central to the quality of our schools.... We must examine means of improving the initial and on-going training of teachers to meet the demands of a changing educational, economic, and social world (Dawkins cited in Dwyer 1990, p. 103).*

The 'pursuit of quality' became the hallmark of the 90's namely:

*...there must be greater effort to attract people into the teaching profession who are able and suited to teaching; teacher education must be improved in both quality and outcomes and must pay greater attention to pedagogy and practical experience... These reforms are only achievable through the cooperative efforts of employers, higher*

*education institutions, schools, teachers and governments and through the development of a unified teaching profession (Howe 1991, p. 59).*

Bold recommendations such as a three-year university-based program of preparation followed by a two-year part time internship/ 'associateship' were suggested as models for initial Teacher Education (Dyson 2005). As early as 1990, national teacher registration and a national professional body of teachers were being called for as a mechanism to ensure 'quality' (Dyson 2005, p. 48). The policy statement, 'Teaching Counts' (Beazley 1993) was broadly supported for its themes of a balance in theory and practice, a strong knowledge base, professionalism, partnerships and flexibility within teacher education programs as the essential components contributing to the renewal of teacher education (Dyson 2005). However the pendulum was about to swing again with a subsequent policy change and defunding when there was a change from Labor to Coalition governments at the federal level. As the government changes so too does the agenda in teacher education (Dyson 2005). By March 1996, the Commonwealth's policy agenda for schools was focused closely on the establishment of a National Literacy and Numeracy Goal, national benchmarks for student achievement and targets for performance against national goals for schooling (Welsh 1999). This marked the beginning of an audit culture in education, which included the push for national testing, for 'league tables' of schools and for the creation of the teacher registration institutions that would operate separately from teacher education institutions (Connell 2009).

'Quality' was increasingly being 'measured' in terms of outcomes. According to Welsh (1999) quality was not talked about much until 'outcomes' were in vogue mostly because of the view that quality could now be quantified through outcomes data. There was a prevailing climate of 'outcomes-driven' economic rationalism where policy activity related to issues of accountability, assessment monitoring, performance indicators, quality assurance and school effectiveness (Rowe 2003). In order to enforce this outcomes-driven, data-quantified, 'quality teachers' agenda, teacher education had to be more tightly regulated. The push for nationalisation continued in the form of 'National Competencies' of quality teachers and the 'National Standards and Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education' were produced in 1998 despite the recognition that 'the development of explicit standards for such a highly contextualised profession as teaching would be very difficult' (Dyson 2005 p. 49).

By the end of the 1990s, and in response to 'low morale' of teachers resulting from the perceived 'lack of status in the teaching profession' (Dyson 2005 p. 50), the development of National Professional Teaching Standards and a teacher registration body (Australian Parliament Senate Employment, Education and Training References Committee & Crowley 1998) was recommended as the panacea. This was at least in part also a response to the concern that 'quality' new recruits to education would not be found to replace the aging teaching force if the status of teaching was not increased (Dyson 2005). These more 'nationalised' conversations about teacher education in the 1980s and 1990s moved teaching away from the context-driven vocational perspectives to a standardized, professional approach to teacher education.

### 3.3 The implications of the nationalisation and standardisation of the teaching 'profession'

While this nationalisation and standardisation of the 'profession' across the country did resolve some of the issues faced previously, it also raised other areas of concern. Having a common approach to course length and some national understandings of what it meant to be a teacher did not leave a lot of room for consideration of the regional and contextual differences in the experience of 'being a teacher' across Australia. With the advent of and increasing delegation of responsibility to a national peak body, originally named 'Teaching Australia' and in its current form as the Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL), nationally coherent rules were developed in the form of the National Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership viewed 24/9/2015a). These professional standards outlined what teachers had to know, do and be in order to be good enough to teach in Australia's schools. Parallel to these standards were additional regulations about what teacher education courses had to include in order to prepare teachers to meet these Professional Standards (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership 2011). Connell (2009) highlights the danger of these developments warning that,

*The Standards framework embeds the neoliberal distrust of teachers' judgment. What teachers do is decomposed into specific, auditable competencies and performances. The framework is not only specified in managerialist language. It embeds an individualized model of the teacher that is deeply problematic for a public education system. The arbitrariness of the dot-point lists means that any attempt to enforce them, on the practice of teachers or on teacher education programmes, will*

*mean an arbitrary narrowing of practice. This cannot be a good thing to do, when in conditions of global integration and social diversity, education needs to become culturally richer. (p. 223)*

This move towards a 'standards' approach to teacher education has further homogenized conceptions about what constitutes 'quality' teaching in terms of accepted 'standards' that lead to managerial perceptions of 'normality' when it comes to 'good' teaching. It is important to question whose perspectives on 'good' teaching these conceptions of 'quality' are based upon.

### **3.3.1 'Quality' as an invisible binary**

The use of the word 'quality' has also become a rhetorical device in reports and reviews about teaching and teacher education. 'Quality' is one of those terms that is hard to argue against. No one wants to raise their voice against the idea of 'quality teaching and learning'. But it is a dangerous term in that it sets up an invisible binary. If something can be measured as high quality then other things can be relegated as low or lower quality. It is increasingly ubiquitous in documents and papers written about teachers, and has developed into the default position of how we wish to define the professional role of teachers. The extent to which this is true can perhaps best be understood by looking at a selection of the national reviews on teacher education specifically for the use of this word. In the 2007 'Top of the Class' national review of teacher education the word 'quality' is used 120 times in the 119 pages of the main body of the report. The attitude of the report's authors towards what constitutes 'quality' can perhaps be best synthesized by this excerpt:

*It is not enough to have academic aptitude to be an effective teacher nor is academic performance a reliable indicator of whether a student possesses the wide range of other attributes required of a teacher. The other attributes cited include: a knowledge and enjoyment of the subject they teach; an ability to acquire new knowledge and understanding; 'other directedness' or recognition of and responsiveness to the distinctive, individual needs and interests of others; favourable attitudes to children; a sense of calling and a strong motivation to teach; and, specified levels of literacy and numeracy (Top of the Class 2007, pp. 53-54).*

It is worth noting at this point that the terms 'literacy and numeracy' are used a total of 28 times in the body of the 'Top of the Class' (2007) report.

By 2014 when the next major national review of teacher education was completed, the 'Action Now: Classroom ready teachers' report contains more than double the frequency of usage of the word 'quality'. The 51 pages in the main body of the report contain 126 uses of the word 'quality'. This report sets out the following as its vision of what constitutes 'quality':

*While there may be no single factor that can predict success in teaching, research on teacher characteristics and student outcomes has found that using a broad set of measures can help improve the quality of teachers. Predictors include teaching-specific content knowledge, cognitive ability, personality traits, feelings of self-efficacy and scores on a commercially available teacher selection instrument (Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers 2014, p. 13).*

The 'commercially available teacher selection instrument' refers to the recently developed 'National Literacy and Numeracy test for pre-service teachers' (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, viewed 24/9/2015). This test will be discussed further below. It is worth noting that in this 2014 report the frequency of the use of the terms 'literacy and numeracy' has increased sixfold with 72 usages in the 51 pages of the report. Despite lip service being paid to the other 'qualities' of teachers, it is clear numerically and semantically that the 'literacy and numeracy' abilities of teachers are valued highly by the reviewers as a major contributor to the formation of a 'quality' teacher. This shows a distinct bias towards those who come from an English speaking, Western knowledge background. What is never addressed in any of these reports is the persistent problem that when faced with teaching Indigenous students many non-Indigenous teachers lack the necessary knowledge and skills and struggle to address the needs of these learners (Santoro & Reid 2006). 'Quality' by this definition is clearly skewed towards a whiteness bias.

An interesting example of this whiteness bias shows up in the 'Teach for Australia' program. This program allows university graduates with a non-education first degree and six weeks of 'teacher education' to be dispatched to schools in regional and remote Northern Territory as fully accredited teachers (Galtry 2015). This is an interesting development in the light of the national requirement for a 4-year qualification and the conversations about 'teacher quality'. This in many ways harks back to earlier observation of the entrenched pendulum swing in teacher education between ensuring professional readiness in teachers and meeting the demands of teacher shortages, particularly in rural

and remote communities. The choice to fund the 'Teach for Australia' program demonstrates how the system privileges the qualities intrinsic in white, middle class, English speaking, university educated candidates as opposed to local, Indigenous language speaking, remote teacher education candidates from the same communities where the teacher shortages exist.

### **3.3.2 National Professional Standards for teachers and National Literacy and Numeracy testing for teacher education**

Discourse around teacher education in Australia in the first decade and a half of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has been dominated by consideration and development of and adherence to National Professional Standards for Teachers. In fact the initial ideas about 'standards' that would ensure 'quality' teachers looked at the need for standards at a number of levels including standards for entry into teacher education programs, standards for tertiary qualifications, accreditation standards and registration standards (Ingvarson, 2002). The first two have largely been the domain of the Higher Education providers of teacher education courses, while the latter two have been under the purview of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL). In a policy briefing report advising on the development of a national standards framework Ingvarson (2002) goes into great detail about the benefits, uses, application and structure of such a framework. However any discussion of the 'context' of teaching is limited to curriculum areas and levels of teaching. No consideration of the geographical, cultural or linguistic context of teaching is explored in this formative document. This then sets the tone and emphasis for the further development of the National Teaching Standards, which were ultimately endorsed by Education Ministers from all States and Territories in Australia in October 2011 (Australian

Institute of Teaching and School Leadership, viewed 24/9/2015b). These standards, along with the National Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education courses (Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership 2011), have become the yardsticks that are now used in Australia to ensure and measure teacher 'quality'.

There was some questioning and criticism of the role such standards would play and what their impact would be. Connell (2009, p. 218) points out that these standards documents that are being used by teacher registration bodies have become the 'most important definitions of the good teacher'. However she is highly critical of the disconnected and 'dot point' nature of the standards document suggesting that '(t)he lists do not come from any systematic view of Education as a field of knowledge' (Connell 2009, p. 218). Connell is also highly suspicious of the influence of the neoliberal agenda in the construction of the development of standards stating that:

*The stratification of the workforce that is sought by neoliberal agendas of individual competition among workers is thus built into the definition of teacher professionalism...They (the standards) construct the good teacher as an entrepreneurial self, forging a path of personal advancement through the formless landscape of market society with its shadowy stakeholders and its endless challenges and opportunities (Connell 2009, pp. 219- 220).*

She further warns of the inherent dangers of this kind of a system:

*Good teaching...needs also to be diverse. A well-functioning school needs a range of capabilities and performances among its teachers. Given the diversity of the pupils and their communities, a school should have among its teachers a range of*

*ethnicities, class backgrounds, gender and sexual identities, age groups and levels of experience. Any definition of teacher quality, any system of monitoring or promotion, that tends to impose a single model of excellence on the teaching workforce – whatever that model may be – is likely to be damaging to the education system as a whole (Connell 2009, p. 223).*

Unfortunately such warnings do not seem to have been heeded. In fact, quite the opposite has happened. Even greater standardisation and restrictions are being placed on admission into the teaching profession through the focus on 'literacy and numeracy' levels of teachers. This becomes evident in the 2007 Top of the Class report which stated that:

*'it is...desirable that students' literacy and numeracy skills are assessed when entering courses, not in order to exclude students from teacher education courses, but as a diagnostic tool to assist universities to support students to develop the required level of skills' ... 'Teacher education courses should guarantee that all students who graduate with a qualification in education have thoroughly demonstrated that they have high level literacy and numeracy skills' (Top of the Class 2007, pp. 59-60).*

By the 2014 'Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers' report this idea had become much more prescriptive with a requirement for 'entrants to initial teacher education programs to have personal literacy and numeracy levels broadly equivalent to the top 30 per cent of the population' (Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers 2014, p. 12). By 2015 a measurement mechanism had also been developed in the form of 'The Test – a national Literacy and Numeracy test for pre-service teachers' (Australian Government Department of Education

and Training, viewed 24/9/2015). In a statement about the role of this test the federal government department of education states the following:

*The Australian Government believes that the first step to achieving a quality education, which is so critical for the future of young Australians and our nation, is to focus on the quality, professionalism, and status of the teaching profession. One aspect of lifting quality is to ensure that teachers possess the strong personal literacy and numeracy skills needed to foster the development of these skills in their students. To give effect to improving the literacy and numeracy of teachers, the Australian Government is introducing the Literacy and Numeracy Test for Initial Teacher Education Students (the Test). The Test will assist higher education providers, teacher employers and the general public to have increased confidence in the skills of graduating teachers (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, viewed 24/9/2015).*

So pervasive and ubiquitous is the neo-colonial discourse in these kinds of reports that it is not even considered necessary to add 'English' when talking about literacy. Once again we see diversity in both learners and teachers not even being given fringe consideration. All teacher education candidates, no matter what their own cultural and linguistic background, no matter what the context of their intended teaching work, must now have their literacy skills measured by exactly the same yardstick as candidates whose first language is English.

### **3.4 Where are the Indigenous teachers?**

Reference to and about Indigenous teachers in the overall national teacher education discourse could be characterised as fringe at best and is frequently an afterthought. When it is brought under the microscope the discussion tends to focus predominantly around target setting so as to reflect population demographics, as well as a kind of surreptitious ongoing colonial discourse about whether it is realistic to think that Indigenous teachers will ever be equal in quality and ability to their non-Indigenous counterparts. Once again, to understand the subtle and not-so-subtle positioning of Indigenous teachers in the broader system of teacher education, we need to explore the past and examine the intentions of policies, programs and politics.

#### **3.4.1 The historical and political positioning of Indigenous teachers**

As detailed in the previous chapter, the latter half of the 1970s and early 1980s were a time of great focus around locally contextualised programs and policies that supported Indigenous teachers in remote schools. In 1978 and 1979 the first major national research was done into 'teacher education for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders' (National Aboriginal Education Committee 1986). This research examined delivery models in operation in Western Australia, South Australia, Queensland and the Northern Territory and made a submission to the 1980 National Inquiry into Teacher Education (Auchmuty 1980). Included in this submission was the analysis that the still 'low numbers of Aboriginal teachers' should be seen as an area of 'critical need' and the recommendation of specific targets to bring the number of Indigenous teachers in line with the proportion of Indigenous students in Australian schools. These initial targets aimed to increase the

number of Indigenous teachers from the 72 trained teachers in 1979 to 1000 by 1990. However by 1986 the National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) was warning that based on the programs that had been thus far introduced to support Indigenous teacher education, by 1990 it would be more realistic to expect only 500 qualified Indigenous teachers nation-wide (National Aboriginal Education Committee 1986, p 3). In the Northern Territory specifically the NAEC noted that in 1982 there was a specific target to reach 137 qualified Indigenous teachers. This represented an increase of 134 from the existing 3 in the NT in 1982.

In 1980 a report entitled 'The training of Aborigines for teaching in the Aboriginal Schools of the Northern Territory' (Penny 1980) was also produced. This report had a more specific focus just on the Northern Territory and even specifically on remote schools with high numbers of Indigenous students. This report was done in conjunction with the NAEC. It was authored by a non-Indigenous researcher, W.H. Penny. In the initial pages he identifies some background factors. He notes that 'all research studies show that Aboriginal pupils are, under the present system of schooling, achieving very low standards in literacy and numeracy' (Penny 1980, p. 3). He also recognises the position of the National Aboriginal Education Committee on this issue which is that 'In order to ensure the effectiveness of educational services for Aboriginal people, Aborigines should play the major part in the delivery of those services. This requires an immediate and substantial increase in programs...to employ Aborigines in the field of education' (Penny quoting from NAEC 1980, p. 4).

Interestingly Penny (1980) almost immediately seeks to qualify or question this position by saying that 'An important task of this report will be to consider whether a hastened Aboriginalization of Settlement school staffs will achieve what members of NAEC and many other Aborigines so earnestly seek' (p. 4) and he also notes 'the uneasiness of officers and Balanda (non-Indigenous) teachers in the Education Department of the Northern Territory about the general level of attainments of children in Aboriginal Schools, about the educational qualifications and training of many of the Aboriginal members of staff and in particular about their competencies to take sustained charge of a class' (Penny 1980, p. 4). This mention of 'uneasiness' is one of most tangible examples of the ongoing colonial discourse still at play in the schooling system of the Northern Territory. While by 1980 the discourse has moved beyond one of Indigenous people being labelled as 'uneducable' as they were in the first half of the twentieth century, the use of the terms 'hastened' and 'uneasiness' perhaps expose a constant and enduring lack of belief on the part of non-Indigenous stakeholders about the educational pathways possible for Indigenous students and teachers. In these two examples we see great emphasis being placed on the importance of Indigenous teachers, but again the resistance of the Western educational systems to actually bring the reality of increased Indigenous participation to fruition. Passive resistance is also evident in the lack of political and economic support for programs to meet targets and the attitudes implicit in the language of the reports being written. This will be explored further in due course.

### 3.4.2 Learning lessons

The 1990s is a period of scarcity of reports that focus on Indigenous teacher education at any level in Australia. Perhaps this is reflective of the neoliberal agenda that took hold during the period and the fact that most of the work in education was focused around the shift to outcomes based and standardised systems. Importantly though the 'Learning Lessons' report was released in the Northern Territory in 1999. This independent review by Collins into Indigenous education in the Northern Territory (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999) was the most in-depth review in two decades. The 'Learning Lessons' report was scathing in its assessment of many aspects related to Indigenous Education and in particular remote Indigenous education. In the area of staffing remote schools the report took aim at two important areas: the recruitment, retention and training of non-local teachers, and the attitudes towards, treatment of and support for local teachers. It was important to address both of these aspects of staffing as remote schools relied on both to function.

The 'Learning Lessons' report brings into sharp focus the dysfunctionality caused by the high turnover of non-local staff. Collins drew on earlier research which suggests that in the mid-1980s the average period of service for non-local teachers in Central Australian communities was six months (Young 1996). The 'Learning Lessons' report, while being highly critical of the inability of the Northern Territory Department of Education's data records to provide accurate information, was able to verify the 'widespread understanding that Indigenous teachers are in place far longer than non-Indigenous teachers' (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 76). Collins points in particular to the 'costs of

high staff turnover...from a recruitment and induction point of view', but suggests that 'of even greater concern is the educational impact' (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 77). Once again the author of this report was highly critical that there was obvious data available about the actual dollar cost of recruitment and retention. He did however point out that 'the short term teacher transiting through a community gets a far richer and more rewarding educational experience for themselves than they are ever able to impart to their students (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 77). At the same time there was an emphasis on the crucial support provided by the local Indigenous staff. One respondent to the review offered the following reflection,

*I'm in my second term now and I still don't know how to even program a lesson for these kids. Nothing I did in my training prepared me for this. If it wasn't for the help I'm getting from the Indigenous staff, I wouldn't know what I was doing* (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 83)

This seems to bear out the assessment of the 'Learning Lessons' report, which suggested that 'the school relies for stability on local Indigenous staff and faces a constant stream of new staff' (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 71). The report also emphasized the crucial value of teaching partnerships between non-local and local staff (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 82). These findings are important as they raise nuanced positions to begin to answer the question 'what is 'quality' teaching and learning?' How high can the quality of teaching and learning be in remote schools when the teacher turnover is so high and those who come from outside the community say 'I don't know how to program a lesson for these kids'? The attribution of 'quality' being connected to a university qualification seems to come into question in this context that relies so

heavily on the knowledge and skills of the Indigenous paraprofessionals working in the schools (Santoro & Reid 2006). De Plevitz (2007, p. 65) points out that there is a major problem with educational systems that 'assume that teacher quality is similar across schools and that every teacher provides the same standard of education' but then rely heavily on new and inexperienced teachers to teach for short periods of time in rural and remote communities which are notorious for their high teacher turnover (De Plevitz 2007, Fovet and Hall 2012, Hall 2012). This reliance on teachers staying in schools for a short time undermines the time it takes for teachers from outside the community and not embedded in the community culture to develop understandings of the local culture, history, language and family qualities which are necessary to be an effective and successful teacher of Indigenous students in these communities (De Plevitz 2007; Santoro & Reid 2006). Critical of this kind of policy and practice De Plevitz suggests that 'Indigenous students in schools affected by a policy that encourages a turnover of staff are more likely to be denied the continuity and stability of experienced staff essential for a quality education' (De Plevitz 2007, p. 66). This creates an inevitable paradox where the belief that 'quality' can be streamlined and measured results in children receiving less than 'quality' teaching.

The 'Learning Lessons' report was bold in its recommendation that 'the long term strategy in remote schools is to increase community control with more local staff supported by non-local teachers' (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 83). The report found that trained local teachers were 'much more stable' (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 89) than non-local teachers and that stability was the key to student attendance and learning (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 83). This

insight again reinforces the need to question national conceptions of 'quality' teaching as applied to the locally contextualized circumstances of these remote communities. The report points to not only the benefits for the school but indeed for the whole community, of having people with Higher Education qualifications from the local community. The report at one point suggests that 'there can be no better role models to convince Indigenous parents and their children of the value of education than the alumni of Batchelor Institute' (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 89). However, the report also points out the extreme inequity of the treatment of 'local' verses 'non-local' recruits. In the areas of housing, conditions, pay and incentives and classroom conditions there was, in 1999, one rule for local teachers and another for those coming from outside the community. Indigenous and non-Indigenous respondents alike raised this inequity,

*Yapa (Aboriginal) teachers go and study and work really hard yet they come back and are treated as small people....How come white teachers live in good houses?*

*Yapa (Aboriginal) teachers get nothing.* (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 68)

*Indigenous staff in schools do not get the same conditions of service as expatriate teachers...It also makes it hard to insist on the same standards from Indigenous teachers as are expected from expatriate teachers* (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 68).

*My assistant teacher is far more effective at teaching these kids than I am. I wouldn't know what to do without her help. But I've been in this community for six*

*months and I'm in reasonable accommodation that I share with one other teacher. My TA has lived here all her life and lives in an old wrecked house with twenty-two other people* (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 68).

So even for Indigenous teachers who have completed their qualification and demonstrated to the system's governing this process that they meet the standards required, the system still chooses to treat them differently to non-Indigenous teachers who meet those same standards.

The report stresses that just as non-local recruits require significant ongoing support, so to do local recruits require this support, although it will be different in nature and the advantage is that the investment the system makes in these teachers is much more likely to stay in the community long term. In particular it points out the benefits of a cohort approach as well as using an apprenticeship model for the next generation of teacher trainees (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 91). Ultimately the report recommends that:

*'it is imperative that Indigenous teacher training, building on the role of assistant teachers and by targeting talented senior students currently in secondary programs, is made a high priority across all regions'* (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999, p. 91).

The 'Learning Lessons' Report was regarded by many as a watershed moment in Indigenous education in the Northern Territory.

### 3.4.3 Empty rhetoric and political sleights of hand

By 2003 in the report 'Australia's Teachers, Australia's Future: Advancing Innovation, Science, Technology and Mathematics –Agenda for Action', produced by the *Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education*, concern is being raised again about the continuing low numbers of Indigenous teachers completing teacher education at the national level. The report states that:

*Prospective Indigenous teachers need to be attracted to the profession in greater numbers. Such teachers serve as role models, infuse a broader range of cultural perspectives into schools, and bring a capacity for closer rapport and identification with students from Indigenous backgrounds* (Committee for the Review of Teaching and Teacher Education 2003, p. 21).

Sadly by 2007 it seems little has changed with the 'Top of the Class' report stating that:

*Australia-wide, the proportion of Indigenous students enrolled in initial Teacher Education is approximately 2%, just below the 2001 estimate that 2.4% of the Australian population identify as an Indigenous Australian. However, the success and retention rates for Indigenous students fall well below average, and the proportion of Indigenous people in the Australian teaching workforce is much lower than the proportion of Indigenous people in the Australian population. In 2004, approximately 0.7% of all teachers in Australia were Indigenous. In 2003, Indigenous students represented almost 4% of total school enrolments across Australia and this proportion is growing.* (Top of the Class 2007, pp. 38-39).

The same report provides an even starker picture in the Northern Territory, where Indigenous Australians make up approximately 30% of the population, with 40% of the school student cohort identifying as Indigenous. In 2004, according to Department of Education, Science and Training – Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programs (IESIP) performance reports, 2003 and 2004, approximately 15% of initial Teacher Education students in the Northern Territory were Indigenous, and 15% of teachers in the Northern Territory were Indigenous (Top of the Class 2007, p. 39). These figures are worth further exploration as just one year later, in 2005 when the Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory began registering teachers, they reported only 156 out of 3992 (or less than 4%) registered teachers in the Northern Territory identified as Indigenous (Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board Annual Report 2005). The ‘Top of the Class’ report (2007, pp. 40-41) goes on to make two pages of recommendations about ways to support and encourage more Indigenous teachers to complete teacher education. One key recommendation is the allocation of \$20 million per annum to establish a Teacher Education Diversity Fund, which would be designed to provide additional support to students from underrepresented groups in teacher education across Australia, with an emphasis on Indigenous teachers (Top of the Class 2007, p. 51).

Herein lies a powerful example of the rhetorical support of an initiative that is not backed up with political or economic will. Examination of the 2008 Higher Education Report reveals that the Federal Government appeared to act on this recommendation with the development of the ‘Diversity and Structural Adjustment Fund’. However upon closer examination it becomes evident that this ‘Fund’ was in fact the renaming of something that

had been called the 'Collaboration and Structural Reform Fund', which had been in place since 2005. In its new form the purpose of the 'Fund' is described as follows:

*The objective of the Diversity Fund was to promote structural reform by eligible higher education providers that supports greater specialisation among providers, more diversity in the higher education sector and better responsiveness to labour markets operating in the local or national interest. Over \$200 million was allocated to the Diversity Fund over four years (2008-2011) with a competitive funding round held in 2008 (Department of Employment Education and Training 2008, p. 25)*

With no specific mention of teacher education or the intention to use the money to increase diversity in teacher graduates, this fund simply becomes another bucket for universities to access. A search on projects funded by this money reveals that funded under this model included engineering projects, rural health projects (Senate Standing Committee, 2012) and university wide online learning projects (Charles Darwin University, 2009). This type of connection between a review, which produces recommendations, and the political sleight of hand used to act upon such recommendations through policy and funding decisions is crucial to understanding the current issues facing Indigenous teacher education in Australia.

The most significant effort to focus on Indigenous teachers in many years has been the 'More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative' (MATSITI). MATSITI is an Australian Government four-year initiative managed cooperatively by a number of Australian Universities and the Australian Council of Educational Deans. This initiative arose out of a need to readdress the 'One Thousand Aboriginal Teachers by 1990' project

(National Aboriginal Education Committee 1986) and in recognition of the fact that there had been little cohesive national policy and outcomes in this area in over 20 years. This initiative has produced a 'Report into the Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students Enrolled in Initial Teacher Education' which has brought into sharp focus the fact that though the call for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island teachers has a long history Australian teacher education programs nationwide are struggling to retain and graduate students from these backgrounds (Patton et al. 2012). The initiative has been focused on improving the retention, success and graduation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher education students as well as increasing the 'recruitment, retention and leadership capability of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples working as teachers in Australian schools' (Patton et al. 2012, p 7). Emphasis at the beginning of the initiative was placed on identifying the context, practices and outcomes for Indigenous students in initial teacher education programs (Patton et al, 2012). The MATSITI project has also filled an obvious gap in bringing together a national focus on the role of Indigenous teachers in Australia. It has been a mechanism for gathering real data in a space that has had sporadic and inconsistent data collected in the past. It has also provided a central research co-ordination role looking at issues around success, retention, completion and barriers for Indigenous students undertaking Initial Teacher Education (Patton et al. 2012) with a number of projects scheduled to report on this by the end of 2015. Additionally this initiative has been able to facilitate professional learning and co-ordinated promotion of teacher pathways for Indigenous people. Finally, it has been able to draw some national attention to the racism experienced by Indigenous students and

teachers within the educational systems in Australia (Patton et al. 2012; Buckskin 2013) and how this impacts on the success of learners both at the school and university levels.

### **3.5 Indigenous teachers in the Northern Territory**

These shifts and changes at the national level have of course had a flow on affect at the Northern Territory and remote central Australian level. These impacts can be seen through an exploration of the reports and reviews undertaken, as well as through looking at the increasingly regulated teacher education and teacher registration systems in the Northern Territory.

#### **3.5.1 - More reviews – ‘smoke and mirrors’**

Not to be outdone by the number of reviews at the national level, the Northern Territory Government has commissioned its share of reviews and reports in relation to the Indigenous teacher workforce. In 2012 the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training commissioned a report into the ‘Recruitment, Retention and Development of quality educators in very remote NT schools’ (Nutton et al. 2012). This appears to be the first and only report to focus specifically on remote Indigenous schools in the NT since the Penny report in 1980. The role of this report is to ‘review the implementation and examine the outcomes of a range of Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NT DET) initiatives to improve the recruitment, retention and quality of teaching staff in very remote schools’ (Nutton et al. 2012, p. 5).

Two things should be noted at this point. Firstly, the up front and central use of the word 'quality', reflective of the national discourse around this term, and secondly, the fact that this report is looking at all staffing of very remote schools, not just Indigenous staff. This latter point is reflective of the policies of the Northern Territory Department of Education, which has increasingly emphasized the need to attract and retain non-Indigenous staff from outside these remote communities over the need to support local staff to complete full teaching qualifications. These recruitment and retention policies, programs are outlined in detail in Brasche and Harrington (2012) with a particular focus on the recent 'Quality remote Teaching Service recruitment strategy'. These authors touch on the impact high teacher turnover has on the quality of the teaching and learning in remote schools. Yet again the default focus is on importing teachers from outside the community, rather than growing them from within, as evidenced by programs such as 'Teach for a Term' (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, Annual Report 2008/9, p. 111).

The Nutton report (2012) focuses about a third of its attention to Indigenous staff in remote schools in the Northern Territory. It evaluates programs that have been in place to both recruit more Indigenous teachers and support the education and training of Indigenous staff working in schools. Overall though, it points to the lack of sustained momentum or success of any of these programs due to the 'disparate' nature of the initiatives which lack a 'comprehensive overarching' strategy (Nutton et al. 2012, p. 59). It takes a cautious approach to targets for more Indigenous teachers suggesting that 'a radically improved and better supported strategy will be needed to achieve the Northern Territory Government's target of 200 Indigenous Teachers by 2018, especially if this

number is to include a significant proportion of remote Indigenous staff' (Nutton et al. 2012, p. 60). It also highlights the benefits of 'specific cohort planning' and questions the merits of 'intensive fast track programs' (Nutton et al. 2012, pp. 60-61) such as the recent Charles Darwin University Remote Indigenous Teacher Education (RITE) program. The report also notes that:

*The status of Indigenous remote staff currently undertaking teacher training and education support courses needs quantifying (p. 61).*

The report also draws significant attention to the 'overall literacy and numeracy competencies in the remote Indigenous workforce' citing that 'access to secondary education for residents in many remote NT communities has been low, and consequently there is only a small pool of people with the capacity to successfully undertake higher level vocational education or tertiary studies' (Nutton et al. 2012, p. 63). The authors comment that this perception of Indigenous capacity is something that has been 'raised consistently in consultations, reports and publications' (p.63). This identification of low literacy and numeracy amongst Indigenous community members is consistently used to explain away and justify low completion rates of Indigenous adults from remote communities in tertiary courses including teacher education.

While the review claimed to have many discussions with 'stakeholders' (Nutton et al. 2012, p. 8) it was clear that these stakeholders were in the different divisions of NT DET and the various training providers. It is unclear if any consultation or discussion happened with communities or the people for whom the initiatives are being developed, or indeed if this

was part of the brief for this review. The imperatives driving the review were to improve the supply of very remote teaching staff, reduce the impact of 'demand' challenges that derive from high staff turnover, and increase the qualifications and quality of very remote teaching staff (Nutton et al 2012, p 9). These same imperatives had been raised 13 years earlier by the Learning Lessons report (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999). There is no discussion of how remote Indigenous children learn and what kind of teaching and pedagogy is best for them, and so the issue of 'quality' is raised again but without a discussion about the pedagogical qualities that might position Indigenous teachers better qualified to teach children from their own communities. There is a sense that increasing the local Indigenous workforce will enable improved student outcomes but no explanation of what that means and how these underlying beliefs shape the policies and initiatives with regard to remote workforce development. There is a suggestion that such policies and initiatives are perhaps implemented in response to 'commissioned inquiries and reports' (Nutton et al. 2012, pp. 10-11) or as an overlap with 'specific national strategies' to grow the Indigenous workforce rather than any real sense of commitment from within the NT itself.

If there is a belief about the value of having a strong Indigenous workforce in remote communities it is largely wrapped up in the idea that Indigenous employees are strong advocates of the value of education and training in their communities and that Indigenous staff are uniquely placed to help develop strong partnerships between Indigenous communities and the Department of Education (Nutton et al. 2012, p. 12). Once again this does not touch on improving learning outcomes for students through changes in

pedagogical practices. This oversight prompts a number of questions. Is there a belief that Indigenous teachers are in schools to do a different job to non-Indigenous teachers? Is there a hidden implication here about the pedagogical quality of Indigenous teachers?

By 2013/2014, with National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) statistics continuing to paint a bleak picture about the progress being made in 'literacy and numeracy' for Indigenous students (Smee 2013), it was time for yet another review of Indigenous Education. This time the NT Department of Education brought in former CEO of the Curriculum Corporation, turned Education consultant, Bruce Wilson, to do the review. Wilson used as his starting point the Learning Lessons report from 1999, as well as the 2005 Learning Lessons status report. An entire chapter of the report was dedicated to 'Workforce Planning' (Wilson 2014, p. 189) and notes the 'evidence for weakness in the recruitment and training of Indigenous staff (Wilson 2014, p. 193). While Wilson (2014) suggests that since the Learning Lessons report (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999) 'a broad range of programs and resources have been put in place to improve recruitment and development opportunities for the general remote workforce and for Indigenous employees' (Wilson 2014, p. 195). He notes that 'increasing Indigenous staffing numbers and quality' still requires attention. The author uses that term 'quality' to refer to the types of teachers needed to teach Indigenous students. However, there is no detail put around how such 'quality' is to be defined.

Wilson's report comes to the same conclusion as Bat (2011), that the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program which ran from the 1970s to 1990s was the most successful

program historically at producing qualified Indigenous teachers and was 'responsible for producing many of the Indigenous teachers in schools today' (Wilson 2014, p. 196). He does not place any explanation around why this Teacher Education program from this era was so successful. He then names the Charles Darwin University (CDU) Remote Indigenous Teacher Education (RITE) program as 'the current Teacher Education model' but already speaks about it in the past tense noting that it 'was regarded as unsuccessful after a relatively short life' (Wilson 2014, p. 196). He notes the CDU figure of '120 Indigenous pre-service teachers enrolled in different study modes in programs delivered through the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE) a joint enterprise with BIITE' (Wilson 2014, p. 196) but does not take into account that ACIKE courses are open to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across Australia and anecdotally far more of these 120 student come from interstate or urban backgrounds, not very remote Northern Territory communities. Wilson (2014) points out in his review the heavy investment by the Northern Territory Department of Education in the 'More Indigenous Teachers' (MIT) program, which offered a range of scholarships, cadetships and fellowships to financially support Indigenous teachers in their training. However, once again the data is sufficiently ambiguous (Wilson 2014 p. 196) as to provide no real way of knowing if this More Indigenous Teachers program has been an effective support for ensuring more Indigenous teachers from very remote communities are completing their Teacher Education.

Wilson (2014, p. 196) notes that the combination of the 'low literacy level of candidates' and the Australian Institute of School Leaderships (AITSL) 'requirements that teacher

education students are in the top 30% of the community in literacy' has presented barriers for Indigenous Teacher Education students, and suggests that this has impacted on recruitment. Another potential impact on recruitment named in the report is the ongoing 'difference in employment arrangements and rewards for Indigenous teachers appointed in their own community' (p. 199). This is the same issue named and criticized in the Learning Lessons Report (Northern Territory Department of Education 1999). Wilson notes that:

*The lack of housing entitlement and related benefits for these appointees is seen as discriminatory, and was cited by Indigenous teachers themselves as both a disincentive to teach in their own communities and a practical obstacle to effective planning and teaching, given that in some cases they were living in crowded conditions with little opportunity for quiet study and planning' (Wilson 2014, p. 199)*

Wilson comments on the damaging effect of a 'two-tiered reward structure for different teachers' and that while the reasons for it are historical it is 'based essentially on race' (Wilson 2014, p. 199) and that this in effect creates a disincentive for people to become teachers in their own communities.

Other 'difficulties' named by the Wilson report are the 'high levels of support' and 'high levels of costs' in sustaining pre-service programs for remote Indigenous teachers, the lack of co-ordination between providers and the absence of mentoring arrangements for new Indigenous teachers (Wilson 2014, p. 197). The report also raises the possibility of 'standards' being lowered and 'assessment processes bypassed or distorted to ensure

graduations' of Indigenous teachers and names 'consistent feedback to the review about the unsatisfactory quality of some graduates' (Wilson 2014, pp. 198-199). Wilson notes that these criticisms are 'anecdotal' and he does not provide any specific evidence. The choice to publish in the report these unsubstantiated claims about Indigenous teacher 'quality' is significant as it echoes the continuation of the ideological positioning of the Indigenous as of lower capacity to the non-Indigenous.

Wilson does outline a road map for strengthening 'programs to increase Indigenous teacher numbers and quality' (2014, p. 205). His suggestions include rigorous candidate selection, programs largely delivered in school with a local coordinator, school based coordinators with time release to support pre-service candidates, principally face-to-face instruction, development of a common understanding of responsibilities between the candidate and the school, clear expectations of candidates being outlined, a reasonable expectation of study load, assessment and supervision arrangement on parity with 'other pre-service teachers' and additional coaching and advisory support through the education department, school and tertiary institution (Wilson 2014, pp. 197-198). The author makes special note of the need for strong departmental support demonstrated by a 10-year commitment to funding and a job guarantee for graduates. A worrying aspect of this roadmap is the assumed complete passivity of the Indigenous teacher candidates themselves and their communities in this process. At no point does Wilson suggest the need to consult with remote communities about the 'recruitment' of candidates. This sits in direct opposition to the idea that in remote Indigenous communities 'who studies to become a teacher is a decision in which many communities want to actively participate'

(Bat and Shore 2013, p 14). Indeed the recruitment process reads as being rather clinical, much like the army draft used to be – soldiers pulled into a battle because their country ‘needed them’. One wonders about the success of such a strategy used to ‘recruit’ teachers to fight the ‘battle’ against ‘low Indigenous literacy’ rather than a strategy that seeks to engage in processes and practices that facilitate relationships with local communities and develop programs that have continual reference to the society, culture and community needs of the students, which is the preferred approach that Indigenous people in the Northern Territory have continually articulated for themselves (Bat and Shore 2013).

Both the Nutton report and the Wilson review employ the common ‘smoke and mirrors’ approach of referring to other reports and reviews, their findings and recommendations. Little critical analysis of the lack of action is applied before the latest review goes on to make surprisingly similar findings and recommendations. The remote Indigenous workforce is trapped in a revolving door of policy and politics, provided momentum with well-timed and politically motivated reviews and reports that never seem to achieve any of the stated aims of increasing numbers and percentages. This should lead us to question why the responses never quite match the rhetoric.

### **3.6 The impact of regulation and streamlining of teacher education in the Northern Territory on remote Indigenous teachers**

It was in the nature of this nationalized system that any teacher education programs in the Northern Territory would now need to fall in line with the National Standards and that teachers in the Northern Territory would have to demonstrate their ‘quality’ as measured by the Professional Standards.

### 3.6.1 The Teacher Registration Board of the Northern Territory

A regulatory body was required. On the 13<sup>th</sup> September 2004 the 'Teacher Registration Act (NT)' was passed and this legislation came into effect on the 1st February 2005. This was the NT keeping pace with other jurisdictions in Australia when it came to who was allowed to teach in the schools of the Territory. In the words of the legislation it was there 'To ensure that only persons who are fit and proper, and who are appropriately qualified, are employed as teachers in the NT' (Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board Annual Report 2005). To administer the Act the Teacher Registration Board (TRB) of the Northern Territory was established in 2005 and from the beginning Board membership has included one Indigenous teacher nominated by the Chief Executive of the Department of Education. The TRB sits as an Independent statutory authority within the Northern Territory. In its first year the TRB received a total of 4098 applications. Initially 3992 of these applicants were approved with a further 85 'authorities to employ an unregistered person' granted. For these 85 teachers, the Board considered employers' ability and willingness to provide adequate supervision, support, mentoring within the school, persons' qualifications and relevant experience, hours of employment, purpose of employment, teaching environment where they work. The categories listed under the TRB's 'authority to employ an unregistered person' included 'Batchelor College graduates' with a two year teaching qualification approved for team teaching (Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board Annual Report 2005).

This was the first piece of regulation in the Northern Territory that focused on the need for a 4-year qualification to be a registered teacher. Prior to this, teachers were trained up to a 3-year qualification and considered eligible to teach. To deal with this anomaly the TRB created 4 schedules of registration with a transition clause stating that that ultimately all teachers would need a four year qualification as a minimum (Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board Annual Report 2005, p. 11). Many of the Indigenous teachers working in remote schools in the NT at this moment in time were 3 year qualified teachers so were affected by this transition clause, although there was little systemic thinking by the Teacher Registration Board, the universities or the Department of Education about how to deal with this transition until late in 2008 when some specific short term programs were funded (Hall et al. 2010; Hall 2014). This is a good example of the academic goal posts being shifted through changes in policy.

In the years that followed the establishment of the TRB the numbers of teachers working in the Northern Territory schools were reported in the TRB annual reports. The number of Indigenous teachers was less consistently reported as the TRB seemed to take an inconsistent approach to the gathering of such data. This data is compiled in the table below:

	Registered teachers	Indigenous teachers	Un-identified
2005	3992	156 (3.9%)	NA
2006	4022	169 (4.2%)	290
2007	4572	164 (3.6%)	287
2008	5086	164 (3.2%)	693
2009	Over 5400	3%	NA
2010	5768	NA	NA
2011	6151	3%	NA
2012	5884	NA	NA
2013	6014	NA	NA
2014	5710	NA	NA

**Figure 1: Number of registered Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers in the NT**

**Source: TRB annual reports 2005-2014**

The table above shows two main trends 1) that there has been no consistent collection of statistical information about the number of registered Indigenous teachers in the Northern Territory and 2) that, based on what little information has been collected, the number of registered Indigenous teachers in the Northern Territory has stayed very low.

### 3.6.2 Accreditation of 'standards' and 'quality' in teacher education courses in the NT

In addition to their role as a registration body for teachers, the TRB was also given oversight of the teacher education courses offered in the NT. At the beginning of the TRB's existence in 2005 there were 18 separate teacher education courses available in the NT. CDU offered 10 separate courses, all at Bachelor level or higher. Batchelor Institute offered 8 courses from Diploma to Bachelor levels. While the CDU courses were open to all students, they were predominantly designed with a non-Indigenous clientele in mind. The Batchelor Institute courses were only offered for enrolment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and were designed with a 'Both Ways' philosophy (Bat & Shore 2013; Lhanupuy 2003; Marika 1999; Ober & Bat 2009). These 28 teacher education courses were on offer from the two Higher Education institutions of the NT at the time the Federal Government called for a national review of pre-service teacher education, foreshadowing further national streamlining of teacher education in Australia.

In the period since its inception the TRB has played an important role in regulating and monitoring the quality of teacher education courses in the NT. Soon after its inception the Board noted the following in relation to its work in the assessment of the quality of teacher education courses:

*A key factor in the development and assessment of new programs will be the extent to which they can facilitate the ability of pre-service teachers to meet the Northern Territory standards of professional practice for teaching (Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board Annual Report 2006, p. 14)*

This same phrase is repeated year after year until the Northern Territory Standards for professional practice in teaching were superseded by the 'Australian Professional Standards for Teachers' developed and published by the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership in 2009. It was another key shift towards the streamlining and standardization of teacher education in Australia and, as a corollary, in the NT. In the 2010 TRB annual report there is an acknowledgement of the work that will need to be done in order to develop 'the Boards accreditation practices in order to participate in the national system' (Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board Annual Report 2010, p. 2). The legislative changes brought about by the Amendment Bill in 2010 also gave enhanced powers to the TRB to recommend new teacher education courses to the NT Minister for Education. This has happened in 2011, 2012 and 2013.

Of particular note in 2011 was the development of a new partnership between Charles Darwin University (CDU) and Batchelor Institute with the development of the Australian Centre for Indigenous Knowledges and Education (ACIKE). This was a decision made at the federal government level and the result was that all teacher education students in the NT would complete the CDU accredited courses with Batchelor Institute from this point being unable to submit teacher education courses for accreditation in its own right. Existing Batchelor Institute courses were integrated into CDU courses with the outcome that all teacher education courses offered through the ACIKE partnership carry CDU accreditation. Batchelor Institute has been able to continue with its specialized mixed-mode of course delivery for Indigenous teacher education students. The 2012 TRB annual report noted the following:

*Teacher Education programs for Indigenous students have been and will continue to be delivered by the institute in Batchelor and the DPC (Desert Peoples Centre) in Alice Springs through the mixed mode approach. This approach combines intensive workshops, community based learning and online learning to support Indigenous students to achieve their teaching qualification* (Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board Annual Report 2012, p. 5)

It is worth questioning this amalgamation. Seen by some as a new relationship of collaborative delivery that provides the potential for increased delivery (Bat and Shore 2013, p. 16) it could also be seen as an act of economic pragmatism for a tertiary market as small as the Northern Territory. Another interpretation could be that it was an act of assimilating the previously strong 'Both Ways' teacher education courses into the more 'mainstream' (Shore and Bat 2013, p 15) offerings of the CDU courses. Whatever the motivation it is worth asking the question whether this move really will facilitate and support more Indigenous teachers from remote communities becoming fully qualified teachers.

### **3.6.3 So much regulation for so little improvement**

In 2014 AITSL reported that Australia-wide the number of Indigenous students in initial teacher education programs was no more than 3% of the total student teacher population (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2014, p. 16). There is no specific Indigenous student teacher data available for the Northern Territory. However, the federal

government's review of teacher education, 'Action Now: Classroom ready teachers', reported that:

*In 2013, there were 183,306 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander full-time equivalent enrolments in Australian schools. This represents 5 per cent of all full-time equivalent enrolments in Australia. Eighty-four per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were enrolled in government schools, 10 per cent in Catholic schools and 5 per cent in independent schools (Action Now: Classroom ready teachers 2014, p. 83).*

From these data it is clear that the number of Indigenous people preparing to become school teachers is not keeping pace the number of Indigenous students Australia-wide. With a much higher proportion of Indigenous students in NT schools (40%) than the nationwide figure of 5%, and the proportion of Indigenous teachers in NT schools in the order of 3%, one would expect to see NT and federal governments place a heightened level of urgency on increasing the numbers of Indigenous student teachers preparing to teach in the NT, and particularly so with respect to preparing to teach in remote community schools in the NT where the Indigenous student population can be up to 100% of all students at certain schools.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

The progression from the original, practical, on site, classroom based teacher training to the modern, professional, national, university based system of 'quality' teacher education was perhaps inevitable, and may even have been necessary. However, in a country the size of Australia with so much geographic, cultural and linguistic diversity, it is worth asking the

question 'who does this National 'quality' teacher education system serve best?' The process of nationalization and standardization assumes a 'standard' or a 'norm' and herein lies the danger for Indigenous people from remote communities wanting to become teachers. The standards and norms have not been based on the experiences of Indigenous students and Indigenous teachers in remote communities in the NT and, given the research location of my doctoral study, in the remote communities of Central Australia.

Has the question of what constitutes 'quality' in that context been given more than a cursory consideration? Some will argue that the standards are open and flexible enough to be interpreted in diverse ways. But that leaves open the question of who is doing the interpretation? Each move towards a centralized, standardized, homogenized norm of what it means to be a 'quality' teacher, makes the meeting of those standards harder and harder for people who come from cultural backgrounds and languages and teaching styles that deviate from that norm. This is especially true with the increasingly heavy emphasis on the English literacy and western numeracy requirements of teacher education applicants. On the question of quality it is worth asking some hard questions about what constitutes 'quality' teaching and 'classroom ready' teachers for teaching that takes place in classrooms located on Warlpiri, Luritja, Arrarnta and Pitjantjatjara country. As Bat (2013) suggests:

*In the current era of nationalisation, accreditation and regulation, the needs of what could be argued are the most disadvantaged communities in the country, appear to have been lost in the rush to create a uniform teacher education system (Bat 2013 p 1).*

While these political and policy based shifts at the National Level in teacher education may not be the sole reason why numbers of Indigenous students from remote communities undertaking initial teacher education programs are low, it is worth considering to what extent these changes and pressures have contributed to the problem.

## **Chapter 4 – Methodology and Method**

### **4.1 Introduction**

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodological choices made in undertaking this doctoral research. This is done in three parts. The first part explains the pre-methodological work that was done as part of a commitment to doing Post-Colonial Knowledge work in 'good faith' with the Indigenous teacher participants. The second part outlines the overall methodology and its rationale. The third part explains the specific methods used in the collection and analysis of the teacher narratives.

### **4.2 Pre-methodological questions**

#### **4.2.1 The case for a unique approach**

The common concern at the heart of this research is to look at pathways for Indigenous people from remote communities into teacher education. The key vehicle for exploring this concern was the stories of Indigenous teachers from remote communities in Central Australia who have successfully completed this pathway and become fully qualified classroom teachers. The immediate impulse was to use a narrative methodology and then choose a method such as 'yarning' (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010), or something similar that has emerged from the field of 'Indigenous research' in recent years. To an extent those immediate instincts have proven to be good ones and the use of narrative is outlined later in this chapter.

However, as a non-Indigenous researcher working in a research space that was prioritising Indigenous research participants and Indigenous stories and knowledge, I knew I had some work to do to ensure that this particular research project did not replicate many of the ills of past research in this field. To that end I did a large piece of 'pre-methodological' work that I have come to think of as 'the work before the work' (Palmer 2009). In particular I was interested in the ethical processes that lead into research work and finding ways to come together in the research space that can facilitate 'good faith' Post-Colonial Knowledge work. The 'participants' in this research were not just the story tellers but are important knowledge authorities in this field of study. These women are recognised leaders within their own communities and across others' communities. In many cases they are among the most highly educated members of their home communities, as defined by the Western academy. Additionally they hold a vast amount of knowledge about education in the intercultural setting of remote community schools. These women also hold and are responsible for an extensive amount of cultural and protocol knowledge from within their own knowledge traditions. To limit their role in the process to only being 'participants' and ignore everything else that they are and that they bring to the process would be insulting to them as well as doing a huge disservice to the question we are trying to answer together. As detailed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, the common concern at the centre of this research was born out of a collective process between myself and all of these ladies during some previous work we had completed together. So from the very beginning conversations on this topic it has felt like a collaborative effort, with the PhD process serving as a vehicle for that exploration. While this is clearly an unusual approach to take, there are important opportunities that arise as a result of this.

One thing became very clear from the outset of seeing this as a collaborative process: we would need to pay attention to and nurture the collaboration for the entire length of the process associated with my PhD study. So it became obvious that this ongoing reflection and evaluation was an element that needed to be built into that process from the very beginning. This gave rise to a parallel question, namely 'How do we do research together in the intercultural space?' This doctoral research was offering a unique opportunity to reflect on, evaluate and analyse ways of doing research together that might offer alternative models for future researchers. This also became a methodological question because these reflective and evaluative stages needed to be built into the entire process. Ultimately this gave rise to a new type of methodology which I am calling 'participatory narrative', the process of which is outlined in the final section of this chapter and the implications and benefits of which are discussed in Chapter 5.

#### **4.2.2 Understanding the past**

I take the view that no researcher should plan to do research involving Indigenous peoples and communities without first examining the history of research that has damaged, disempowered and silenced Indigenous peoples. It is especially important for non-Indigenous researchers to acknowledge the role that their cultural ancestors have played in this history and to make a firm commitment that they will not make the same mistakes. Fortunately we are now living in an era where many Indigenous researchers are speaking back to the Western Academy and not only naming the impact of the damage that has been done but also claiming their right to rethink the underpinnings of the research

process from Indigenous standpoints. This is leading to exciting new research paradigms that have at heart Indigenous ways of knowing, Indigenous worldviews, Indigenous values and ethics and Indigenous methodologies.

#### 4.2.3 The colonial legacy of research

*'Researchers are like mosquitoes, they suck your blood then leave'*

Alaskan Native saying (in Cochran 2008, p. 1)

This Alaska Native saying sums up how many Indigenous people the world over feel about research. Linda Tuhawi Smith (1999) talks about research being a 'dirty word' for most Indigenous communities. Australian academic, Lowitja O'Donoghue summed the research experience of Australian Indigenous people thus,

*Until very recently...scientific research has been a very top down approach. For Aboriginal people, this has meant we have been amongst the most studied and researched group in the world...few if any tangible benefits have flowed to our people, as the research papers and the academic accolades have stacked up. Researchers have, by and large, defined the problems and sought solutions that they have seen as the correct, 'scientific' way to go (Lowitja O'Donoghue 1998, cited in Henry et al. 2002, p. 12).*

Research has, in the past, been something that has been done 'to' Indigenous people rather than with them. It has set Indigenous people up as the 'Other' to be studied rather than people who have agency over their own lives and knowledge systems. It has done enormous damage in terms of stigmatising Indigenous people and reinforcing negative

labels and beliefs and perhaps worst of all, but unsurprisingly, it has produced very few benefits to the Indigenous communities themselves, with the majority of the benefits going to the non-Indigenous researchers and the institutions they work for. Western researchers seemed to approach research in one of two ways. Often they would approach Indigenous communities as knowledge treasure chests to be looted, mining the local people of their knowledge and then claiming the prize of discovery, a practice which was a violent way of dismissing the Indigenous people's knowledge as irrelevant and a way of disconnecting them from what they knew and how they knew it (Chilisa & Preece 2005). Rigney (1999) also comments on the damage done to Indigenous people through research when their voices were silenced and their ways of knowing under-valued, ignored and shut out.

Alternatively, Western researchers have historically looked upon the lives, practices and traditions of Indigenous people as problems to be solved (Cochran et al. 2008) with an emphasis on 'illness rather than health' (Wilson 2009, p. 17). Wilson (2009, p. 16) points out that this counterproductive focus has come about because traditionally researchers came from outside the community to 'study' the Indigenous 'problems' and then impose 'outside solutions' rather than appreciating and expanding upon the resources available within Indigenous communities. This has resulted in the proliferation of negative stereotypes about Indigenous communities (Wilson 2009) and the stigmatization that can occur when these problems and negative stereotypes are the focus of published research findings (Cochran et al. 2008).

This negative focus also points to a lack of commitment to relationships, which is fundamentally important to Indigenous people. Wilson (2009) notes that in the past in most cases research undertaken was not at the request of the community, but rather based on a decision made by the individual researcher or the institution he or she worked for. Research, therefore, was perceived by the communities as disconnected and lacking any relevance to them, and they felt excluded from any kind of agency over the research process. There was no expectation or commitment on the part of the researcher to build relationship and trust with the community and no engagement in the issues the community itself would identify, or indeed the resources available from within the community to create solutions for those issues.

At a more benign end of the spectrum Wilson talks about this affecting people's attitudes towards research saying, 'People are accustomed to seeing researchers come into their communities, do whatever it is they do and leave, never to be heard from again' (Wilson 2009, p. 15). At a more sinister level Cochran and others (2008, p. 2) give examples where the trust of communities is completely violated when informed consent is not taken seriously and people believe they are participating in research for one purpose only to discover the data is being used for an entirely different set of findings. Such appalling research behaviour has led to research findings that cannot be considered valid and reliable, but that have still had traction amongst policy and decision making bodies.

Perhaps the most glaring condemnation of the research of the past is that 'so much has been done for so little improvement' (Cochran et al. 2008, p. 1). Gorman and Toombs (2009, p. 4) similarly state that 'Despite decades of research there has been little or no improvement' and identify one of the reasons for this, 'Part of the problem that has been identified is the ineffectiveness of research based on non-Indigenous cultural values'. Smith (1999, p. 3) says that for the Maori people 'research was talked about both in terms of its absolute worthlessness to us, the Indigenous world, and its absolute usefulness to those who wielded it as an instrument'. Finally Wilson (2009, p. 20) makes a comment about the never ending research 'inquiries' that Indigenous communities are bombarded with noting that the 'thing that all of these inquiries hold in common is that without fail, the conditions and issues that are being studied get worse, rather than improving, after the research has been done'. Researchers can no longer ignore this 'colonial legacy' of research (Cochran et al. 2008; Gorman & Toombs 2009).

#### **4.2.4 Relational research that generates 'good faith'**

One of the key reasons that we have such a clear critique of the way research with Indigenous people has been done in the past is because of the emergence within the last two or three decades of a number of Indigenous writers and researchers who are speaking back to the Academy about the exclusion of their voices and knowledge systems in research. Through these scholars we are reminded that how you do the research is just as important as the outcomes of the research. This means that if research is conducted with Indigenous people and the design ignores Indigenous ways of knowing and appropriate ethical development then it cannot be considered rigorous, and the results will be

questionable in terms of their efficacy (Cochran et al. 2008, p. 2). If we believe that choosing an appropriate research methodology is based on the skill of matching the problem with an 'appropriate' set of investigative strategies' and that it is 'concerned with ensuring that information is accessed in such a way as to guarantee validity and reliability' (Smith 1999, p. 173), then in order to be valid, reliable and rigorous in research with Indigenous people the research design must be co-constructed in order to remain open to open the multiplicity of ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin 2008).

Research involving the collaboration of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people needs to have the intent of conducting itself in 'good faith' (Verran 2013) which means that at its core it needs to remain relational. Wilson (2009, p 11) suggests that the research itself must be considered 'ceremony'. Warlpiri scholar, Steve Patrick reminds us that for Indigenous epistemologies the knowledge lies in the relationships, not in the separate parts (Pawu Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes and Box 2008, p. 15). DeCrespigny and others (2004) also concur with this notion of relationality, as does Chilisa (2011, pp. 108-122) reminding us that it is not just about relationships between researcher and community, but more importantly about understanding the relational ontologies and axiologies of Indigenous peoples. In this paradigm the researchers' relationship to knowledge itself is and must be different. According to Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009, p. 6) Indigenous ways of knowing explicitly recognise that one cannot know everything, that everything cannot be known and that there are knowledges beyond human understanding. Additionally they maintain that 'knowledge cannot be discovered or owned; it can only be revealed and shared. In research the Indigenous person is always the observer and Indigenous worldviews and perspectives are explicitly positioned as the lens through which the

research seeks to reveal knowledge' (Moreton-Robinson & Walter 2009, p. 12). As Chilisa (2011, p. 99) points out this Indigenous perspective of research being about 'unveiling knowledge' may pose some challenges for an Academy that has previously be focused on the 'discovery' of 'new' knowledge.

#### 4.2.5 The ethics of Post-Colonial research work

Rose (2004) places ethics as central to the work of decolonisation. But she says that we must no longer see ethics as a 'closed system' but rather as a 'way of living...in vulnerability and openness to others' (Rose 2004, p 8). She further explains that this needs to be an ethics of responsibility rather than guilt and it should focus on developing a human condition of 'living with and for others' (Rose 2004, p 12). Finally, Rose suggests that ethics are revealed in our lives as they 'unfold within relationships of responsibility' (Rose 2004, p.13). This conception of relational ethics corresponds strongly with ideas expressed by Indigenous scholars. Moreton-Robinson & Walter (2009, p. 6) underline the important principles of respect, reciprocity and obligation, while Smith (1999, p120) recommends that when working with Indigenous people one should,

- Show a respect for people
- Present yourself to people face to face
- Look, listen....speak
- Share and host people, be generous
- Be cautious
- not flaunt your knowledge

Similar sets of ethical principles can be readily found in contemporary examples of collaborative research between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. For example Henry et al (2002, pp. 9-13) give a detailed overview of the attempts made in the field of Health research in Australia between 1983 and 1999 to define some new principles and protocols for doing research with Indigenous people. Cochran and others (2008, p. 4) also give an Australian example of guidelines for research. Gorman and Toombs (2009, p. 11) identify the following as some of the ethics and values that need to underlie research with Indigenous peoples,

- mutual respect
- confidentiality
- clarification of who benefits and how
- identification of outcomes, and
- agreements between two parties about the how the research will be conducted and disseminated

Accountability to the respective communities is also a key principle, as is a foundational belief in the relationship and connectedness of knowledge (Moreton-Robinson & Walter 2009, p. 7). Finding relational and ethical ways of doing research together in good faith requires careful consideration at the methodological level.

#### **4. 3 Methodology**

The choice and development of a methodology is only one part of research design and it need not be the starting point for a researcher's consideration. However it is clear that there are certain methodologies, particularly qualitative methodologies, which stand out as

being largely compatible with the relational and ethical requirements for doing Post-Colonial research work in 'good faith'. The one chosen for this research was a narrative methodology.

#### 4.3.1 Theoretical underpinnings

This doctoral research focuses on the stories of a group of fully qualified Indigenous teachers meaning that these teachers have been assessed as demonstrating the Professional Standards for Teachers at a graduate level. The study uses a narrative methodology to explore how these teachers interpret and enact the professional standards in ways that are meaningful to the context in which they live and work. This 'narrative turn' (Bochner 2001) 'honours people's stories as data that can stand on their own as pure description of experience, worthy as narrative documentary of experience...or analysed for connections between the psychological, sociological, cultural, political and dramatic dimensions of human experience' (Patton 2002, p. 116). Narrative traditionally sits within the interpretative social science theoretical tradition, being at times a tool of phenomenology or at other times tool of hermeneutics. As a piece of qualitative research that sits within the 'reformed social science' community (Polkinghorne 2007, p. 473), this research will be looking for 'theoretical transferability rather than empirical generalizability' (Pringle et al 2011, p. 21).

Importantly the use of story is also widely regarded by writers on Indigenous research methodology to be an appropriate and valid choice (Barnhardt C. 2001; Barnhardt R. 2007; Basso 1996; Chilisa 2011; Hughes et al. 2004; Kahakalau 2004; Kawagley 1995; Kawagley 1999; Kovach 2009; Partington 1998; Wilson 2009; Wilson 2001) as will be discussed

further below. Critical Race Theory (CRT) also places the 'voices of people of colour' at the centre of research (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006, p. 22). Central to this choice is the assertion and acknowledgement of the importance of the personal and community experiences of people of colour as sources of knowledge (Dixson and Rousseau 2006b, p. 35). Matsuda (1995, p. 3) reminds us that 'those who have experienced discrimination speak with special voice to which we should listen'.

A main goal of CRT is to use storytelling and narrative to examine race and racism in social and political institutions and CRT scholars believe that the utilization of personal narratives and other stories are valid forms of "evidence" and thereby CRT challenges a "numbers only" approach to documenting inequity or discrimination, which tends to certify discrimination from a quantitative rather than qualitative perspective. One important function of voice storytelling and counter-storytelling in CRT scholarship is to counteract the stories of the dominant group so that the myths, assumptions, and received wisdoms can be questioned by shifting the grounds of debate or presenting analyses in ways that turn dominant assumptions on their head (Gillborn 2006, Dixson and Rousseau 2006b). Delgado (1989, p. 240) reminds us that the dominant group tells stories designed to 'remind it of its identity in relation to outgroups and provide a form of shared reality in which its own superior position is seen as natural'. Gillborn (2006, p. 24) suggests that 'CRT approaches serve to appropriate such forms and use them to build a powerful challenge to "mainstream" assumptions'. The storytelling aspect of CRT has been critiqued as problematic because it is regarded as 'unscientific' and subjective, but CRT never makes claims of objectivity or rationality. Rather, it sees itself as an approach to scholarship that integrates lived experience with racial realism (Dixson and Rousseau 2006a, p vii).

### 4.3.2 Story as method

The central role of storytelling as a means of knowledge transmission is at the heart of Indigenous knowledge systems (Barnhardt C. 2001; Barnhardt R. 2007; Basso 1996; Buker 2014; Chilisa 2011; Hughes et al. 2004; Kahakalau 2004; Kawagley 1995; Kawagley 1999; Kovach 2009; Partington 1998; Wilson 2009; Wilson 2001). Partington (1998) states with regard to the Australian context that learning was largely oral and the use of storytelling was important. Eliza Jones, an Alaska Native woman, reinforces the central importance of story for Alaska Native people. She says,

*Our native beliefs are inside those stories...it's like gospel to us. It is very much a part of my belief in living in harmony with nature, with the land, trees, water, animals and bird spirits* (Eliza Jones, cited in C. Barnhardt, 2001, p. 16)

Stories and metaphors were the original teaching tool used by Indigenous societies. Wilson (2009, p. 17) points out that 'stories allow listeners to draw their own conclusions and to gain life lessons from a more personal perspective. By getting away from abstractions and rules, stories allow us to see others' life experiences through our own eyes. This information may then be internalised in a way that is difficult for abstract discussions to achieve.'

### 4.3.3 The wider appeal of story/narrative

Not only is story or narrative widely used by Indigenous people, but it is increasingly being recognised as an important research methodological strategy within the social sciences and health fields of research (Gorman & Toombs 2009; Hamilton et al. 2008; Lai 2010; Mattos

2009; Pepper & Wildy 2009). In more Western research paradigms it is seen that the use of narratives as a methodology permits life-like accounts of individual experience and offers an opportunity to value the experience of others (Gorman & Toombs 2009; Pepper & Wildy 2009). The wider appeal of story to all is that our aesthetic understanding of reality is formed and informed through our embeddedness in the generative and creative process of story (Lewis 2011). Reid et al (2005, p. 22) remind us that in research the value of story as method is that 'the researcher begins by hearing people's stories, and prioritises the participants' world view at the core of the account'. Pringle and others (2011, p. 24) underline the importance of this stating that 'it is by understanding and bringing to the fore individual accounts that we can begin to understand the 'life worlds' in a phenomenological sense'.

There are many advantages to using narrative and storytelling as a methodology. For example, it can create a power shift in research where the participant is able to direct the course of the research and retain ownership over it (Gorman & Toombs 2009, p. 10). Allowing people time and space to tell their own story in their own way has also been shown to contribute to peoples' wellbeing (Pepper & Wildy 2009, p. 1). Story also frees the participant up to choose the language of telling, and Chilisa (2011, p. 153) points out that the language the story is told in is one of the key components of research with Indigenous people. Additionally, Pepper and Wildy (2009, p. 6) remind us that in addition to language there are non-verbal cues that are associated with storytelling and they can inform us as much as anything said aloud. Additionally, who is actually telling the story and how they are related to those around them is key in understanding the story (Chilisa 2011). All of

these elements make story or narrative, a rich and in depth method of research, but story offers opportunities not just for data collection but also as a method of information dissemination (Chilisa 2011, p. 149). Critical Race Theory also shows us that stories can be powerful ways of identifying, uncovering and understanding the more invisible and everyday forms of racism that people experience (Delgado 1989, Gillborn 2006, Dixson and Rousseau 2006b).

#### 4.3.4 Some tensions and challenges with story as method

There are some tensions and challenges involved in using story or narrative as a research method. There are important issues to do with reliability and analysis when used within a qualitative research approach. Narratives require more than validity, reliability and generalisability as they also involve a tension centred on context. In any situation context counts; it is essential for making sense of any person, action or event. So the context of both the story and the person telling the story must be fully understood and factored into the analysis (Pepper & Wildy 2009).

It is also important to acknowledge that researchers will generally act as 'initial filters' of data. Non-Indigenous researchers in particular must question their underlying assumptions and ensure that they use the right questions for checking their understandings (Pepper & Wildy 2009). To add rigour to this methodology it may be important to look for meaningful ways to bring participants into this analysis and filtering process. It may be possible for participants to analyse their own and each other's narratives and, through recognising the points of similarity and difference, participate in drawing out the critical conclusions. It is

important to remember that 'qualitative approaches...do not seek to find one single answer or truth, but rather a coherent and legitimate account that is attentive to the words of the participants' (Pringle et al. 2011, p. 23).

#### **4.4 The narrative method used in this research**

##### **4.4.1 Purposive sampling**

The participants for this research were chosen using purposive sampling. This is a form of non-probability sampling in which decisions concerning the individuals to be included in the sample are taken by the researcher based upon a variety of criteria. These criteria may include specialist knowledge of the research issue and capacity and willingness of potential participants to contribute to the research. It is particularly appropriate for research that necessitates the identification of individual participants who would be most likely to contribute appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth (Oliver 2006). In the case of this research the criteria used was as follows:

- Indigenous
- Fully qualified classroom teacher having completed a four year Bachelor of Education/Teaching
- From a remote community located in Central Australia (this is intentionally a Central Australian focused research project)

At the beginning it was estimated that the number of participants was likely to be between six and ten which is a commonly recommended number in studies of this kind. Ultimately there were seven participants who had their narratives recorded. In studies such as this 'fewer participants examined at a greater depth is preferable to a broader, shallow and

simply descriptive analysis of many individuals' accounts (Heffron & Gil-Rodriguez 2011, p. 756). Pringle and others (2011 p 21) also point out that a 'reduced participant numbers allows for a richer depth of analysis that might be inhibited with a larger sample'. Purposive sampling often leads to a more homogenous sample, but this is quite intentional where participants are chosen because they offer insights from a position of shared experience (Pringle et al. 2011, p. 22). In this research the number and nature of participants was determined by the reality of how many fully qualified Indigenous teachers there are from remote communities in Central Australia.

#### **4.4.2 Narrative collection**

The main 'data' for this research is in the form of the teachers' narratives. They were gathered using an interview technique that falls on the continuum between un-structured and semi-structured narrative interviews (Sarantakos 1998). This lack of initial structure is common in qualitative research that uses a narrative method for a number of key reasons. Hefferon and Gil-Rodriguez (2011, p. 757) maintain that it is preferable to begin with 'a more open ended interview maintaining a careful balance between guiding and being led' and to 'start with broad, general questions that allow the participant to see the parameters of the topic...so that the researcher does not impose their understanding of the phenomenon on the participant's narrative'. Pringle and others (2011, p. 23) also warn that 'expansive, honest and reflective accounts may be less forthcoming and more difficult to access from participants if a rigid set of questions or a more structured interviewing technique are used'.

In this research the story telling focused on the whole of career experience of each teacher. Each narrative was recorded over a number of sessions and produced a detailed, in depth, rich account of the experience of becoming and being a teacher for the participant. The language of telling was left up to the participant and translation was used where required. This was most often done by the participants themselves, either at the time of telling (i.e. they repeated what they had just said but in English for me to understand) or at a later date in a follow up session.

#### **4.4.3 Semi- Structured narrative interview process**

##### ***Step 1***

Sensitive to the unique contexts of the individual participants some questions were considered collectively prior to storytelling. These included:

- Where would be a good place to tell this story?
- Who are the right people to be involved in telling this story?
- Who would like to/should listen to this story?

In the case of each participant the recording of the narrative was preceded by a long conversational phase. This was done over many months, at times in face-to-face encounters and at other times over the phone or other social media communication avenues. This gave each participant the time to fully consider their participation in the research and to be in control of when and where the ‘telling’ would commence. The importance of allowing this kind of lead in time is further explained chapter 5.

##### ***Step 2***

Only when the storyteller was ready were the recording devices switched on. Each narrative began with the following prompt:

*“When you are ready can you start telling me the whole story of you becoming a teacher?”*

After this the teller was in control of where the narrative went. Some participants chose to introduce themselves and give a brief synopsis of their teacher story. Others chose a different starting place. Questions and additional prompts were only used when required to move the narrative along, and were constructed on an ad hoc basis by the researcher in response to the narrative being told. In this aspect the method closely resembled a ‘yarning’ approach as described by Bessarab and Ng’andu (2010).

As each narrative ran over a number of recording sessions, often on different days, the researcher would start each subsequent session with a recap of what had been discussed at the end of the previous session. This served to remind both teller and listener and provide some continuity to the recorded narrative.

### **Step 3**

Once the teller came to a natural point of closure to their own teacher narrative, one final recording session was completed with each participant. The aim of this final session was to explore how the professional role of the teacher is understood and enacted by Indigenous teachers. The questions or prompts for this final session were devised in advance and a copy of them was provided to the participant before recording commenced. These questions were guided by the seven Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, viewed 24/9/15a). Namely,

- **Knowing students and how they learn**

Example prompts: Tell me how well you know your students. Tell me what you know about how students from your community learn best? Where does your knowledge about your students come from?

- **Knowing the content and how to teach it**

Example prompts: What is important for your students to learn and how should they learn it? What resources do you draw on to teach what your students need to learn?

- **Planning for and implementing effective teaching and learning**

Example prompts: What is good teaching and good learning in your opinion? What do you do to make sure good teaching and learning happens? How do you plan for your classes each day and each week? How do you include all of your students in learning?

- **Creating and maintaining supportive and safe learning environments**

Example prompts: What does a safe learning environment look, feel and sound like? How do you make sure that your classroom and the school is a safe learning environment for your students?

- **Assessing, providing feedback and reporting on student learning**

Example prompts: What kind of feedback do you give to students about their learning? How do you do this? Who do you give this feedback to? Who do you talk to about how the student is going at school? Do you involve your students' parents and other relatives in your talks about how your students are going at school?

- **Engaging in professional learning**

Example prompts: What kinds of professional learning have you found the most useful during your work as a teacher? Have you got a professional role model in mind as you work to become a better teacher in your community school? What sorts of professional learning activities have helped you most? How has your professional learning helped you grow as a teacher?

- **Engaging professionally with colleague, parents/carers and the community**

Example prompts: What does it mean for you to engage professionally with colleagues? How do you engage with parents/carers and the wider community? Do you see yourself having a wider role as a teacher in your community than just being a classroom teacher?

Participants were invited to respond to the prompts using stories or examples from their own teaching experience, or in any other way they chose to respond.

#### **4.4.4 Narrative Analysis**

A three level analysis was used to explore the teacher narratives. The participants were involved in different ways at all three levels of this analysis. This is not uncommon in qualitative research that uses narrative, where 'the interviewer is understood to work with the respondent in flexible collaboration to identify and interpret the relevant meanings that are used to make sense of the topic' (Reid et al. 2005, p. 22). Involvement of the participants in analysis also helps to overcome issues of language and cross-cultural understanding as the participants were given this additional opportunity to clarify their meaning and unpack any metaphors and symbolism used. This is particularly important in

communicating meaning and understandings in a cross-cultural space (Pringle et al. 2011. p. 21).

### *Level 1 – Researcher with individual participants*

At the conclusion of the narrative recordings the researcher transcribed each narrative using NVivo© software. After this the researcher went over each narrative transcript with the respective teacher participant and together they explored the individual narrative to see what it revealed about the question at the centre of the research. During this process some initial basic coding was done on the basis of repetitive words, themes and ideas emerging. This was also a time for the participants to evaluate what they said in their story and to remove anything they were not comfortable with, as well as adding in additional parts of the narrative that they may have forgotten to mention at the time of telling. It was a chance to revisit the language used and clarify what the teller was saying, as well as doing any translation work that was necessary. This first level was important to ensure that the story teller was comfortable and happy with the version of their narrative that would be used in the next step of analysis.

### *Level 2 – Group level analysis*

The researcher worked with the group of teacher participants who told their stories to explore the set of narratives collected. This was an important way of ensuring that important themes in the narratives were not identified solely by one non-Indigenous person; that is, the principal researcher. This work was done at a two-day seminar conducted in Alice Springs with all research participants in attendance. Each participant read and analysed the narrative of another teacher and provided commentary about the important themes they felt were contained in that narrative. This second level of analysis

by the group gave important direction to the initial coding work completed in the Level 1 analysis. It helped direct the research towards the codes and themes to focus on more strongly. There were key moments during this two day seminar when the topic under discussion generated the engagement of the whole group and some additional examples and expansion of the narratives were offered by the group members. The energy of the group during those times had a different feeling. These key moments of engagement were indications that what we were discussing was felt to be important by all participants. It was around these key moments of engagement that the initial seven themes were identified. The analysis of these group discussions and the themes that were inductively produced in this way are detailed in Chapter 6.

### *Level 3 – Researcher analysis & feedback loop*

After levels 1 and 2 were completed the themes and analysis drawn out by the individuals and the group were used by the principal researcher as analytical frame to further explore and analyse the individual narratives of the teacher participants. This analysis is contained in Chapter 7, themes one to seven. An ongoing feedback loop with the research participants also provided a way for the participants to provide feedback to the researcher on the conclusions drawn as the process unfolded. This happened in an ad hoc way through some casual and some intentional interactions between the researcher and teacher participants.

### **4.5 Methodological evolution – ‘participatory narrative’**

While the original research design envisioned the use of ‘narrative methodology’ the careful consideration of the ‘ethics’ of research and the desire to come together in ‘good

faith' to do Post-Colonial research work meant that what emerged was a new form of narrative method, one where those offering their narratives to the research were also active participants in the research process. I am calling this methodology 'participatory narrative' and this will be discussed further in Chapter 5.

## Chapter 5 – Discussion of ‘Participatory Narrative’ method

### 5.1 Background and rationale

The decision to pay attention to our collective practices while doing this research was born out of the fact that the problem was centred on a collective public problem to begin with. The question at the heart of this research emerged over a number of years of collaborative work between myself and the teacher participants. During this collaboration we had many discussions around the lack of people from remote communities in Central Australia completing teacher education and becoming qualified teachers, as the teacher participants themselves had done. In this particular research the teacher participants are not just the ones providing the narratives as data, but are themselves some of the key knowledge authorities on this subject. When it comes to questions of Western education in their communities, and many other areas, they are the ‘go to’ people. These women are also scholars who are in many cases the highest qualified people in their communities when seen through the lens of the Western academy. A number of the teacher participants are also interested in pursuing further study in the form of post graduate education and at least part of their motivation for participating in this PhD process was to gain some experience and first-hand knowledge of the research process. They were keen to actively participate in and learn from the research process itself. Similarly I, as the non-Indigenous researcher, am interested in deepening my own understanding about ‘ways of being’ and ‘ways of doing’ with Indigenous people. By not only working together to explore a problem but also paying attention to our process we were able to find ways of working together in

‘good faith’ and offer what we learned here as an example of Post-Colonial Knowledge work.

## 5.2 The centrality of relationships in collaborative research with Indigenous participants

The presence of pre-existing relationships, while often seen as a risk or threat in the positivist view of research, is commonly seen as something advantageous to the quality of the research when working with Indigenous research participants (Chilisa 2011, Wilson 2009). Largely thanks to my own existing knowledge base and contextual experience that has been built up over time working in remote communities and with Indigenous people in Central Australia, I approached the research process wanting to keep relationships central to this new endeavour. Because of these existing relationships I was better placed to enter into what Thrift (2004) calls research ‘encounters’. Thrift (2004) talks about these spaces of ‘ethical encounters as being part of the real ethics of doing research and suggests that things such as ‘knowing when to wait for a response, knowing when and when not to foreclose a situation, knowing when to be playful and when to be serious...can open out the ethical possibilities of an encounter and allow both the researcher and the researched to trust their judgement’ (Thrift 2004). He suggests that these encounters expands our subjectivity, but does so in a frame of responsibility. This echoes Rose (2004) who talks about the need for an ‘ethic of relational responsibility’ which is central to the work of decolonisation. There is also evidence to suggest that research is strengthened by the principal researcher being experienced and knowledgeable in the area being researched; someone who understands the experiences of the participants (Pringle et al. 2011). In this case, as the principal researcher, I shared both the experience of teaching in the remote

Central Australia context for over a decade, as well as supporting the delivery of teacher education for remote Indigenous teachers.

The group of research participants were already known to me and I to them. We are accountable to each other through friendship, collegiality and a shared commitment to education. We have developed a rapport that enables honest and sometimes challenging conversations to take place in respectful and responsible ways. Ensuring participants' free and voluntary consent and participation in the project was very important to me. I did not want people to participate out of obligation to me or to our friendship. Ensuring the participants felt free to enter into but also opt out of the project was an important part of what needed to be negotiated in an ongoing way. Also important was the provision of many opportunities for participants to negotiate aspects of the project so that the options were not simply opting in or out, but ensuring that the research was done in ways that everyone felt happy with.

### **5.3 Co-constructing the research process**

From the beginning it was important to us all that we didn't just focus on the outcomes of the research but on the process itself and how everyone was experiencing that process. To ensure that we kept this focus we needed mechanisms of checking on our relational accountability to each other. These mechanisms emerged and evolved as the research progressed. An extended 'conversational phase' was allowed for at the beginning of the research process. This enabled everyone to do as much talking as they needed to about the research questions, the implications of participation and the process of gathering the

narratives. It also provided people with time to have conversations with family and community members about the research and their role within it. This was important as it often enabled the participants to embed their understanding of the project in their first language by explaining it to and discussing it with other language speakers. The conversational phase enabled the researcher and the participants to conduct one main group discussion about the project where almost everyone was present. It also allowed for a number of ad hoc individual and group conversations to take place. It was also during the conversational phase that we had conversations with leaders and Elders in the respective communities to explain the research we were doing and invite questions, conversation and input about the purpose and usefulness of what we were doing for people in that context.

At the end of each narrative collection, each research participant and the researcher had a final reflective conversation. The focus of this conversation was to document how both the researcher and the participant were feeling about the research process thus far. In each instance it was a moment of ethical and relational accountability to each other, to ensure that the consent given at the beginning of the process still felt true for both parties. These conversations were recorded on audio only and transcribed, again with full consent.

#### **5.4 Participatory narratives**

No narrative recording sessions commenced until the individual participants indicated their readiness to begin. The first of the narrative recordings began in January 2014 and each narrative was generally recorded over a number of sessions at the time and place of the teller's choosing. The final narrative recordings happened in January of 2015.

The teacher participants were also involved in the exploration and analysis of the full set of narratives collected. This was an important way of ensuring that important themes in the narratives were not identified solely by one non-Indigenous person; that is, me as the principal researcher. This work was done at a two-day seminar conducted in Alice Springs with all research participants in attendance. Each participant read and analysed the narrative of another teacher and provided commentary about the important themes they felt were contained in that narrative. This second level of analysis by the group gave important direction to the initial coding work. It helped direct the research towards the codes and themes to focus more strongly on. There were key moments during this two day seminar when the topic under discussion generated the engagement of the whole group and some additional examples and expansion of the narratives were offered by the group members. The energy of the group during those times had a different feeling. These key moments of collective resonance were indications that what we were discussing was felt to be important by all participants. It was around these key moments of resonance that the initial seven themes were identified. During this two day seminar there were also ongoing parallel conversations about the 'right way' to work together. These conversations built on the ideas discussed in the one to one conversations at the end of each narrative recording. The process of doing and reflecting on what we were doing became symbiotic.

These ongoing and intentional conversations throughout the research process provided what Verran (2013) calls 'interrupting tools'. She talks about the need in post-colonial knowledge work to pay attention to moments of epistemic disconcertment and to be alert to the differences we encounter. These intentional conversations about the research

process helped us to ‘go deeper inside the encounter’ (Verran 2013, p. 147) to explore how the way we did things actually helped us to work in ‘good faith’ with each other.

### 5.5 Analysis of our shared process

The analysis process that helped us to think about how we were doing the research was twofold. Firstly, transcripts from the recordings of our intentional conversations, a total of seven documents, were uploaded into NVivo© software. Ideas that repeated in the texts were identified, often using the words or phrases from the conversations themselves. By the end of this process there were three areas that repeated themselves often enough to make them stand out. These three areas related to notions of time, the nature of our existing relationships, and our ability to ensure that multiple needs were met by the work we were doing. If I had left it at this level then I would have become what Verran (2013) calls an analyst who thinks she can step outside the situation. Conscious of this it felt important to check in with the teachers again and discuss the possibility of going further into these three areas. This ‘checking in’ happened both through one to one conversations where and when possible, and then again when all of the participants came together at the two day analysis seminar in Alice Springs. It was during this period of discussion that the use of the words ‘Anma’, ‘Marlpa’ and ‘Ngapartji’ increasingly began to be reference points between all of us to discuss these areas. Waiting and allowing time before ‘coming to concepts’ (Verran 2013) was an important part of this work. It meant that we were able to discover some important insights about what made a difference when we intentionally set about to work together in ‘good faith’. These discoveries are discussed briefly below as

examples of the possibility of generating new shared understandings when working together in a Post-Colonial Knowledge space.

## 5.6 Insights into how we do research together in 'good faith' – Anma, Marpla and Ngapartji Ngapartji

### 5.6.1 Anma

*'...not usually, you know straight answer 'No' but you know, 'anma, give me time'*

The first area that we needed to pay attention to in how we worked together was in our differing notions of time. Together we ultimately came to talk about the importance of 'Anma'. This is a Western Arrarnta word that has equivalences in other local Indigenous languages. For example a similar concept in Warlpiri is expressed with the word 'murnma'. In Luritja and Pitjantjatjara the word often used is 'wanyu'. There are also related concepts in other Australian Indigenous languages further afield. It carries epistemologically complex understandings that I cannot hope to grasp, but my immature and experiential understanding is that it can be interpreted in many ways including waiting, giving space, waiting for the right time, not filling up all the space, being patient and waiting until the other person feels ready. While it might be perceived as a passive term where nothing is happening, it is often quite an active space of preparation and foreshadowing.

We discovered that 'Anma' or waiting is important. This waiting is a space that allows time for many things to occur. It allows time for good communication to happen and allows for everyone to feel ready and prepared. This was really important for enacting the Western academic research consent process. Waiting for the 'right time' and until people indicated

their readiness felt more informed, more like genuine consent and ensured that the narratives that came from that process emerged comfortably and confidently. This perhaps points towards a point of difference in relation to ethics which can be identified and granted into the future through a western metaphysics, but in Indigenous knowledge and understandings, it is always provisional as reality itself emerges. Approaching things with 'anma' created a space for patience, consideration and a giving over of control when required. This enabled participants to not feel pressured to the point of opting out of the research. Participants continued to engage in the process until they felt they time was right, or their lives allowed enough time for recording the narratives. Participants also felt some sense of control over their participation in the process. It is a space that allows for a respectful way of entering into work with people and provides enough time for everyone who needs to be involved in the process to be included. Often in research the perception is that the researcher needs to be in control of the process. There were many times when I needed to give up control and trust in my research collaborators. Sometimes this was about letting someone else plan how and when we would spend our time together and being flexible when plans changed. It is a way of thinking about time not as sequential and linear, but as patterned, seasonal and emerging. It is not something that you plan for, but rather something that you pay attention to and allow to unfold. It is something that you meet with readiness only when the time is right.

### 5.6.2 Marlpa

*'...we can't leave you by yourself, we gotta use everyone's eyes and ears and search for it.'*

The second area that we needed to pay attention to in how we worked together was in the

nature and role of our existing relationships. Together we ultimately came to talk about the role of 'marlpa'. This is a word that is used by Warlpiri, Luritja and Pitjantjara language speakers. It has equivalences in many other Indigenous languages, for example in Western Arrarnta the concept is often expressed using the word 'ilkwatharra'. It is often translated simply as 'company' but once again the depth of epistemological understandings of this word is beyond my reach. I have come to understand that at its core 'marlpa' is relational. It is about friendship, doing things together and not leaving anyone out. It is a way of being with others that ensures harmony, connectedness and relational responsibility. 'Marlpa' is often experienced bodily, as a 'good feeling'. It was of central importance to how we worked together in this research process.

Having existing relationships with each other enabled us to operate from a position of relational trust, shared experience and commitment, and accountability to each other. Knowing each other for so long and with such familiarity enabled flexibility, gave us the ability to read the more subtle nuances of communication and strengthened our commitment to working towards a common purpose. New work required additional negotiation, but it meant that we were starting from a place of knowledge and trust that does not exist if the researcher and participants are unknown to each other. A large part of the commitment of these teachers to work on this research was not necessarily about their relationship to me, but their relationship to each other. The teacher participants have a sense of community born out of their shared journey working in schools and their teacher education. They provide 'marlpa' for each other that cannot be provided by other people, including me. Relationships and 'marlpa' provided an important accountability mechanism

into the research process. This is important when considering the traditionally privileged and powerful role of the principal researcher. I have been able to trust that if I was headed in the wrong direction, the strength of our relationships meant that people would find honest ways to tell me and show me that. But that feeling of ‘marlpa’ was also an important reminder that it wasn’t all about the research. Sometimes ‘marlpa’ was about making time and space to be together doing other things: storytelling, hunting, teaching or laughter. Mostly it was just about being together. These shared activities were also ways of entering into the research process more gently and comfortably; of starting from a point of ‘marlpa’ and re-establishing that trust relationship before the recording devices got turned on. It was important preparation work that needed to be done each time we came together.

### 5.6.3 Ngapartji Ngapartji

*‘...my history is helping both you and me because that’s like our country helps us to do our language and culture’*

The third area where we experienced both disconcertment and ‘good faith’ as we worked together was in our ability to ensure that multiple needs were met by the work we were doing. Together we talked about this using the phrase ‘ngapartji ngapartji’ which can be translated in many ways. In discussion we decided that the best translation to English to use was ‘you give something to me and I give something to you’. Warlpiri speakers will sometimes borrow this phrase from Luritja, but will also use the word ‘watinyarra’ meaning ‘equal’ or ‘level’ to express something similar. In Western Arrarnta it is often expressed as

'kapanha'. To encapsulate this concept in English we might talk about reciprocity or mutual generosity. In practice this concept was enacted in many different ways.

Through this process of exploration we came to acknowledge what mutual generosity actually looks like in an intercultural space. Helping each other out is about everyone getting their needs met with the collective resources that we possess. Finding ways to do that that are balanced and respectful of all can be challenging but at times also made the difference between research sessions going ahead or not. Learning from each other has been a defining feature of the reciprocity that has existed throughout my time of knowing and working with these teachers and it has been a central tenet of what we have been doing in this research work.

The reciprocity of ideas at times happened in everyday conversations about things that mattered to us, while driving somewhere or sitting together of an evening. Then there were other times when I was the one who was doing most of the learning through conversations with Elders, time spent on country and visits to significant places. It was through moments of 'ngapartji ngapartji' that I began to understand the research itself as being an embedded part of the lives of participants, my life, and in interconnected ways to the life of all those we came into contact with. The stories being told were indivisible from all knowledge for the tellers, and I needed to begin to understand this about the stories we were recording together. This was challenging for me as it seemed to increase my sense of obligation and responsibility to do it 'right', whatever that meant. Perhaps this just points towards an ongoing epistemological disconcertment that needs to be dwelt in longer?

Finally the participants and I frequently discussed the 'good feeling' that we often felt throughout the process. In some ways this is a type of reciprocity that lies in the well-being that the teacher participants got in return for offering their stories as the data for the research. At other times it was the 'good feeling' of working together on a shared problem that we all cared deeply about. Steven Patrick a Warlpiri scholar from Lajamanu community talks about this in his writings on Ngurra-Kurlu. He uses the following phrase to describe this 'good feeling', *'People tasted it, they liked that taste in their mouth and they came back for more'* (Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes and Box 2008, pp 7-8). This is similar to what Verran (2013) is referring to when she talks about doing things together in 'good faith' from which something different and interesting emerges.

### 5.7 Conclusions about 'how we do research'

The research process used in this study was not without fault. It was still confined and constricted by the trappings that come along with the PhD frame. There were time constraints, language constraints and ethical constraints, to name but a few. All of these were limited by the capacity of me as the principal researcher and by the administrative constraints of the PhD process itself. But because we have not solely been focused on the narratives as the outcome of the research, but have intentionally made space to notice how we do this work together, we have all been left with a 'good feeling' about what we have done together. In particular, we have thought and talked extensively about what we wanted to do together, we have made time and space in our minds and in our lives and we have kept talking to each other to find the 'right time' to do the work. We have discovered 'anma' as an insight in how we have done the work. We have also allowed the deep trusted

relationships built over time between myself and these teachers to act as a compass to help us navigate the right way to do the research together. We have discovered 'marlpa' as a force that shapes the research space. We have also valued the immense knowledge, capabilities and experience that everyone brings to the process and have acted in a spirit of reciprocity and generosity towards each other. Rather than the research process being a one way street that only benefits the researcher, we have acted in a spirit of 'ngapartji ngarpartji' where the multiple needs can be met. There is an inherent danger in labelling and categorising these learnings. They are words that point towards something deeper, with multiple meanings and, in some ways, unable to be known. We use them here not to not by way as establishing them as recommendations or a prescription for others. We use them as a kind of narrative that tells the story of how we talked, thought and did things together. They were ways of doing and being that helped us to learn about our differences in how we approach things and in turn helped us to find ways of doing the research that left everybody with that 'good feeling' indicating that we were working in 'good faith'. It is this 'participatory' approach, where we have all collectively shared this responsibility of participation and reflecting on our participation, which feels most important. By intentionally setting up some 'interrupting tools' and by creating the time and space to talk together both about how we are doing things as well as what we are doing, we have learned important lessons about how to do research together in 'good faith' (Verran 2013).

## **Chapter 6 - Teacher narratives – group theme analysis**

Both this chapter and the next one are focused on the teacher narratives themselves. This chapter reports the findings of the group analysis work done collaboratively with the teacher participants. Chapter 7 then uses the themes proposed through this group process, to interrogate the individual narratives.

### **6.1 Putting things against a contextual background**

As established in Chapter 2, it is important to remember that schooling is still a recent development in remote communities in the Northern Territory. Many places did not have any kind of schooling until the 1960s or 1970s and, prior to this, Indigenous children were often specifically excluded from participating in schools. Apart from some very early examples of bilingual schools in places such as Ntaria/Hermannsburg mission, schooling has almost exclusively been conceived out of a Western cultural framework. The epistemology and model that the schooling system was built upon came with the colonisers. Educational processes and practices were established in ignorance or blatant dismissal of learning processes that already existed within the language and family groups that had lived and thrived for many tens of thousands of years before that time. In contrast to the steadiness and reliability of the tried, true and trusted traditional learning processes they were used to, the experience of Indigenous Australians with the Western education system has been defined by constant and rapid change.

Chapter 3 established that those policy makers defining the experience of Western schooling for people in remote communities do so operating within a cultural milieu that is

greatly removed from the local context. Time frames for education for both schools students and tertiary learning are set at State and National levels and according to Western knowledge and timeframes. Notions of equality or equity in education are defined at the National level by one size fits all curriculum, standardized tests and professional standards for teachers. The system promotes the ideas of sameness and quality, but these concepts are defined based on a 'mainstream' norm that scarcely resembles the life and reality of children or adults in remote communities in central Australia. Any changes that come from outside are imposed without local choice or autonomy.

Despite this there are committed and dedicated Indigenous adults in remote communities who have chosen to get involved in their local schools and have dedicated their lives to the quality education of their own children. There are parents and community members who absolutely believe that education is crucially important to the future choices, aspirations and leadership of their communities. Some remarkable individuals have shown such dedication so as to persevere and navigate their way not only through the ever changing western schooling system they work in, but also through the changing teacher education landscape, to complete their teacher education and become fully qualified classroom teachers. But these qualified teachers are few and far between. Despite decades of rhetoric around wanting 'more Indigenous teachers' in remote schools we see almost no new pre-service teachers from remote communities in the region of Central Australia or the Northern Territory as a whole. The reason for this current situation is the focus of and impetus for the research for this doctoral study. Through a series of teachers' narratives the insider experience of becoming a fully qualified Indigenous teacher in a remote community has been examined. These insider accounts have been analysed at both a

collective level, discussed in this chapter, and an individual level, discussed in the next chapter. The Chapter 8 will then explore the findings of these analysis chapters further against the contextual backdrop established in the two literature review chapters and with due consideration of theoretical knowledge.

## **6.2 Collective analysis process**

From the outset of the research design attention has been paid to the collectivist nature of the research. In the analysis of the teacher narratives it was important to find a method that was inclusive of more than the principal researcher. It was important to ensure that themes in the narratives were not identified solely by one non-Indigenous person, but were inclusive of the knowledge experts in the field; that is, the teacher participants. I refer to this stage in the research as a second level of analysis. In order to meet this analytical imperative a two-day seminar in Alice Springs was conducted with all teacher participants in attendance. Each teacher participant read and analysed the narrative of another and provided commentary about the important themes they saw emerging from that narrative. This second level of analysis by the group gave important direction to the initial coding work. It helped direct the analysis towards the codes and themes upon which we collectively felt should be the focus. The discussion during this two day seminar included moments when the energy of the group had a different feeling. These key moments of engagement were indications that what we were discussing was felt to be important by all participants. These moments provided emphasis about what influenced and impacted upon the experience of being a remote Indigenous community teacher.

### 6. 3 Seven themes

The seven themes below were identified by the teacher participants through this inductive process as important, recurring and enduring ideas throughout their lives and teaching careers. This chapter will provide analysis of the themes as they emerged during the group seminar experience. In the next chapter this thematic frame will then be applied to a more detailed analysis of the individual teacher narratives.

#### 6.3.1 'Our feeling for family'

The teacher participants placed a strong emphasis on the importance of what one participant called 'our feeling for family'. This sense of connection to family, culture and country came through as a powerful and not-negotiable imperative in the lives of the participants. One participant talked about it in comparison to the non-Indigenous culture saying,

*there's people all the time in our lives, doing things and everyone knows each other...like you know white people society there's only that one house that you can be in, your own house, next door neighbours - nothing to do with them. But out in the community its 'oh this is your aunty, your cousin' you know...it's different*

Several of the participants talked about how this 'feeling for family' impacted on their schooling experience, especially in relation to attending boarding school in their secondary years. All of the participants had attended a boarding school in Alice Springs for a period of time but none of them had stayed for more than two or three years. When asked why they thought they didn't stay longer, the universal response was because of the experience of

homesickness. When pressed for a further explanation of what that feeling of homesickness was about, it proved to be a complex set of motivators linked strongly to that 'feeling for family' and community. Another participant linked this to the feeling of being in a space that just felt too different to home saying, 'the change of that from (going) into the college, it was too different'. One participants listed activities such as 'hunting, being with family, starting to get married' as being the types of things she felt homesick for. Other participants identified the feeling of personal and cultural safety as being a motivation for leaving,

*'other students teasing, you would want to go back early, we want to be safe'*

*'And sometimes teachers get smart for students and students dont feel safe and they want to go back home'*

One participant talked about the feeling of loneliness and the loss of 'company' as being a reason to leave saying,

*sometimes we could see our friends not staying there, going early, they kept leaving, and you might think 'oh I'm by myself now, I might do same, go back home'*

Finally, the death of family and community members (referred to culturally as 'sorry business') was identified as a major reason for leaving school and moving back to the community,

*'And sorry too back at home, when we lose family we want to go back'*

All of these examples, referring to the participants own secondary educational years, demonstrate that in the choice between schooling and family, the participants always chose family first. One participant reinforced that she felt that people still feel that same way today as she did when she was at school,

*'I think technology and all this stuff has changed but our feeling for the family and the community hasn't, it's not gonna change, that need to be close to the families...I think this culture is really strong you know, family and family connection and sorry business...you're expecting them to get a good education but these things are gonna come all the time'*

The teacher participants also identified that this 'feeling for family' was a key aspect that supported them to be successful in their teacher education. One of the key determinants of them being able to continue on with their teacher education was the fact that, at least in the beginning, the courses that these teachers participated in were community based which enabled their families to engage meaningfully in what they were doing.

*I think there was more support at that time and like the activities were done in the community so people could see what we were doing and that made it, you know strong.*

One teacher talked about this as both being supportive of the large group who began the study and the main reason why people dropped out, saying

*We started off in a big group and it was just community based and we were just travelling in between communities for workshops. And then the big one came, you know to go to Batchelor or come into Alice and everyone thought 'No!'*

When encouraged to reflect on why this group of teachers continued on to complete their study, while others dropped out, again this theme of obligation to family and culture came through. In this case it was the willingness of their families to release the participants from their obligations that made the biggest difference. One participant simply said 'family supported me to go away'. When asked what sorts of things family did to provide this support another participant said,

*'Taking over responsibilities, like if you're away someone will come in and look after your family when you are away.'*

Another participant suggested,

*'Even my sick husband he's been supporting me too'*

So this support came in the family giving permission for the participant to go away from the community for periods of time, giving them permission to miss out on 'sorry business' and in practical ways taking on the workload left behind such as caring for children or sick family members.

This 'feeling for family' is ontological. It speaks to ideas of cultural knowledge, connection to country, participation in ritual and ceremony and the obligation of interconnected relationships. It is something that is part of who the teacher participants are as Warlpiri, Luritja, Pitjantjatjara and Western Arrarnta people and will never be superseded by other demands such as education. However, these participants are proof that this 'feeling for family', and all that that represents, must be accommodated and respected as part of the

educational journey. When understood and applied creatively, this ontological imperative can actually be a tremendous support structure to help Aboriginal Teachers succeed. This is expanded upon the next two themes.

### 6.3.2 Learning with 'marlpa'

'Marlpa' means company in the Warlpiri, Luritja and Pitjantjatjara languages of Central Australia. It is a concept that is, at its core, relational. It is about friendship, doing things together and not leaving anyone out. It is a way of being with others that ensures harmony, connectedness and relational responsibility. It was highlighted by the teacher participants as being an important part of the delivery model of teacher education that they experienced. Many of the participants talked about the fact that they found studying at that level for the first time daunting and were comforted by the fact that they could do the study in their home community and with a group of people. For example,

*It was first time for us and easy based at the community,*

*That first year we were lucky that we had lecturers or tutors working with us sometimes some of us weren't confident but we felt like we wanted to study to have experience, more experience through that program, to become teachers.*

*...and secure as well, and like that was, I think we all didn't have a qualification.*

*Studying was new, something new to us, cos it wasn't really thought of. We had other jobs before but didn't have any training. I think really it's just that study, when there's other people we can feel confident.*

*...but that was really easy we could see that we were all coming together, sharing ideas, talking up.*

*...and it was also bit easy because we had already been teaching in the class, and there were also a lot of people.*

This cohort model was mentioned repeatedly by the teacher participants as being a key determinant in their success. They identified this as being part of their early success in the program when it was community based, but also in later stages when they had to travel to workshops. The relationships built across cohorts from different communities also played an important role in supporting learning, and deviations from that model impacted upon their learning.

*Thats how we get to know each other becasue we were all doing the same study. See like RATE program we were all doing the same module at the same time. We didn't know anything about it but we were always in group working together, sharing ideas and presenting to each other, that's how we were learning. And then when we went to Batchelor it was like separate work now.*

The relational aspect was an important element in the way that the original Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program was developed. Participants were not left by themselves to learn individualistically; they had 'marlpa'. These teacher education students did not feel left alone, but through the cohort model felt a part of a group working towards the same goal.

### 6.3.3 Mentors, support and encouragement

All of the participants identified the role of community and family encouragement as being very important in their early discernment about becoming a teacher. Many of the participants talked about having supportive parents who encouraged them from a young age,

*When I went home my mum said 'you've got to be working, get a job'...And like before coming to boarding school we used to help mum out in her workplace, go and sweep, whatever job she was doing and she would take us in and say 'you do this you do that', this is how we learnt.*

This also extended to family members who worked in the school and who the participants got to see playing a role in learning in both the school and home environments,

*...like family working in the school, like assistant teacher teaching them in the school and then going home and teaching them at home too*

*....she talked about at school she had one of her family working there, her uncle, he used to be a teaching assistant and then also taught her when she went back home, telling stories. And that's good when someone's like that in the family so we can pass on to the little kids after.*

Some of the participants also experienced this kind of support and encouragement through being inspired by others from their community who were starting to undertake further education,

*Like (name), when I was a student at Yirara we went on an excursion to Darwin and then Batchelor and we saw (name) she was doing her training and I started thinking 'one day I might come to this place, Batchelor'.*

This inspiration of seeing other community members going on and succeeding in their study was an important form of encouragement throughout the learning journey of the participants,

*...just inspiring seeing others on video or going to ceremony where they actually graduated, and from that that I said 'oh next one I'm going to be like her!' you know looking at students who graduated before.*

Family members working in the school also played a strong role in encouraging the participants to start working in the school themselves and then playing an important ongoing mentoring role,

*Like I had my cousin there, she encouraged me 'come to work, they are looking for people like you, come and work with us...She was a strong lady ...and we also learn from her, she also took me to Adelaide for conference, Indigenous language and culture conference, first time I talked in front of lots of people. I was young, I was just learning but I thought to myself 'I've got to feel strong' because she wanted me to talk...yuwai she was like a mentor person.*

All of the participants talked about an ongoing need for encouragement, support and mentoring throughout their career, even after they had completed their qualifications. This was seen by many as a normal part of reflective practice,

*And also having a tutor inside the classroom when I was teaching, observing, she used to take notes, observation of what I taught and then she would in my free time go through what she wrote, 'oh this is what you have to do next time to make it improve'. That helped me as a teacher. That helped me and made me a stronger person and a better person. Always I'd ask whoever was inside the room, other teacher or other tutor, I used to ask them to be critical because that's how I want to learn. Come up with the critical questions.*

This need for ongoing in-service mentoring was often due to curriculum and policy changes in the Northern Territory that were constantly altering what it was teachers were expected to deliver. At times it was also needed to make up for the fact that they were not getting that support from the school leadership,

*Because we're a teacher, we've got to take on that role and teach, but we still weren't confident about planning and programming. We need someone to come and sit down with us and plan with us. We still didn't understand the NTCF framework curriculum.*

*Like a mentor coming out in the community, like (name) used to come out and support me. Like someone out in the school already doesn't help us.*

This mentoring role is also something that the participants identified as a role they now played for other young Indigenous teachers in their schools. One teacher participant spoke eloquently about this,

*I want to work with adults and mentor them, they need yapa person helping them with that experience, and I want to encourage them, we do that, we organise yapa staff meeting and those young women they have opportunity to talk up about what they do in the classroom...They ask for advice ... I also went to their workshop in (community name) for these young ATs and I've also helped them with planning a program and talking about planning.*

So once again we can see that this support and encouragement plays an important role in the careers of these participants right through from when they were children, through the discernment process of choosing to work in the school and into their teacher education. Certain mentors, especially key family members, have had a strong influence on the careers and successes of these teachers, such that they have now developed a sense of themselves as mentors to others for the future.

#### **6.3.4 Team Teaching**

All of the teacher participants emphasized the centrality of team teaching in both how they developed their understanding of the work of teachers and how they built their confidence to do this work.

*And team teaching, like the way it was building confidence and then after that taking small groups*

Many of the participants talked about the value of working with other teachers and staff members in the classroom. They talked about the importance in their early years of working in the school of having opportunities to work as a team with the fully qualified

teacher and often a literacy worker or tutor as well. The participants said that the team dynamic allowed for them to watch but more importantly participate in all aspects of the teaching cycle,

*You are there to work with the team and learn from them*

*It wasn't only her teaching team, they both planned it*

*We need to be there to teach them and take that group, be part of that team, be part of the planning*

*Sitting down and talking about how did the lesson go...*

While participants talked a great deal about the importance and effectiveness of team teaching they also identified the detrimental effect of not being involved in team teaching and some of the ways team teaching became difficult. In some situations the fully qualified teacher they were working with, who most often was non-Indigenous, did not know how to work in a team teaching environment and would end up 'using assistant teachers for language lessons' only. At other times the assistant teacher would not be involved in anything other than being called on to translate and monitor children's behaviour. The participants pointed out how this non-colleagial behaviour discouraged many assistant teachers from taking their work and learning seriously. As one participant said,

*If you're just sitting down there watching the kids - its boring*

Another participant pointed out the challenge of the power and hierarchical issues that existed in some classrooms,

*see like for example if me and my team teacher work together but sometimes that team teacher can be like a boss in that classroom, and she's putting me down, but who is feeling bad there and feeling boss. There are some teachers like that who are bossy but we've got to report them because we've got to learn together as a team and teach together*

Sometimes these hierarchical issues within teams were enacted by passive resistance on the part of the fully qualified non-Indigenous teacher refusing to let the Indigenous assistant teachers participate in upskilling and education courses on the basis that they were needed in the classroom,

*now a days we've got more than one AT in the class. In our school we've got tutor as well, and still that's not enough when the AT goes for study and the tutor is there. It's just really different now. In our school we've got Assistant Teacher and a tutor in each class and I think that's not enough for the white teacher. They're not letting people go.*

This participant suggested that this was something that had changed from when she completed her study and felt that it was one of the reasons that more assistant teachers were not completing their teacher education. Other participants pointed to the key role that

the Principal played in whether or not team teaching was valued and implemented in a school,

*Sometimes it happens if that school has been doing it for a long time it'll go that way, you know team teaching, but if Principal - you might get a good one or a bad one, it just falls apart ...*

All of the participants saw the team teaching work they did in classrooms, whether before, during and after their teacher education, as a cornerstone in learning about the role of the teacher. Having the opportunity to meaningfully participate in and contribute to the student learning that happened in the classroom was one of the most powerful experiences in helping these teachers develop their professional identity.

### 6.3.5 Leadership

The tone of the group conversation became almost wistful when we broached the topic of leadership. One participant commented simply,

*...before we had a good principal but now a days I don't know, no one supports us.*

When encouraged to identify what made a good principal the teacher participants identified the following qualities,

- *one that listens.*
- *going around checking each classroom.*
- *working strongly with Indigenous staff.*

- *talking with all the yapa and kardiya staff and asking how it is going.*
- *Someone who makes us feel comfortable and safe.*
- *Have learning together sessions and sharing ideas.*

Participants thought they were more likely to get a Principal with these qualities when:

- *Yapa should be on that panel to interview that Principal.*
- *they should be chosen by the community.*

In the general discussion about leadership it became clear that the kind of leadership that these teachers had found the most useful and powerful had been a collaborative model that was focused on learning together and teaching together. When asked what kind of leadership she found helpful one participant said the following,

*Having professional development for the whole staff, talk about stuff and then doing it, checking how well it went. We have a lot of those at school but really it doesn't work, it's not followed up and it's not done in the classroom, what we talked about. It's just something that the Education Department wants to hear 'Oh this is really good what they're doing at that school' but it's not followed up, its not done. This is what I see all the time. 'Cos one of the things we were talking about was team teaching...still not happening! We need to get back together again and talk and maybe change some things that aren't working ... And like there should be evidence as well, like she's taking a small group there and I'm taking the other group, there should be evidence in those learning together sessions, you know 'this is what she's doing, this is what I'm doing'*

This again shows a strong desire and commitment on the part of these teachers to be reflective practitioners. Many of the participants talked about their own leadership aspirations as well. They referred to part of their teacher education course that supported this kind of development,

*Also like field trips made us confident in leading in other areas too, like when we go back and be a leader and better person to be a spokesperson for your community, that's another way I looked at it while I was doing field trips to other communities and looking at how their council worked and school worked and both community and school where you can gain your confidence and be a leader in your position....and put it in practice.*

Sadly, many of the participants also talked about how these leadership aspirations had been blocked or stymied throughout the course of their careers; a topic that will be discussed further in the individual narratives.

### **6.3.6 Exclusion and power**

In the two day seminar where all participants came together and analysed the individual teacher narratives, the most animated discussion happened in relationship to the experience of exclusion and power. It began with one participant telling the following story about her experience,

*...we got a new fence built, they're doing it now and Principal came up to me with a plan before it was started, and she showed me 'oh I want to show you this is where the new fence is going'. And I said 'no no no', thats what I'm just feeling a bit bad, I*

went and seen it yesterday and saw the fence is still going where the old fence was before. And I said 'no we need to put this fence, make it bigger, more space'. And I had spoken to the Principal and she had said 'yeah that's alright, we'll do that' and then yesterday when I went around it's still going in the same place where the old fence was. She didn't listen to me. It's still going where the old fence was.... I think it's her decision 'I'm just going to go ahead and tell them where to put it. I'm the boss!'. I don't know why she comes and asks me?... if she's not going to listen, just to make me happy, show me the piece of paper, so I can't think 'Oh I'm part of this as well'. That's what I thought... and over the holidays I went and saw where the pickets were put in place where the fence is gonna go, and its way back that way. But the fence is still going where the old fence was... it's hurting me becasue we're being used in all of these sorts of things...as soon as school starts I was going to go back and ask the school council if she showed them the plan to the school council, did they agree?..I think she already spoken to those fence people before going on holidays and when she was away they started building the fence...'cos I was saying 'where's the gate gonna go, cos we can put the gate right near the kitchen where we can see the kids going out'. 'No it can go back over to the same place, near the toilet'. She didnt really want to listen to me.

In response to this story one of the other participants observed about the behaviour of the Principal in question,

*She wants to do it her own way...she was using her own power to run her down, run over her...she did that with her own power but she didnt share that with others*

This led to a number of other stories being shared. All of the participants had experienced something similar during their working life. Some stories like the first example focused on the role and power of the Principal in the school. On the subject of Principals, one participant remarked 'They come with bad powers'. Another told the following story,

*We had one Principal come and say to us 'I'm not here to make friends, I'm just here to fix the school, that's all!' And we used have a lot of fights with him and one time he said 'You should go and get Centrelink'. I wasn't going to get Centrelink, I'm here to work in my own school. He was a racist. He took his family to go to the toilet back home. Their kids weren't involved with yapa kids, lawa. They used to teach their own kids in the principal's office. They weren't supporting us. He had that power for himself to rule over us and he wasn't listening, he was hurting us, he was doing things his way. He didn't want to listen to anybody. It's a lifetime story and I've still got it in my heart, that bad feeling.*

Other stories focused on the behaviour of other non-Indigenous teaching staff and even curriculum advisors visiting the school,

*We were having a staff meeting. Only non-Indigenous staff they talk to each other instead of talking to anangu staff, and one day I banged the table and said to them 'hey we are anangu staff here, we're not invisible. We want to share our ideas too!' They all stopped talking and put their heads down. I said 'you only come and go, but we are here, we stay here for a long time'.*

*I stayed in one afternoon to work with my team teacher, but she was also talking with (another non-Indigenous teacher) about Walking Talking Texts. I sat there, they were yapping away. I sat there waiting for her, thinking 'when will she come and do planning?' They were just talking away, looking at the books and getting ideas. And while I was sitting there I thought to myself 'I'm an invisible person here in the corner'. She didn't even say to me 'come over and join me!' I didn't want to wait anymore, I had to walk away. And she said 'Oh (name), are you going home?' Next day I came back, feeling sad, and she said 'I'm really sorry for what happened'. I said 'No! you made me feel invisible! You didn't include me in that teaching, because I am your team teacher, you should have involved me in that. And I'm really sad, I don't know now what we're going to teach. You the one who knows everything and I didn't plan with you. I'm just going to be sharpening the pencils because you haven't included me in your planning'. She left me out, she didn't include me, I was just an invisible person sitting there. I really wanted to learn, listen to what (name) was trying to teach her.*

*One Assistant Teacher in Junior class, I went past and she said to me 'Can you come here?' So I went over to her and she said 'Look I'm sitting away from the kids, what can I do? We did planning together me and her.' So I talked to the teacher 'excuse me what is she doing sitting over there? Is she doing anything or just sitting and watching? How can you teach? There's a lot of kids here and she did planning with you.' The teacher said 'Ohhh you come over'. But I told her 'You should have*

*involved her, you did planning with her, and instead she's just watching and sharpening pencils. But we are all the teachers!'. But when the kids start fighting or not listening, that's the time they start using Indigenous staff.'*

Many of the other stories shared in this theme related to the lack of support these teachers felt they received from the leadership of the school and how this was a form of inequality and exclusion. One teacher talked about how this was something they first discovered when completing the teacher education course,

*See ... we found out that there weren't any equal rights not rights for yapa teachers, Indigenous teachers. Things weren't same for us because they used to bring kardiya teachers from south, using all that money to bring them in to work in our community and we started feeling sad. I'm a teacher and I need to have same equal rights with kardiya teacher. Just giving us housing, but later on they took that away. Things like that we learned about. It was so difficult for us to be a yapa teacher.*

This sense of neglect continued on for many into their practicum teaching experience, something that doesn't go unnoticed by the community members,

*When I did my prac teaching and I was working in that little room, doing planning, no help from the Principal, lawa, no helping with planning or anything...she's not helping yapa, lawa. The yapa people who live there, they don't go and ask her for job because they don't want to work there*

One participant commented specifically on the lack of orientation to the 'education law' that she received when she first became a full classroom teacher.

*So when I first became a teacher in my classroom they said 'yeah go ahead this is all your stuff and...teach!' But there were also rules there, and laws from education, I was expected to learn them but I didn't have anyone telling me, I had to go alone and just trying to do my best.*

Other participants commented on how hard they found it to transition into the role of being the fully qualified classroom teacher. This was challenging for them personally and for the students to understand as generations of internalised assimilation had caused these children to believe that white teachers were the 'real' teachers and 'black' teachers were just the helper, the assistant to the white teacher.

*But some kids used to talk like 'You're not English! You're Warlpiri!' Mainly in the school. You've got to have both those...explaining to them 'This is what we've got to teach, English side of things. I've got to teach both'. This is what I was explaining to the kids "Because somebody is watching me in the corner, you know?" Those kids were looking for a kardiya teacher. I was showing them my certificate 'This is what I got. I'm like kardiya teacher now'. The kids had to know. After talking to me and saying 'no you're not our teacher' It took a long time for the kids to know.*

*Same at (community name). We always used to keep on saying 'We are the teacher! I am your teacher. Doesn't matter pangki (colour?), but I am the teacher'.*

In this way it was the contact history and the colonial legacy that was causing the exclusion for these teachers, and they received no support to help them navigate this transition.

### 6.3.7 'Not looking at us level'

The seventh theme is connected to the previous theme of exclusion and power, but it is more strongly related to this idea of the colonial legacy of Indigenous teachers working in schools in the NT. Many of the participants spoke of their experiences being treated unequally, even once they had completed their full teaching qualification. The participants shared a number of examples of this kind of unequal treatment. At times this was expressed by expecting fully qualified Indigenous teachers to take on extra work and roles,

*I've been taking the preschoolers for a year and I haven't had anyone placed with me as an Assistant teacher because they think 'Oh she's Indigenous she can do everything!' Cos the requirement is ten kids, can't be alone in the classroom with any more than that, and I've got about 14 or 12. They never come and ask or look for someone to work with me. But if a white teacher had five kids oh she'll be screaming her head off 'Ohhh they're going to attack me!'*

Another participant spoke about being called on whenever there were visitors to the school who wanted to 'consult' with the community,

*Sometimes it's negotiated too by the Principal and whoever is coming, they pull you out, no warning just come and drag you out.*

Others talked about how it felt to be constantly called on to deal with behaviour problems in a way that the non-Indigenous staff were not,

*Like we are qualified teachers. They don't use us as a qualified teacher. They use us to look after the behaviour. 'You've got to talk to this child! You've got to stop them fighting!' That's what they use us for. Not like act professional like them. Even though we started working a long time ago we're still gonna be stopping fighting. That's what they are using us for.*

So it seems that the school leadership treats these teachers as fully qualified staff members or even school leaders when it suits them, like leaving someone by herself in a class with too many students and pulling Indigenous teachers out of class to consult with visitors to the school. However, they are equally prepared to expect the Indigenous staff to act as the 'behaviour police' and do all of the communication with the families and community members.

*They're not looking at us level, where we are. We're supposed to be same professional level and they still put us down like we're an AT*

*They always get us to tell the parents, talk to the parents, but I always say 'Wiya, you and me, we'll go together'*

*They are frightened of the kids! A lot of the time I see teachers are on duty and kids start fighting and they run to the Indigenous staff, 'can you come and talk to the kids, find out what happened'. And they're on duty!*

As well as being 'frightened' of their pupils, by not wanting to visit parents and grandparents these non-Indigenous teachers are showing that they are also 'frightened' of the community. This points to deep cultural disconcertment on the part of the non-Indigenous teachers who come from a very different cultural and knowledge tradition.

In large part this exclusion and inequality transpires in the everyday activities, actions and reactions of the leadership and staff of the schools; selectively ignoring some rules and then insisting that Indigenous staff do things that the non-Indigenous staff refuse to take on. One participant talked about this in a curriculum sense as well saying that Principals insist that some elements of the curriculum were taught while ignoring and not making time for other parts of the curriculum. This is particularly so in the case of local languages and culture being taught as part of the curriculum.

*How come this curriculum, this is what you've got to do in the classroom and this Principal, boss, does the wrong things. And we're trying to learn and teach the kids and the bosses are not .... We've got that language and culture program in the school and they've got nothing to lose, white teachers, if that program goes, 'cos they've got these other programs, English ones. They can teach it because they're expected to teach it in the classroom. They can just change, change, change the program. We've only got this one program that we want to hold onto and it's very sad to see it go. Not go but doesn't follow on, doesn't happen in the classroom. It's important, we want to hold onto it. It comes with our identity. They don't care.*

So in addition to the teachers not being seen as 'level', there are also decisions being made in the schools about what curriculum is most important that exhibits an inequality regarding the status of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge itself.

#### 6.4 Conclusion

There were many more examples of the themes included in this chapter in the individual narratives recorded with each of the individual teacher participants. In Chapter 7 these seven themes, 'feeling for family', 'learning with marlpa', 'mentors, support and encouragement', 'team teaching', 'leadership', 'exclusion and power' and 'not looking at us level', will be used as an analytical framework for further interrogating the individual narratives.

## **Chapter 7 – Individual analysis of the teacher narratives**

The seven themes, as generated in the group analysis process outlined in Chapter 6, were applied as an analytical frame for the detailed examination of the much longer individual narratives of the seven teacher participants. This examination provided increased richness and depth and some expanded understandings of these seven themes.

### **7.1 ‘Our feeling for family’**

One of the themes that emerged as central during the group discussion was what one teacher participant described as our ‘feeling for family’. This phrase points towards a larger truth that is central to understanding the journey of the Indigenous teachers in this research. This theme is ontological because it is something that is at the core of who people are. It is not something epistemological, something they have learned. Neither is it axiological, something these teachers have chosen. The way the teachers spoke of it, it is clearly a not negotiable human condition for them. It is expressed in choices that are made, priorities that are decided and it regulates their participation in the life of their families and community. It is a powerful obligatory force that will always remain more important than any other responsibility – including education and work. The teacher participants spoke of it to underline that this ‘feeling for family’, and all that that represents, must be accommodated and respected as part of the educational journey. Additionally, these teachers are living proof that when understood, respected and applied creatively, such ontological understandings can actually be a tremendous support structure to help Indigenous teachers achieve success while navigating the intercultural space of education.

The following examples taken from the individual teacher narratives illustrate firstly how this 'feeling for family' is always foremost in the hearts and minds of the Indigenous teacher participants and how separation from family can cause intense loneliness to the point of derailing people's educational journey. Secondly, the examples explore how cultural obligation, as an expression of ontology, mean that those pursuing teacher education will always be forced to juggle multiple responsibilities. Thirdly, the examples show how a community based model of teacher education that enlists the support of families and community members can in fact greatly assist Indigenous teachers to complete their learning journey. Finally, the examples illustrate how this 'feeling for family' actually provides Indigenous teachers with unique insights about how best to teach students from their home communities.

### *Loneliness and the comfort of family*

Many of the teacher participants spoke of giving up on their education at various points because of a feeling of extreme loneliness and isolation when they were away from their community. This was especially true when they tried to complete their secondary years at Boarding School.

*I was there for one year and got lonely and came back to (community name). I was lonely (for) family, yuwa,*

*...it was just like you want to be home and not want to leave that home and just like you know when I go to Darwin or Adelaide I want to come back home and that's the homesick I used to have when I was that stage.*

None of the teacher participants stayed at Boarding School through to the end. All of them ended up back in their communities and this was the point at which all of them started working in their local school either as assistant teachers or Literacy Workers. One teacher participant said the following,

*I'm not homesick (when) I'm at home I'm you know, working and more the more prouder I got. And my mum used to come to the school and see me teaching and used to praise me and all that praising made me more confident....and my sister used to come and take photos and used to stay around, bring the children to school.  
'Yeah she's gonna be your teacher soon'*

The teacher participants also strongly emphasized that this feeling for family was not something that can be ignored or switched off when people enter the school. In fact in the same way that being 'at home' made the teacher participants feel comfortable, many of the teacher participants suggested that having Indigenous teachers made Indigenous students feel more comfortable and less lonely in the foreign and Western environment of school.

*for Indigenous kids they look at us and they ...we're their family and they know us, we have good relationships like we're family and kids look at us and we are the role models for them... If Indigenous kids have Indigenous teachers and language and culture programs, they'll listen to us and the elders coming in teaching them*

This feeling for family was something that the teacher participants enlisted as a powerful ally in ensuring strong learning and engagement for their students.

### *Cultural obligation*

This ontological 'feeling for family', was something that the teacher participants had to continually balance against their commitment to study and work. Trying to find equilibrium between the cultural obligations that are a part of their ontological existence while at the same time continuing on with study, work and teaching commitments is something that has been a persistent challenge throughout their careers. Many of the teacher participants talked about 'family problems' and in particular the obligations that came with the death of a person in their family, referred to as 'sorry business'.

*Yuwai but also like family problems, sorry problems, we had to go along with all of those things and we still have challenging things you know like family problem is also really important too, yuwai.*

*Maybe family, problem with family, maybe wife. Or somebody gets sick in their family, sorry business all that. Because when sorry business comes and we have to go for a year you know and then we don't know what to do you know when we go back teaching. You lose all that thing, that experience of how you want to teach back. But I had like I went back like when I was in sorry, I stayed out for a year.*

*Travelling to another community for sorry and taking extra times, coming back, not going to school early and stuff like that*

One participant talked of how she needed to enlist a strategy of 'postponement' to dealing with family problems and cultural obligation.

*Even though I had family issues back home, I didn't picture that, you know. I always left it after course or when I got back. And I felt strong and you know said to myself 'I'm not going to forget that, carry that, I'll deal back in my community, but that's not going to be my big issue'. So I kept on going and going.*

However there were some cultural obligations and responsibilities that were so overwhelming that they almost derailed people. At these times the feeling for family and family support was one of the things that helped keep people going,

*And then.....and then I lost my sister (in 1996). I was just about to graduate.*

*Mmm....I rang my mother and told her that my sister was, she was deteriorating from her sickness, and I rang Mum and Mum walked seven kilometres and had a heart attack... that's when I sort of went down...and my husband's family, my other family came and supported me, ... I had two losses and stayed and had a funeral for her and people from school came, teachers, anangu teachers, and families came and talked to me 'be strong, I know you can do it, but don't give up on studying, still*

*do your study, you've got only one more year to go' and yeah it was long time I was on grief, long time and my husband supported me too, kept on going.*

For these teachers, the further along that professional pathway they ventured the more challenging this balancing act became,

*you know, for example, if I lose my son I would feel sad and I wouldn't want to go to school because I still feel no good in my heart and I miss my kid, my son and I would rather say oh I don't feel like going to work...but then I stress about it, 'Yeah I have to go to work, why am I sitting down?... I have to forget about it and I have to start working again and be strong'. But we need to be there for our kids, our kids that are learning. It's important they need to learn from us, we need to be a role model for them.*

One teacher participant talked about how her school enlisted cultural knowledge to facilitate both the cultural and educational responsibilities,

*I would be in sorry business you know like. We thought about having like, for example two TAs were working, maybe a teacher and a TA, if for example someone loses son and I'm not allowed to work, so I would go, AT would stay and work there to help kardiya teacher...someone always there, for example if an AT's family pass away I would be there working with the teacher, kardiya teacher and a literacy worker.*

So while the cultural obligations that come with this 'feeling for family' can be a strong challenge for those who chose to be teachers, a detailed understanding of how these

cultural obligations work can also help the teachers to navigate both cultural and education obligations successfully.

### *Community based study and support from family*

All of the teacher participants talked about how much easier it was for them to navigate the dual pressures of study and cultural obligation when the teacher education delivery was happening as a community based model.

*...so it wasn't just happening here (Alice Springs), it happened there (community name) too... we had you know our children ... and they were all so little. That's why we asked for a community based lecturer so the lecturer can be there and so that we needed to be with our family too. 'Cos just to make the course work out well...everyone was really good and they felt 'Oh that's worked' you know and 'that's making it better for everyone to you know be at home and be with their family'*

This grouping of communities seemed a common part of the community-based model these teachers participated in to do their teacher education. Often a cohort would consist of groups of teachers from several small remote communities who would come together for workshops in a central remote location rather than travelling to an urban centre such as Alice Springs or Darwin.

*...we had lecturers based in the community, they were staying there all the time, awa, and we had times that we can go and you know do our study...school time, and we had workshops in the community like (community name) mob and*

*(community name) and we can sometimes we go out to (community name), have workshop or go to (community name) for you know learning together sessions. Mmm, I think that was better in those days...because we were always at home, not going away...like we had kids! And I think we felt relaxed, not stressing out when you go, you know when you go somewhere, yeah. We had to go back to the family.*

One teacher participant spoke about how proud her community was when the community based delivery was happening and how it facilitated much greater community involvement in the course,

*...that RATE (Batchelor College Remote Area Teacher Education) program was really big, everyone was just looking at us 'oh they're doing a great job' you know, yeah and I think everyone thought it was a good thing, yeah the community... in that course we done it in the community like we invited old people to come to things with us, yeah, we went out bush, mmm. It was all community based, you know doing a lot of things in the community and everyone knew what we were doing. That's why a lot of the other people wanted to do their study*

Many of the teacher participants talked about how this delivery model changed over the course of their teacher education and noted that funding was the main reason given to them for the changes made. The shift was to a more conventional campus based workshop model based in Batchelor, Alice Springs and Tennant Creek at different stages of their teacher education course. Many of the teacher participants surmised that this requirement to leave the community to attend workshops was one of the main reasons that many of

the teacher education students from their cohorts dropped out at that time.

*...I think that change is what made people unhappy and a lot of the other students left, yeah coming into town, leaving family behind, mmm, didn't want to go away.*

*...it's a hard journey I know, we all know that our family's important, we can't leave our husband and go and spend two weeks and come back.*

*...yeah some people dropped out, maybe in second year, yeah maybe had problem, family problem...like husband, children, they don't want to miss their kids you know*

*...some of them pulled out, and Batchelor said we could (not) have when there's only 5, like 10 or 11 or 12 students you can have tutor and lecturer there, but if students fall out or stay behind then we can't have. Mmm that made it so hard for us.*

*Because she said to me that it was really hard studying you know...she was maybe worried for her husband he was like old man, just worrying for him now. Might have to stay home and do her work there. But she said to me, 'yeah (Name) you can do your study but I've got to stay here and help in the school here. I don't want to go out now'.*

For those teacher participants who managed to keep going and continue with their studies they all named the support of their families as the main thing that facilitated this. This is discussed in more detail in a later section of this chapter, but it is important to note that even for those who continued the shift away from a community based model made things more challenging as it evoked feelings of homesickness for them again,

*...back and forwards but then we were getting homesick so we thought no we would come back. Maybe we had a gap, another year didn't feel like doing study, we were only working as a full time AT now, but we were also thinking about working (and) doing our training to become a teacher.*

The periods described as easiest and best for the teacher participants in terms of their teacher education journey were the times when they were participating in a community based model and not having to make the hard choices between that 'feeling for family' and their dedication to becoming teachers.

### ***Knowledge of family and culture***

All of the teacher participants talked a great deal about this 'feeling for family' and the intrinsic understanding of their communities as being an asset in their teaching work. This ontological pre-condition helped them to be better teachers. It helped them in talking to families about their children and the work of the school,

*...I gotta ...talk to people right way, might be right time, right way, yeah...and cos we're in one community and we know each other, know family...awa, you got to have a talk at the right time, get people how...explain it to them so they can*

*understand, mmm, like I said you know, I can't take the pre-schoolers myself, I take the mums as well...But I need to talk to them, you know in a way they feel comfortable. Yeah*

*...we're families, we're connected to each other in family line and we live in the same community and a lot of the times I see what's happening you know, to children and the families. And I know those families might be having bit of problem or awa, I know the lifestyle of the families, yeah, so I can know if they're not doing, if they're not learning properly, cos I know it's got these other problems at home and I can you know encourage the student. And talk, cos a lot of the time I talk to the family as well if that student is not doing well in class. I talk to the families....awa language is a big part of it. You know we ...I think me with that language it helps talking to families... it helps students as well. You know we can ...they can easily talk to me about what's going on. Mmm. ...and for families as well you know, they might be thinking the same as the student. That's why they don't go to the school, yeah. And I can see them at home or you know bump into them at the shop, yeah. It's easy for me, you know, yeah cos I live out there with them in the community. I see them every time.*

*They (parents) look at us as open heart teachers. They can come and talk to me, we let them talk, we talk as normal, like we're yapa friends and we're yapa family. They can come and talk to us. But like we think as a teacher, yapa teacher, we think a lot about education and we talk to them in an educational way, like acting as a person*

*that has been there for a long time as an educator and parents sometimes want to learn from us and want to know what's happening for their kids, but we tell them what the kids are doing now.*

This shared feeling for family enabled these teacher participants to also have uniquely helpful relationships when dealing with students,

*I would say to them... '(We're) family, we're not here as someone else, so we need to you know listen to each other and you know look after each other 'cos we are here as one....that made a lot of difference cos I'm anangu they know me.*

*...maybe they saw yapa not kardiya...maybe you know they knew that person speaks same language, yeah...they were really good to talk to me, yeah, no matter they shame, they could come and talk to me...they feel more comfortable*

This insider understanding also means that often these Indigenous teachers have become both advocates for the students and the cultural interpreters between the school and the community, as evidenced by the following anecdote:

*... yuwa, I was a, like I was advocating for all of the children that was going there, also for Mums and families... because I know the anangu way and how to deal with anangu way and to also to educate and mentor for that whitefella, tjulkurra, who don't know any traditional knowledge. ..Like there was an incident where young fellas who just came, wanted to go to school and the Principal wouldn't let them come in 'cos they wore this, we call it (language), headband, to say that they're*

*man and just got out from bush. And I used to say 'oh you know those young men needs bit of space where they can see themselves as young men, not put off, but the Principal wouldn't listen. She kept on saying, 'Oh you know they not man, they young boys'. You can't say that. I told that person, 'You can't say that, if we acknowledge them and say to them that they're young men that's you know, we respect them and you're here saying that they can't come to the school environment because they are like boys'. And one of the teachers helped me, tjulkurra (non-Indigenous person), she said, 'You know (name)'s right, she knows the background and she advocating for them, so we understand as the people who don't have that knowledge for anangu, we come and learn from them, we can't put bars or barriers, we've got to understand their cultural awareness, that's how she putting into how we can engage with them'.*

This advocacy often extends to what is being taught in the schools. All of the teacher participants talked passionately about the teaching of language and cultural knowledge as a central part of the school curriculum. It was evident that these teachers saw language and cultural knowledge as an extension of this feeling for family. In order for their children to grow up strong they had to be grounded in a strong sense of who they are and what is valued by their community. All of this comes from the land and the language. The teacher participants saw school and community working together as having a central and important role in supporting and maintaining this knowledge.

*I think best way is going, you know going out to places...they can look at things as well, look what this is, it's real, you know...I think it's important to go to the actual*

*place and see it and you know do it, do things...I think community is a big part of it....and it's like the kids can feel it's a family outing and they can know all these rich you know language is coming out from families when they are out bush. And they can see the difference, you know it's different in the home environment, different way of dealing with the language than out bush. Yeah it's more, I guess it's stronger, yeah. Like it's something, it's serious...taking it serious, the learning.*

*... they can't stop Warlpiri lawa, they are Warlpiri literate kids, yeah they learn to speak language when they were small and they need to keep their language and their culture*

*...because they really have to know the places names where they go for country visits and all that and the skin name system and where they come from. Because the kids know, some of the kids were knowing they come from (community name) or they coming from (community name), or their father's country, they can know their father's country.*

*yeah some things we can't learn in a classroom, we have to go out. You can only do like teaching other things, like reading and maths and all that there, but for like animal tracking or plants, everything you have to go outside of the community. A lot of learning for the kids is like going on country visits....We used to take Elders. Because without the Elders we can't take the kids out because Elders are the most important people because they know the knowledge and they can talk about the*

*country and all that. Ancestors and all that.*

All of the teacher participants in this research were powerfully dedicated to their professional identity as a teacher. But this identity came as an add-on to the identity they already have as a Warlpiri, Luritja, Western Arrarnta or Pitjantjatjara person. The ontological identity of the teacher participants and the language, culture and practices that embody that identity, came first and will always pre-suppose anything related to being a teacher. As evidenced by the teachers' stories, this ontological standpoint can either form a stumbling block for Indigenous teachers or it can be carefully and respectfully enlisted as a strength that in fact supports these teachers to be the kind of teachers, according to their professional judgement, Indigenous students need.

## **7.2 Learning with 'marlpa'**

'Marlpa' is a word used in the Warlpiri, Luritja and Pitjantatjara languages of Central Australia. It can be translated as 'company'. More specifically it means not leaving anyone out, or by themselves. This concept was repeatedly identified by the teacher participants as being an important part of their teacher education pathway. The teacher participants clearly articulated that having 'marlpa' in the form of both other students as well as lecturers and tutors helped them to successfully complete their teacher education courses and then go on to develop their professional teaching identities.

### ***The 'marlpa' of other students – a cohort model of teacher education***

All of the teacher participants in this research talked about the start of their teacher

education journey as being something they shared with others. All of the participants talked about the other people who started the program at the same time as them, sometimes in small groups of two or three and at other times in large groups.

*...so I was feeling happy to start doing the teacher training because there was also couple of other yapa teachers there who wanted to do teacher training also, so we started to do teacher training through RATE program.*

*...then 1990's all the TAs some Yapa, Aboriginal teachers, TAs wanted to do their studies so we all decided together we were doing RATE program...we had meeting all of us 'Oh we'll do RATE program, you know do first year' so we did first year...we were still TAs but doing course same time and it was really good.*

*So that's when we, me and other ladies from (community name), started doing RATE course...Four or five of us...I started working as a Literacy worker then started doing study, RATE course. Maybe I saw some ladies they were talking about 'oh we're doing courses in Alice Springs with Batchelor'. Then I joined with ladies from (community name) and then kept on doing it.*

*...then a lady and a fella came to school and came to a meeting where all the staff was and started talking about this training for Batchelor, that you know Assistant Teachers might think about doing training and then I said, 'Oh that's me, I'm gonna put my hand up straight away' and then Principal said 'oh any of you ladies or men*

*wants to study, so you can get qualifications?' and there were three of us putting our hands up.*

The teacher participants spoke about how having 'marlpa' as part of this challenging process provided great support as the study progressed and helped them to feel like they could keep going. It also helped them to build up their individual confidence and self-belief. This is best exemplified by the following anecdote,

*...really good people, always supported me too and we used to sit down, talk and talk about the training and used to help each other how strong we will be you know while we're doing this course and gave all our, you know, encouraging each other in a positive way. Mmm, travelled on field study, look after ourselves, yuwa and someone would get a phone call from home, we used to sit down with that person 'you know this happens but you know this is good way to you know solve it' we used to help each other, so that we used to make that person laugh and then next morning we could see you know good news coming back from home. Yuwa...Mmm feeling that person is not alone, mmm and that's what students and family's about encouraging one another, supporting one another, mmm. Yuwa, marlpa*

Part of the cohort model that these teachers experienced involved bringing together small groups from a number of nearby local remote communities to do their study workshops together. Many of the teacher participants talked about the significance of joining together with these other groups,

*...we were told you know every Assistant teacher that works at this school needs to do this training...yeah, we were all signed up...we started off with about ten...from (community name) as well...I think probably 3 or 2 from (community name) and 8 of us from (community name) school we started off.*

*I think we had each other, yeah to help us out, yeah...like some mightn't understand what we're going to do, what we're doing, awa, and talk in Arrarnta, explaining 'oh this is what we might need to do', and being prepared 'our workshop's coming' and...reminding each other yeah.*

*I started off with 19 students from this region ... we sort of talked to one another and supported one another, you know 'feel strong, don't give up, try and get it over and done, this is good'... and that made me even become more stronger, in studying. And we did report writing and, discussed group discussions.*

This sense of 'marlpa', of not being left by yourself to do the study alone, provided a great sense of comfort to these teachers as they progressed in their teacher education. They formed strong support bonds with the other students both from their own communities and from the communities nearby. Once the delivery model changed and the workshops were being held in urban centres rather than community based, the teacher participants maintained that this 'marlpa' continued to be important. The teacher participants developed additional support and encouragement networks with other groups of

Indigenous teacher education students from across the Northern Territory.

*I did training at Batchelor, teacher training. And I met a lot of students from different communities and top end schools, top end teachers and I was happy studying at Batchelor and sharing ideas with other teachers and working with lecturers.*

*...it helped me like to be confident in my teaching and learning from other students and because we came from the same community and joining with others from the Barkly region you know and learning through that. It was really good you know learning because I learned a lot of good things, what I learned from them. Because it's always different from where I come from.*

*I really liked coming together and meeting the anangu teachers from different communities like talking to them and group work and studying back and you know feeling proud and saying you know we're there for doing our best for our community and striving more and more...So getting back to study was more important so we can meet ourselves back, meet all the anangu teachers who I worked with, who I studied with and I'm still really proud that they're going on.*

Many of the teacher participants talked about this feeling of having 'marlpa' as being one of the reasons they continued with their studies.

*I felt good when both of us were doing it and if I would have started doing it by myself I don't know...would have been quite different...*

### *The 'marlpa' of lecturers, principals and team teachers*

The other kind of 'marlpa' discussed by the teacher participants was the company provided by the teacher education lecturers who worked with their cohort, the Principals of their schools and the team teachers they continued to work with in their classrooms between teacher education workshops. These key people provided important support that assisted the teacher participants to keep going with their studies. Some teacher participants talked about the key role that Principals played especially in supporting and facilitating them to know about the opportunities to study and to commence their studies,

*...like when (non-Indigenous Principal name) and (another non-Indigenous Principal name) maybe was working at (community name) they must have known about those others you know, maybe doing maybe RATE program at (community name). Because I was starting to ask now, 'Is there any training going on you know? Any teacher training going on?' 'Yeah there's some people who started it, like (name), (name), and (name), (name) and there was a couple of others too I can't remember...and I asked them, 'Can you help me to do an application'? So I wanted to do this study. So like me and (name) were doing it.*

The principals who were identified as being helpful and supportive were often ones with experience in other places working cross-culturally and who were able to provide the ongoing support around the RATE workshops the students were participating in.

*...yeah they were really supporting me like I remember (name), I remember those other two like (name) and (name), because they knew yapa at (community name), they worked there and they were really supportive.*

*...yeah supporting me, giving me ideas, like I felt confident like after that one, talking to kardyas now, telling them 'this is what I learned and can you help me out, to maybe get better at like starting to write down in my workbook what I need to do'. And little by little...yeah taking it back and they told us you know lecturers 'you've got to go back and this is what you've got to do and when you come to the next RATE program workshop then you can tell us what you did there'. Yeah this is what we did, went back did work.*

The teacher participants also identified the presence of teacher education lecturers working with them in their schools and classrooms as a crucial support during their study. This reflective practice model where the student was able to immediately reflect on their practice seemed to be particularly effective.

*...there used to be a lecturer, RATE lecturer here...we did lesson with her and we (talked about) what went wrong, you know we would talk about our lesson, we looked back everything and wrote things we had done, you know*

*...and then it was time when the lecturer came and she did one week here and we was in the classroom and we did a presentation on what work we were doing and I got the best mark, cos I was getting stronger and practising and that made me even*

*more, more clever and more understanding, which I can you know go further...cos I wasn't like um I wasn't burned out or you know tired I was, cos the goodness I was getting is from what was relating to my work place.. (and) community too, like community and school, how we should make a better place for people to come and it was really helping me to analyse and find out what was in that school and in that community how we can work to make a better school.*

When the teacher education lecturers were not present this reflective practice and day-to-day learning was continued on in the work the teacher participants were doing with their team teachers.

*...we would do little bit of ....practice teaching and what sort of curriculum would we use to write I mean to plan a lesson, what sort of lesson would I teach to look, but I wasn't also confident about reading curriculum....My team teacher, she would sit down and help me and others would also have team teacher helping them, because then we were still like ATs, yuwai...we were doing training but we were also based in (community name) using resources, but also our team teachers would help us with the training and with the teaching.*

One teacher participant described in detail, and based on her own experience, her idea of how this community based reflective model supported young teachers in their work and their study,

*... the lecturer and the tutor comes in and you know, mainly the lecturer comes in and talks to that team teacher you know, who's that assistant worker working with,*

*say to her you know, 'Ok we have identified the weakness that this girl is having, let's work, you work on this one so she can improve on it', and then she's gotta write um what they call a checklist of what she improved on and she can take it back and she'll say, 'Oh yeah you're getting good at this', you know a lot of praising and that's how people feel, 'Oh now I'm doing good things 'cos my lecturer is praising me and my team teacher is praising me now I can put it in practice'...if they got a good support from the team teacher... Hard work! But at least it's identified by that person and then it can be improved yuwa. Little steps.*

The teacher participants were able to identify significant changes that had occurred between the community based, reflective practice, team teaching model of Teacher Education that was in place when they were studying, compared to what they saw happening in their schools now. They identified two main changes that had occurred. The first related to the lecturing model and is best exemplified by the following anecdote,

*I think a lot of changes go on at the school, you know changes. Not at school but the course itself, the training at Batchelor...I think lecturers...you know different...another year someone else turns up or they don't have anyone for a whole year, nobody goes out to them, to the community now a days. I haven't had one Batchelor person come into that school, haven't seen anyone! I think that's lacking you know, that I think you know people lose interest...I've heard you know them say, that's I think the main important one, lecturers not going out visiting students in the community.*

The second area of change that the teacher participants identified was in the area of team teaching and the role this played in supporting assistant teachers to do study. The teacher participant talked a great deal about the fact that many fully qualified classroom teachers did not understand the role they needed to play in supporting Indigenous teacher education,

*yuwa, cos um at the moment I feel that they doing like what the team teacher is saying, you know 'you do this, you do that, you do this in the morning, this is what we're gonna do next week' - week by week, not actually you know sitting down with her or him and going through what she's weak at, all that*

Instead what many of the teacher participants saw happening was the non-Indigenous expressing anxiety about being 'left alone' in the classroom when the assistant teachers were participating in their own study time.

*I can only say if I hear teachers saying, 'I'm really supportive of his/her'. I haven't heard anyone say that to me... Only thing I hear is, 'Oh am I gonna be alone?'...that's the only thing that I hear. What I was thinking is you know...unqualified, a person going out of the classroom and leaving a qualified teacher...done all this training you know, knows what to do in the classroom and this poor assistant teacher trying to get to that level you know...That's what I'm thinking you know about the classroom teacher, is he just feeling safe 'cos the assistant teacher's there? And is that talking from here (points to heart) or...?*

*...what's lacking there? What's (he) worried is gonna happen to him or the class or the students without the assistant teacher?...I'm always thinking about that, you know, when classroom teachers say, 'Oh I'm gonna be left alone in the class' you know.*

These last comments point towards a significant shift that has happened in remote schools in Central Australia and shines light on why we are hardly seeing any qualified Indigenous teachers emerging from the remote school teacher education pathway. This absence of support from the school leadership and the classroom teachers, in addition to the sporadic support provided by lecturing staff has left the next generations of Indigenous teachers feeling 'left by themselves with no 'marlpa' from the system they are working within.

### **7.3 Mentors, support and encouragement**

Support, mentoring and encouragement have all played a vital role in the careers of the teacher participants involved in this research. Many of them identified positive and encouraging messages from their parents and other family members as being highly influential on their decision to become a teacher. Many of the teacher participants talked about the role that mentors, family and community members played in their discernment process of choosing to work in the school and into their teacher education course. This mentoring support became even more valued and valuable as the teacher participants embarked on their initial work in the school and then moved into their Teacher Education program. All of the teacher participants were able to identify a clear desire, and in many

cases, a strong track record of being mentors to other young Indigenous teachers. However what did become clear was how few structural opportunities existed for these experienced teachers to take on mentoring roles.

### *Growing up*

A common theme amongst the teacher participants was the important role families, and in particular mothers, played in encouraging them along their teacher pathway. Receiving strong support for their own education growing up, as well as parents displaying a strong work ethic were extremely influential on these women. Many spoke at great length about the important role their mother and other family member played in providing this example and encouragement,

*Children used to make fun of me but my mother and my other family used to tell me 'they're not fooling you because you're ugly, they're fooling you because you're getting smarter, see you're going to school every day and that's how they don't like you. But keep on going'. And sometimes she uses metaphor, like "sometimes when you going through a strong wind or storm, you get to the other side". ...I used to say to my sister about how I wanted to go to school and then Mum said 'oh you can, if you get a job, you can still get educated' ... I could see that (others) were you know having jobs and help their mother and getting educated and looking after my mother was the really top priority for me, cos I really wanted to you know help my mother and also get more education, cos I missed out on that.*

*...then I thought 'nah' didn't want to go to school now. But when I left school my*

*mum didn't let me, my mum encouraged me to get a job. Yeah straight away when I left school she said 'oh you're gonna do this'. Cos she was a cleaner at the clinic and she signed me up straight away to be a cleaner at the clinic, yeah, and I did it...*

*I learnt how to look after kids by watching my mother. She used to look after kids yeah... (I learned) to be gentle to the kids and clean up and for you know school, ...she worked and she kept everything neat and tidy, yeah. I seen my mother work. No matter she went to (community name) she worked. When she went back to (community name) she worked...yeah when I was a little girl... I've seen lots of people working those days...I saw Mum working and she was a good mother, no matter she was a single woman and single mother, to raise two children, she was really good.*

*So I had a strong family and it was really you know strict early days...going to school. Now it's a bit different now days...back then parents were really strict. We had to be in school every day and there were only a few things happening, good things... you know after school, we had to listen to the stories of old people at night. And after school on the weekend parents used to take us out hunting and camping, out for bush tucker. That's why you know we have learned good things in the past.*

A number of the participants made comments about the variety of influences and different parenting styles in contemporary life being in part a reason why there may be fewer young people pursuing the teacher education pathway now.

### *Encouragement to work at the school*

Many of the teacher participants also spoke about the specific encouragement they received to work in the school and to try new roles within the school. Many of the women identified specific linguists, Principals or teachers who acted as mentors to them, building their confidence to believe they were capable of the work being suggested.

*...then one lady came along offered me a job. ... And I said yes I'll come to work. So one year I worked at Literacy Centre, came every day and the teachers saw me coming there and the teachers thought, 'oh she's a good worker and she comes every day, we'll get her to be our TA'. So the teachers were racing 'oh we'll get her...'*

*...the Principal said to me 'I think you need to work as an AT, help in the classroom' so with that experience I started working in the classroom. The first teacher, kardiya teacher that I worked with....was young teacher. Mainly she did lots of planning, and lots of talking and teaching but I was there as an AT, Assistant teacher, helping with sharpening the coloured pencils, but I also knew how to do Warlpiri, but I was also helping her with English, English teaching...I used to sit down with any child one to one, helping them to read, helping them to write their recounts or other writing activities, like handwriting maybe. I did lots of that.*

One teacher participant also identified the importance for her of having a family member working at school, and the important role model he was for her career.

*... at school I had one of my family working ... my uncle, but he used to be my*

*assistant teacher. He also taught us after school at home too ...And I remember what he said - 'when you grow up I want you to be like me!' so it did happen. But when I got older, went to boarding school and then finished boarding school and went back, he kept on saying. So after that, straight away when I finished my schooling I went working as assistant teacher at (community name).*

The teacher participants all identified these early experiences of being assistant teachers and working in a team environment in the classroom as being a key factor in them deciding to go on and do their teacher education. This is summed up by the following statement,

*'Cos I really, from working as an Assistant Teacher, I really, I saw what our kids really needed, you know...Like someone in the school...and I think it was for the community as well, to see an Indigenous person at the school... As a classroom teacher, yeah.*

There was also some quite specific encouragement for the teacher participants to pursue their study, and often the mentors and role models for this were again other Indigenous people and family members,

*I used to see a lot of my cousins doing training through Batchelor and there was this RATE program that was going on and people were signing on for the next year and I came up and asked 'oh what's this for? ...Is this going to do literacy too?' and they said 'yeah it's gonna do a lot of report writing, narrative writing all that'. 'Cos I wanted to improve on spelling and writing and writing reports and...also to become a teacher too.*

This last example shows how many of the teachers saw going to work at the school and subsequently undertaking their own teacher education was a way for them to continue their own education which had been previously interrupted or cut short.

### *Family support during study*

Many of the teacher participants also identified the crucial role that family support played while they were actually completing their teacher education studies. This was especially important when it came to looking after children,

*My mum and dad and my other family was looking after them. Like if we have a workshop in Alice Springs, workshop again in Darwin in Batchelor and in Tennant Creek. Yeah that's when we used to have workshops.*

One teacher participant talked of the big decision she made to move herself and her family up to Batchelor campus for a year to focus on her studies. This would not have been possible without the support of her partner who agreed to the move and to take on the main responsibility for the child rearing during that period,

*...we stayed at Batchelor for a year because I told Jakamarra 'I need to do study to become a teacher so I can help more out here, I can come back to be a teacher'. I really wanted to do that you know commit myself. So Jakamarra said 'yes we'll go I'll help you out with the kids'. Which he did, yuwai he was really good helping out... Yuwai, Jakamarra looked after them. I left those kids poor things because I went out two weeks, one week, two weeks, (for) prac teaching yuwai.*

Other teacher participants talked about the role that family played in releasing them from certain cultural obligations such as funerals during the period when they were studying. The support provided here was in the form of permission to prioritise the study over other important cultural and family commitments.

*....my family, my sisters, my mother supported me, and I was missing from funerals from my mother's family while I was studying, that was helpful, she was helping me a lot by sending me away 'you can go for your study, don't worry about the funeral'. I was doing full time study.*

Interestingly all of the teacher participants talked about this need for increased and intensive family support during the period when they were participating in a campus based workshop model of delivery. These same comments were not made when the delivery model was community-based. Many of the teacher participants reiterated that those teacher education students who did not receive this level of family support for campus based delivery were not in fact able to continue with their studies. This is a strong indication that the decision to pursue teacher education is not one that can be made by the individual alone but needs the engagement and support of their family. If the support comes from the entire community this places the individuals in the strongest position to succeed.

### *Support at work while also studying*

All of the teacher participants were working in their respective remote schools while they were undertaking their teacher education. They spoke about the important support, encouragement and learning that happened in their classrooms, as well as the practical support given by the school and the community when the study was based in their community,

*...the school would make a space, one of the classrooms so that the Batchelor students can have a space, and we also negotiated with the family. Like when we had CDEP the school would pay a couple of mums to come or families come and work as a Teaching Assistant, yuwa through CDEP<sup>2</sup>*

Additionally, when the delivery model changed and students were required to travel to Batchelor for their study, they talked of the additional support provided for them at that time,

*...we would have 3 or 4 tutors come in to Batchelor and help us at night tutoring and doing our, whatever they gave us for, and then journal writing after that.*

A couple of the participants talked about the importance of receiving explicit praise and encouragement as being vital for them to feel that they were able to keep going,

*Praising, that how I used to get strong, praising. It's a big challenge I took on and that's what you know after it becomes an achievement cos you do it, you practice it.*

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<sup>2</sup> Community Development Employment Projects:  
[http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/6287.0~2011~Chapter~Community%20Development%20Employment%20Projects%20\(CDEP\)](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Products/6287.0~2011~Chapter~Community%20Development%20Employment%20Projects%20(CDEP))

*If it doesn't work, you know, do it again until you met the requirements.*

*...the study you know, it was getting harder and harder, and when I got to stage 3 I was feeling, you know trying to quit and my lecturer kept saying to me 'this is Stage 3 and keep it up and try and finish your study' and I did, I finished. Stage 3 and Stage 4 was hard.*

Finally many of the teacher participants talked about the value of having ongoing mentoring as they transitioned from being an assistant teacher who was studying to become a teacher, and then finally talking on the role of a fully qualified teacher. This is best exemplified by the following anecdotes,

*...maybe for like a couple of months, yeah. Someone came from Alice Springs and mentoring me to do that. ...someone came and helped me, mentoring and like doing planning, before I can start teaching in the classroom. She showed me how to set up the classroom 'this is what you've got to do' this is for the early childhood/transition/year one. They were all a mixture of kids in the classroom...but as it went along my teaching was like good now you know... I was good at that now because that's what I've learned through that mentor.*

*...the people who came out there mentor people. They brought me like resources you know 'this is what new things that you can do to teach the kids. If you want to do another thing this is what you can plan and do'.*

*...when I was teaching... someone was observing me like when I was doing teaching there ... she was on my panel too you know, when I was teaching...yeah she did my probation. But when the probation, they're the one who came and said 'oh you passed your test, you are a really qualified teacher now' and that made me feel really happy and proud now. I can't believe it I'm one of the yapa teachers here at (community name). I wish someone could do the same like me, you know I was thinking, 'yeah I might be helping others when they want to do study'.*

This idea of wanting to mentor other young Indigenous teachers was raised repeatedly by the teacher participants and will be discussed in greater detail at the end of this section.

### ***Professional learning***

Another key support structure identified by the teacher participants was access to professional learning opportunities throughout both their study years and their teaching years. One participant talked about how this happened very successfully in her home community with the involvement of local Elders.

*...professional development and coming in to like doing workshops...to make it stronger 'cos in communities we have... Elders coming... like every fortnight they used to come and help us have resources and I used to run around and help them. We was helping each other and when we came to workshops I sort of learned how to get stronger at planning and programming, and teaching.*

One participant talked about how she was able to learn good ideas from her workshops

were she interacted with other Indigenous teachers and heard about what they were doing in their schools. She was then able to offer these ideas back to her own school,

*I used to write it down 'oh this is working, this is what they're doing. I'll take it to my school and see if it works'. And on PDs I used to tell this Principal who said, 'Oh this is how we're gonna work', and say, 'Oh you know let's work this way?'*

All of the Warlpiri teacher participants talked about the important role that their own Warlpiri Triangle professional learning cycle played in supporting them and helping them to feel more confident in their teaching. At the heart of this professional learning model is the understanding that it is run by Warlpiri teachers for Warlpiri teachers in Warlpiri language.

*...when we come to Warlpiri Triangle like everybody gets together...we get together and ... we do presentation 'this is what the school does' show the work and all that. So everybody does that. And then we go to different workshops, you know like singing workshops, reading workshop and like old people go to like looking around for bush medicines and all that....not kardiyas, only all the yapas do that.*

*Warlpiri Triangle also helped us plan lessons. We used to do lots of workshops, song writing workshops, looking at curriculums but planning programs with (name) and whoever the teacher curriculum person was...and we used to do that and we used to have a lot of linguist teachers coming from other places to teach us about recording, transcribing but writing stories from Warlpiri book, learning to read Warlpiri book, so that we can read that book with the children in the classroom. And*

*we did lots of program through theme.*

*Things like that we did at Warlpiri Triangle, teaching, talking about how we teach mainly in Warlpiri. (Teaching) them about culture around the community, culture days, what's happening in the school and all that...yeah (and) themes like maybe with 'Watia', trees, and 'Ngapa', water, like we do that for like a month for whole theme, or maybe term theme, and then another one now. But like everybody was doing the same, you know like four Warlpiri schools. We talked about it ...what theme we were going to do. But we shared that, this is what we're going to do with the themes... we shared that ...like '(name) can you send me something through with like...fax it over to me, because some things that I haven't got here'. Because we didn't have a teacher linguist over there at (community name), lawa, for teaching Warlpiri like that, lot of things that we used to get was from (community name), someone came over and brought the resources over.*

Interestingly another teacher participant identified the sheer number of other teachers that she had worked with in her school as being one of her key professional development activities. She talked about what she had learned from both seeing many different teaching styles, but also pointed out that she had learned coping strategies from having to deal with points of difference or conflict with other teachers. She had learned to defend her own professional position through these contested moments,

*...I think it helped me like a lot of teachers come and go and all the different experiences and that really helped me get strong at my professional teaching,*

*working with different people, yeah...awa and learning about differences 'oh she's got a good idea' yeah and all these different ways of teaching and different teachers that comes through, yeah....I personally really think that it's really helped me...awa makes me feel strong, yeah from a lot of the ways, if I didn't understand to this white teacher, like I said, 'I don't understand' and I argue, 'Oh we might have a bit of a ...' and all that helped me to like I said before, I mightn't agree on what you're saying, but it helped me to see how to deal with it, and I've learned. Apart from teaching and all that other stuff, yeah, talking to other teachers.*

This is an interesting spin to put on the 'come and go' syndrome that has plagued remote schools in Central Australia for decades. While many see this high teacher turnover as problematic for remote schools, this Indigenous teacher, who has no intention of ever leaving, identified it as something she in fact has learned from.

### ***Mentoring others***

The final consistent message about mentoring, support and encouragement that came out of the teacher narratives was the clear and unequivocal desire, that all of these teachers felt, to become a mentor to other young Indigenous teachers. Some of the teacher participants talked about this happening from the moment they became a classroom teacher and worked with other Indigenous assistant teachers,

*...first of all when I had my own classroom I was, I really liked it and I really enjoyed it too, cos I had my own space and own like curriculum to follow on and to teach and also I was working with a young girl and I was team teaching at that time and*

*really like a leadership role, and also someone to look at me like, I'm a teacher and I got own classroom and used to talk in staff meetings so that young people can see.*

This sense of being able to support and encourage other Indigenous staff members has become a source of great pride but it also brings with it a sense of responsibility,

*....a lot of the time I feel proud of myself because they look up to me, you know the other Assistant Teachers and use me if any issues arise and sometimes I tell them 'you know you got to step up and do things yourself', yeah.*

*...those other yapa teachers, ATs, because they needed me and (name) to teach them if we are the leader in the school, and old teachers, you know Elders, still there, so that we wanted to teach those young teachers, AT's*

*I try to encourage other new TA's you know 'you gotta come to school' ... some of those ladies are doing studies...and I tell them you know, as a teacher 'you gotta walk around, don't just sit there, you gotta watch the kids and you gotta walk around'. For preschool kids they gotta walk around, because they need help all the time and there's someone to watch them...and I don't want to tell them you know 'You gotta come on time! .... I don't want to force you to come early, it's your decision to come early and stay at work'*

They talked about the resistance that they often receive from other young Indigenous teachers who feel overwhelmed by the idea of working in the school or by the idea of

doing study,

*When they had workshops at (community name) they used to invite me to talk about training and how I got into (being a) qualified teacher and lots of them was always asking 'cos they are young all I could hear was young.... 'It's tricky cos we're young'. And I said, 'Yeah I was young when I started. I had one piperi (child) no two piperi (child), I was challenged, you gotta you know have strong commitment*

*... I tell them you know 'it's a long way to go, and I'm still learning' and we both sides need to learn and I tell the Assistant Teachers 'you need to involve yourself, talk, that's how you're going to be understanding, understand where they're coming from and what you're trying to explain to them'.*

*I think it's important for them to see and learn...yeah team teaching it's your turn, and I tell them you know, these Assistant Teachers 'you know you don't have to get shy' they get shame from the kids, you know, 'oh I started off like that I got really shame from the kids and I hated being in the front. You gotta get used to it'.*

All of the teacher participants were passionate about the need to have young people from their communities learning to be teachers,

*I want young people to come in and work in the classroom as a tutor and they'll learn step by step how to be a teacher and if they feel confident doing like teaching in the classroom, they might decide, they might think 'oh I'll go and do training at*

*Batchelor'*

*...some like when I'm looking at some people when they're looking after their family's children, maybe they are the kind of person to work in the school?...starting out from the aged care, preschool...mmm. We want people who stay in the community to work in the school. We don't want people who come and go.*

*Having my own classroom made me happy and working with children in the classroom, made me happy too, teaching family's kids. And I was thinking like I want young people to come in and work in the classroom as a tutor and they'll learn step by step how to be a teacher and if they feel confident doing like teaching in the classroom, they might decide, they might think 'oh I'll go and do training at Batchelor'*

Only one teacher participant was able to identify an avenue for her to be involved in this support and encouragement of the next generation of Indigenous teachers,

*I've also got involved with Batchelor workshop in learning centre and helping those ATs. They were just sitting there doing nothing and that teacher (lecturer) in the front asking 'what would you do to be a teacher?' you know. And I sat there thinking 'what answer will they give that teacher, their lecturer?' And they didn't answer. She started giving out books, program book and 'look at this, what would you do to be a teacher?' And I said 'you need to plan your program to be a teacher. You need to look at outcomes and look at all the learning strategies and materials'.*

*That's what I said to them and they looked at me 'that's right!' and they started speaking and giving feedback, yuwai, ngurrju. Started making them talk, they were like a child sitting down with the...yuwai and one of the lecturers said 'good on you! You moved them, you made them talk'. Cos I knew a lot of things what I needed to tell them, yuwai...They're clever women, ATs, teachers, they're clever, and then I left them working away now. Yeah, that was a really good role model, yuwai.*

None of the other teacher participants identified any opportunities available to them beyond their role as a classroom teacher to support, encourage and mentor new young teachers in their work and study. This is despite the fact that all of them have at least 20, some more than 30, years of experience working in their schools.

#### **7.4 Team Teaching**

The point of strongest agreement between the teacher participants came through on the subject of team teaching. All of the participants regarded the team teaching work they experienced before, during and after their teacher education as profoundly important in developing their professional identity and learning about the role of the teacher.

One participant was able to recall her own experience being a student and having Indigenous staff in the classroom. However, she made the distinction between what she experienced as a student and what she considered to be good team teaching,

*...yeah some Yapa working there...working in the school like looking after us...like supervising outside and inside, and like counselling like that too they were because I remember they were like coming into the classrooms if we were naughty and we would sit down in the corner, putting us in the corner for might be for an hour and*

*you're not having recess or anything, you've got to be doing your work. It used to be hard like that....I can't remember them teaching us. But I remember there was some Yapa there in the classroom all the time. Looking after us telling us 'you gotta be listening, you gotta learn from them, you gotta learn from Kardiya, yuwai you can't be naughty'. That's what they were telling us, yeah.*

### ***Experiences of team teaching as an assistant teacher***

All of the teacher participants began working in their respective schools as assistant teachers (AT), teacher aides (TA) or literacy workers (producing learning materials in first language in bilingual schools). So it follows that their first experience of team teaching happened while undertaking this initial work. In some cases this experience was not particularly productive,

*...when I was assistant teacher I used to come in and just look at, you know sit and sit and look quietly on the corner, almost asleep, cos I didn't have a job... that teacher would say '(name) can you sharpen all the pencils and make sure they're ready for the next day?' and got all the books neatly and every Friday they used to get it back in their little cupboards where they had names....that's how I used to do.*

In some cases the teacher participants reported having their role extended slightly to contribute language related assistance,

*I was assistant teaching...just helping out, handing out stuff, yeah that sort of things...explaining things. I think most important was the language, you know explaining to the kids what to do....for them to understand, understand what they*

*need to do, like the teacher would say it in English and I can tell them in Arrarnta, what they're supposed to do.*

Over time this role changed for the teacher participants, particularly once formal learning was added to their roles in the school. One teacher participant talked about the increased confidence she felt to speak up, challenge ideas and make a contribution as a direct result of the teacher education workshops she had been undertaking,

*...then at the meeting I said ...'which classroom works well? Let's do a flood walk around the classrooms' and we used to see that one's working and we used to take ideas. I was assistant teacher and I said to this girl, young girl, and she didn't like it. She said 'oh but this is how we do it'. 'But your ways isn't working, let's do it this way and we'll see next week it might work' and she hugged me and said 'this is working, how did you do that?' 'I saw all this in a workshop where this lady was saying in this school it works like that, like this, so I take it, I bring what they're doing there to practice here' and it was working...I started talking because my workshops had been helping me.*

This powerful combination of reflective practice where the teacher participants were able to study and work at the same time gave them a mechanism to try new ideas, implement changes and make the important connections between theory and practice. It was with this strong grounding and experience of team teaching that these women were then able to commence their work as the fully qualified member of the team.

### *Experience of team teaching once the teacher participants became qualified*

Having themselves experienced the role of assistant teacher, these newly qualified teachers were able to bring that knowledge from that experience to their ways of working with assistant teachers as they transitioned into being qualified classroom teachers. In particular it is quite clear how highly these teachers valued the work done by their team teachers and also took seriously the process needed to team-teach effectively.

*I had an assistant teacher, really good one, I'm glad I had (name)...yeah we were a good team... I think that got me... through the year, I think (name) and me were a strong team...She really got into teaching...we were like team teaching...equal yeah I didn't take the job on my own...we planned things together...group work, what to do, what lessons to take...Group work which kids we can have in our groups. Yeah (name) was just excellent!*

*I was teaching and it was challenging because that's when I was left in a room on my own, but lucky I had assistant teacher cos we could you know communicate well in the classroom and we were getting lots of children...they were confident and comfortable seeing both Anangu there...And they used to come and sit at my desk and say 'oh, I'm teacher now' they used to see me and they used to be proud...they want(ed) to be like that too.*

Another teacher participant also highlighted the central importance of group work in a

multi-level class with large numbers of students all at different levels,

*...first I taught maybe year 1, maybe T/1? It was really great cos little kids came and they knew they had Warlpiri teacher and they were happy ...we took groups...and literacy workers used to come and take groups. It was really good like that. Yeah we don't do that now ... we used to rotate when we used to have Warlpiri...and for Maths we did same, me and my TA did, took groups...because there were lots of kids.... for example if there's 20 kids maybe my TA used to take 10, I used to take 10...and just set them around the circle.*

A number of the teacher participants talked about the significance of continuing to work collaboratively with non-Indigenous teachers during this period. The strong feeling was that things worked best when everyone had good relationships and worked well together and everyone was working towards the same goals and supporting each other,

*...there was this young teacher that I worked with...we used to teach in team because I was a Warlpiri teacher and she was an English teacher, so she would do English lesson, maybe reading and writing, I would maybe after recess would be Warlpiri learning, yeah Warlpiri teaching, then I used to plan and do Warlpiri lessons....Yuwai there were lots of kids who were trying and there were lots of kids who were having difficulties. Yuwai...my team teacher was helping me to help with other kids, but she was also learning Warlpiri because she wasn't a Warlpiri speaker. Sometimes we could work with two groups or three groups. There would be like AT in between for me and her, myself and the kardiya teacher.*

*We worked as team, teacher and assistant teachers...three in each class...and one Principal who used to be in the office while we were teaching in the class....but now Principal is teaching now. And we used to have a teacher linguist too. Teacher linguist and literacy worker used to come out to the class and teach. Palya lingkku everything was working well before, you know? Team teaching. And we used to have a staff meeting and all palya. Staff meeting, team teaching, planning together, planning, staff meeting, team teaching. But not now....*

A number of the teacher participants also noted the importance of feeling like they were offering leadership and mentoring to the younger teachers they were now working with in a team teaching environment,

*....my professional learning for myself, I do my own planning and program with my AT and she sits down with me and we both talk to each other and you know looking at outcomes and talking about outcomes and where it fits. That's my learning, learning myself to teach that other teachers, like AT and being a strong teacher, talking in meetings, going to meetings and being a role model for the leadership.*

*I had my own space and own like curriculum to follow on and to teach and also I was working with a young girl and I was team teaching at that time and really like a leadership role, and also to someone to look at me like, I'm a teacher and I got own classroom.*

One teacher participant talked about how much more difficult her transition into being a

fully qualified teacher was precisely because she was not in a team teaching context and was left to cope in a classroom by herself,

*...at first it was really hard you know, after all those studies that I did. What have I got to do to organise myself...and then what can I teach? And it was really (hard) at first. Yuwai that's when I started...to do my own preparation and all that, lesson planning because there'll be no one here to help me....It was really hard because I had no Assistant Teacher with me.*

### ***Ideas about what makes good team teaching***

All of the teacher participants had very strong, clear ideas about the kinds of things that made team teaching work well. At the heart of this is the idea of planning together for what happens in the classroom,

*...both teachers need to be there, like assistant teacher/team teacher. We've got to really include them as well for planning. And also you know we talked about it very strongly and we team teaching teams should be planning together, yeah....I think it teaches the other, the assistant teacher, it's their way of learning yeah. And they can see how it's done and you know 'it's not just from their head they're doing it, these resources that we need to access and whatever we're planning'. I think it's important for them to see and learn.*

*...working together and supporting each other and sitting down and planning with team teaching, but make sure we need to be there to look after kids as we are*

*working together and be a team teacher but we gotta learn from each other, both Warlpiri and English. We need to involve others, we need to work with mentors to keep us going to do the right things what we're trying to teach.*

*...team teaching...good program and sharing ideas...planning together...sit with the kids...teaching in multi-age groups... make a good program, what is suitable for the kid who's got a difficult learning...for different age groups...good resources.*

A number of the teacher participants talked about how crucial it is for all members of the team to feel empowered and actively engaged in the teaching process as well as the centrality of building strong and balanced relationships between team teachers,

*I see them coming to work every day and joining in with teaching and like taking groups it is really good, and asking questions yeah like 'what we doing today?'... (Important) to be active, active and do everything, yeah not sitting down.*

*It's not about you know one being great. It's being you know, it's good to be working with each other and learning together too.*

*...relationships that the main thing you gotta look at for relationship and to build that, to be better persons.*

Another teacher participant talked about the absolute necessity in a remote teaching environment to work as a team if you want to be able to have any kind of longevity,

*If you're one person trying to teach you will stress out, you won't have any idea 'what am I doing, there's kids playing everywhere'. You won't ever sit them down. You won't ever settle them down. You need a group of team teachers to help you and to work with you and to work how we want the kids to learn.*

This philosophy of team teaching based on planning together, active engagement in the teaching and learning process, and strong and balanced relationships provides a powerful road map for remote schools wanting to engage in effective teaching and learning. This final example gives a strong indication of how effective team teaching can support teachers and students alike,

*...but if you're together in the one classroom you need to ...plan and program then that person needs to have a class on her own....Like if there's um twenty then say ten each, if there's 30 well maybe 15 each and that's how you teach and then come back and (discuss) 'so and so is real low, how can we make him meet to the others?' ...and come back ...and look at it 'oh this was really low and needs to move on to this level and how can we help that student to become in that group?' We can't leave her and say 'that's it, you are in the corner and you're the weakest!' No. And that's where I see the behaviour can improve in schools....and also he (the student) thinks that he's being cared about too, so he's not shoved down in the corner, he knows that 'oh both teachers care for me so I'll come you know and I'll put my effort in learning'.*

### *The current team teaching environment*

Sadly many of the teacher participants commented repeatedly on how far from the ideal the current team teaching experience seemed to be. As alluded to in previous comments the participants often spoke of how things had been in the past but 'not now'.

*...feels like now that we are outside. Only the non-Indigenous staff planning.*

*Everything changed and before when we were working when there used to be a NAPLAN testing (community name) school was always number 1 and 2, because there were Indigenous teachers working. Palya lingku, it was really good when we were working. Kids have learnt.*

*...now a days it's really hard to handle the kids...maybe it's because there are non-Indigenous teachers in the classroom all the time teaching those kids...there's a big difference yuwa...yeah maybe that's a problem the kids not responding*

*Cos you know a lot of the times you hear, (and) I just really hate, a lot of the times when you hear assistant teacher complain 'Oh I'm just there as a policeman in the classroom'. I just hate that. If I had assistant teacher I want to treat her like a classroom teacher when they work with me.*

*... at the moment I feel that they (assistant teachers) doing like what the team teacher is saying, you know 'you do this, you do that, you do this in the morning, this is what we gonna do next week' week by week, not actually you know sitting down with her or him and going through what she's weak at, all that.*

*...sometimes they don't see their...program and they don't plan with each other...*

*some of the people who they were team teaching with were sometimes critical ...yeah cos that person, you know the one who's fully trained might think oh 'she's no good', or 'he's no good', but actually talking and programming and sharing makes a good team teacher.*

*....and that's how I thought um some of the training isn't given to people...How about you know give that training to improve in that area, and that's where the strength is. And they see the weakness...they can do it, but they need support, you know and not to be critical but actually have support and look at the strengths, look at the weakness and build on that, rather than being critical and saying, what's the word... patronising?*

It might seem obvious enough that team teaching relies upon training, supportive relationships, collaboration and constructive feedback. However, based on the experience and evidence provided in the teacher narratives it would appear as whereas once team teaching was valued and effectively implemented, we are now seeing a return to the kind of classroom environment described by a teacher participant at the very beginning of this section. In many schools and classrooms the Indigenous staff are there as classroom police and translators rather than as educators. This absence of a pedagogical role for paraprofessional staff could be considered one of the reasons why we are not seeing more young teachers progress through to becoming fully qualified teachers.

## 7.5 Leadership

In line with the group analysis the theme of leadership came through strongly in the Individual teacher narratives. There were a number of aspects to the discussion around leadership. These were the role of school Principals, collaborative leadership, supporting leadership aspirations, cross-cultural leadership and hierarchy.

### *The role of the school Principal*

One of the strong points made by all teacher participants was the powerful role played by the school Principal in either supporting, enhancing and leading their school towards the kind of work the teacher participants felt should be prioritised, or being the cause of significant difficulties and barriers to this kind of work. A number of the teacher participants talked about the challenging role of the Principal who are often coming to contexts in remote community schools that are outside their comfort zone and markedly different to their previous professional experiences,

*...you know when the Principals, new Principals came and it was also challenging for them because they never worked in a bilingual school before, which was like different for them. Like Principal would be a high school Principal or teacher coming into our community to teach in a school and some Principals found it difficult and challenging.*

Another comment was on the high turnover of Principals and the lack of power experienced by local community teachers in matters over which teachers get to stay and which ones need to leave,

*...Bad ones stay long time, but we want to try to get rid of them, we push them away but good ones they go quickly... They find another job better than what they are doing there? You know they move around a lot because they just a visitor and they move along, they want to go. We are local people we always stay, but we see lot of movements, lot of good Principals go away, yuwai.*

### **Examples of poor leadership**

There were many examples of what the teacher participants considered to be poor leadership on the part of Principals. These examples ranged from Principals acting like parents who scalded the Indigenous staff like children and spoke in a wrong way to the students,

*...cos I had bad Principals before, when I was assistant teacher. If some of us would come late, they would growl us.*

*And then another one came in with a nutrition program and the kids coming in with a coke 'You not having this, you can have it this afternoon, I'll put it away!' Made kids cry ..... Yes, kids shouldn't be drinking coke but she would have done it right ... She would've sat down with us and explained it, she was like acting, she was the Principal.*

There were other examples cited by the teacher participants of the Principals being openly hostile to their teaching staff and causing a great deal of anxiety and conflict at the school.

*...we had a lot of changes of our Principals, yeah they come with different ideas. Some would come with 'I'm not gonna be a friend here, I'm just here to clean up the mess' you know 'with my power'. The leadership role he wasn't really cleaning up the mess, he was making things worse for us....yeah giving us hard, bad time and hard time...that was really sad because like he said he would come and clean up the mess, but he made lot of mess. And it was really challenging for us...He wasn't also asking for help but he was by himself trying to clean this mess, trying to do this, but he wasn't getting other...people involved, that's true....he never cared about any parents. We wouldn't have parents meeting to talk about this, lawa....he didn't go to talk to parents, lawa, he was just a Principal in his office*

This in many cases would be directly related to the high turnover of non-Indigenous teachers at that school, adding to the instability.

*...she kept on picking on kardiya teachers, I don't know why. They were trying to do their job, because she's the Principal 'do this properly, do that'! They would come to us with tears rolling down their cheek and I would say 'I really don't know what to do but we need to fight, be strong in a group'. Yuwai some teachers left because of her, yeah they said 'I can't work when she's here, I will come back when there's another Principal'.*

The lack of support from the Principal felt by the teacher participants was also a recurring message in the narratives. At times this lack of support occurred while they were simultaneously working in the school and undertaking their teacher education studies. At other times it was related to important decisions being made about the school programs. In all examples there is the suggestion that support was withdrawn when the Principal did not understand things from a cultural or community based perspective.

*He (Principal) wasn't really supportive.... because maybe he didn't help me through a lot of things, like maybe he didn't want me to study or anything like that....Maybe he didn't know sorry business or things that were happening? ... some kardiya like him weren't really supportive and good...*

*...we used to go to leadership meetings and I used to see them ... couple of Principals ... not where I wanted to see them...I was you know for that particular program and they were against us. And I thought... she was gonna be with me 'cos I was going for programs, but she was against me.*

One teacher participant summed this experience of the lack of support up with the ideas of 'right time' and 'bad feeling'

*...we didn't have that in other Principals who weren't worried about supporting yapa teachers or kardiya teachers....because you know we didn't have right time to get together to talk about program and stuff like that. Yuwai and which we all had bad feeling.*

### *Good collaborative models of leadership*

However, the teacher participants were also able to talk extensively about examples of where the 'right time' and the 'right way' of doing things led to a 'good feeling' for everyone about the direction the school was taking. This most often was linked to collaborative models of leadership within the school.

*...later on we had to get, a lady Principal came and she did help fix it and things were going smoothly and we were teaching well. We were happy both yapa and kardiya teachers, we would sit down and help each other.*

The following strong example talks about the impact on the everyday teaching that the leadership can have,

*....we want Principal... that loves working with yapa and loves doing their job right way, not looking at problems and giving problems. Yuwai. That's what we want. We want people who love working with yapa people and love helping making programs work well, yuwai and our teaching works well because when we teaching our lessons in the classroom we feel much better, you know we feel happy yeah this is what they learn. And if you have those kinds of hard feelings and hard problem with Principal and you're trying to teach your lesson, you won't feel right. Yuwai and you're thinking a lot about it, 'how can I make my teaching today better tomorrow?' Yuwai, but you need to look at how would you work with a Principal that is giving you a hard time and not worried about what did the kids learn today.*

Often these examples of good leadership came when Principals arrived with experience at another community or with pre-existing relationships with the community and the school. In other words they were 'known' to people already,

*...but like (name) and (name) they were working at (community name) before, but they knew, and we knew them. But we worked together very well after that. But not like before, like new kardiya came and came and came and went back. Like they were in a run you know coming and going, coming and going.*

Another teacher participant when asked about preferred models of leadership talked about the need for the issue of power to be addressed, particularly the danger of too much power in the hands of the non-Indigenous leadership. She suggested the need for non-Indigenous staff to understand their role as being there to mentor Indigenous staff and provide support and constructive feedback to help people improve,

*Tjulkurra only comes as a mentor, only there to teach that person and not to really take over, yuwa. Just say you know this is how you can do this, this how you can teach, but doing it in a both way culture. Yuwa, rather than saying 'oh he's hopeless at this, he's useless at this' instead of looking at that building on you know like the strengths and the weakness and moving whoever is in that position.*

Another teacher participant talked about the collaborative model of shared leadership that had been devised at her school through the use of groups or committees. These were groups that all staff, Indigenous and non-Indigenous participated in, and they took carriage

of important aspects of school planning, programming and functioning,

*... there's I think four other little groups down below us. We feed into them like we talk to them and they organise things now. What to do you know, go out to community, out to families. There's community engagement and other one's about behaviour management, and other one's something else. Yeah and everyone's in that group, like non-Indigenous staff and Indigenous staff....I was in the community engagement, that means planning the campfire meeting and yeah going out to ...and like when it happened, not only campfire meeting, events that happen, like Kupurilia, Easter, we do a lot of work around those events, like the Christmas party.*

In almost all examples given by the teacher participants there was a clear preference shown for leadership that was collaborative and inclusive of both people and the knowledge, experience and skills they brought with them.

### ***Leadership aspirations***

In addition to talking about their experiences of leadership over the course of their careers, the teacher participants also talked quite extensively about their own leadership aspirations and experiences as developing leaders. Some of the key influences that helped these teacher participants to develop their leadership skills were their study, community support and encouragement and working with a range of different people.

*I was the really quiet one when I first got my job and as I was studying I became now to speak up because I could see that some of the discussion was relating to my study and that ... sort of gave me more knowledge and understanding, yeah 'cos I already had wisdom from my community and the local level but to get into wisdom I was*

*more careful and... finding out as I went along....whenever we had staff meeting I started speaking up and saying 'oh you know this is not right and that is not true' all that, so that's when our Principal started giving me more practice....*

*...yeah community was supportive they say the leaders were saying 'oh you know she's good at doing that and she's gonna be you know more qualified' and some of the leaders I got good feedback that after when I graduated when I did training they gave me good feedback....school only mainly the teachers, not the Principal, wiya*

*And in staff meeting I was changed, cos I was talking, like when our Principal would go I then was acting, for three days when she was away on meetings, I used to act on some of the Principal role, which made me more confident and I found it challenging but something I liked (the) challenge.*

But even the most aspirational of statements made by the teacher participants about the desire to take on leadership within the school still has at its core the need for collaboration and supportive relationships,

*I want to be an ordinary teacher but have that leadership role to run my own school but with the support of mentor. Yuwai, if I would become our Principal I would work with a mentor to help me along my leadership, to run the school. That's what I think, but I can't be leader or Principal myself, but I need people to support me to direct me in the right track, on that journey to run my own school....I would like to work with AT's, new AT's that I've been working there and older AT's that have been*

*working there for long time and new ones that are coming in. They need to see Yapa person working with them, but with the support of mentor... Yuwai, ngurrjunyana*

This aspiration to be a leader is motivated by the desire to see others following in their footsteps, before it is too late.

*We talked about that in our meetings you know 'we want to see a lot of young people doing studies, like me'. I talked about myself when I went through this study, what I told was that it was really hard in my first years but as the years went by you know when I did my training back in the community, I found it really easy because support of the community, support of my family, support everybody supported me, you know.. And that meeting time I used to tell them because we want to bring in more young people you know to become teachers. Because we won't be there for long, we're old ones, we're sick.*

### ***Cross-cultural leadership***

The teacher participants were also acutely aware that they were called upon to provide a great deal of cross-cultural leadership within their schools. As some of the most experienced and longest serving staff in their schools, they often found themselves asked to mentor new non-Indigenous staff frequently arriving in the community.

*Like mentoring teachers that came from you know, first time in (community name) and the Principals you know not to have issues against anangu people you know,*

*help them how to behave the right way. I took that role and became you know good role, good leader for you know both anangu and tjulkurra.*

Often times this kind of cultural orientation work would continue as the teachers from outside the community were dealing with the culture shock and adjustment of living in a remote Indigenous community so different to their own,

*...sometimes (they) didn't fit it well and that's when we said you know it's not the same as your culture, if you have your culture different to our culture so we should be sitting down and you know looking at this, what barriers are there, so we can work and make it better...sometimes responses are sometimes questionable, sometimes we would you know disagree on each other, but once we practiced on and make an action, that would work, and sometimes you know, some non-Indigenous didn't take it so they ended up getting burnt out cos they weren't fitting into our culture, which sometimes can be hard.*

*...like when, like tjulkurra ask anangu...sometimes the anangu is not ready to ask that tjulkurra. ... along the way I've learned quite a number of things that wasn't given to me, to work in community schools, remote schools you have to be trusting each other and working on that in a particular...maybe how we can like I said before behave in the right way, instead of you know. Cos some of the behaviours is not appropriate to our culture.*

As the more experienced staff members other Indigenous staff members also look to these qualified teachers to take on the leadership role and provide guidance for how to navigate and be heard in the school environment,

*...had a PD when anangu and tjulkurra you know, when we together sometimes the ATs don't feel comfortable and you know to answer questions when someone asks you know, and I used to, with the Principal, I used to negotiate some ways of improving that. So we used to come up with a plan of like we'll do the introduction with all of us in the same room and then we'll split up into separate groups so that anangu can be just anangu and tjulkurra can be just tjulkurra. And that's how we did it... so when anangu wanted to ask questions they were confident and comfortable cos it was just anangu in the room... Yuwa, and that went around in language and that helped um some of the younger ones to get to have a say on what they wanted and what they wanted to improve on... then after that we came together and I wrote down some of the things that was said ... and I used to interpret for them.*

It often falls on these teacher participants to also play this cultural interpreter role with the parents and community members too, acting as cultural bridges between the community and the school.

*I think the language (is) ...important! Talking English... if they (parents) all came and sat a long way and the teachers went over to them, yeah...they felt comfortable where they were sitting... And I didn't really want to make them shame 'oh you mob don't sit long way, come here!' you know I don't really want to do that I just leave them 'oh they can sit there where they feel comfortable' yeah. And every time you*

*know we went out to the community 'oh kala!' they know now, they come now more without getting shame...*

*Because after school I used to go and sit down with parents 'you've got to tell your kids to come to school so she can learn...sometimes we get their parents to come in. They used to sit down to help us, you know if he doesn't fully understand and then that's how we can assess the kids, where they're learning from both the teachers and the parents.*

One of the teacher participants talked about the challenges playing this cross-cultural leadership role posed for her, but also how it had made her stronger and more confident as a leader,

*...it's hard yeah, it's hard for me when I'm always put in the middle. I've got to really you know try to explain to both sides...it's hard for me, yeah they're trying to say that and this group trying to say this and you know. It's always hard for me, yeah. And I'm really pleased that I've really learned all this yeah, how to deal with it. Deal with issues at school, the school issues. I think I've learned enough to say 'oh this is what you need to say/do' to both sides. I've got that knowledge...to say that what I think 'oh you probably must have misunderstood a word' or 'this is not the way to go about it' to Indigenous staff. 'Cos a lot of the times white teachers comes up with 'oh must have misunderstood' this is the way of saying all the time. But get to the point you know. 'What is it she misunderstood?' really go into it and talk about it.*

### *Leadership v hierarchy - 'A leader on that same level'*

One final thing that stood out in the discussion of leadership was the very strong opinion that leadership should not imply Western style hierarchy. Even the fact that some staff members had completed qualifications and some had not did not equate, in the views of the teacher participants, to some staff members being more important or having more power than others. One teacher participant expressed it simply in these terms,

*...the last staff meeting I was in I said 'listen no body is higher than me and I'm not higher than any of you teachers. We're all equal.'*

Another teacher participant gave more words to the same idea and explained it in more detail,

*I really want to show that leadership for Indigenous staff....I really want to be just a leader on that same level, yeah. Working with them, yeah, I don't really want the role model term. That's my really strong ...I don't want to have my Assistant Teachers down, you know 'I'm the boss and I know everything!' ... 'cos I see other Indigenous workers as important as I am in the school. Like we're all there to do the same thing, yeah teaching...I'm not doing anything different from them, we're all doing the same thing in the classroom so why do I have to be higher than them? I can say that I've done the training...yeah...(I want to) help them ... I don't want to be better, I want to help them, yeah, to become where I am now. Awa....how can I put it, when people tell me 'ohhh you're a really good role model for these...' and as soon as they say it, it's my heart that no good feeling. 'No I don't want to be a role model, I want to be at the same level as they are' yeah. And just give them support to where they want to get to, yeah....I don't want to be singled out. I want to be part of the Indigenous crew*

*that are working...and doing the same thing in the classroom. Why should I be higher and I'm not doing any different from them.*

This last point links strongly to the notion of the 'feeling for family' discussed in the first theme as an ontological standpoint that places harmonious relationship with family as a central way of being. It in turn poses some interesting questions about the possible misunderstandings and misinterpretations about the perceived roles and responsibilities of people working in remote community schools. This would particularly be the case for non-Indigenous Principals and teachers taking on a leadership role in schools where they bring Westernised understandings of hierarchy in schools and don't understand the cultural nuances of balancing family and leadership roles in that community context.

## **7.6 Exclusion and power**

*'We don't make it to the top. Lawa'*

In the teacher narratives the experience of exclusion was commonly talked about. All of the teacher participants had had significant moments in their working careers when they had felt powerful forces moving against them and had experienced a sense of being sidelined or shut out of the power within their school's operation. This was experienced in a variety of ways and contexts.

### ***The power of school Principals***

Many of the experiences of power and exclusion offered by the teacher participants were connected to how they experienced the leadership within their schools, and in particular

the way the Principal operated. One of the most common experiences was the feeling of being excluded from the consultation or decision-making processes of the school, despite being the most senior and experienced Indigenous person on staff,

*...things were happening around like Principal would speak to a staff member or other tjulkurra instead of telling or asking me 'this one he isn't the right one for this'...that's what the point I got to that I wasn't being asked, being notified or being like I wasn't told 'oh this can happen if this happens'. Principal would take it over and start doing it on his own.*

Other examples involved the Principal circumnavigating the local staff by recruiting their own people to work in the school. This sort of 'stacking the deck' was experienced as a way of keeping all the power in a concentrated way,

*....he brought his sister-in-law and (her) husband to that ET2 job....but there were teachers already there, that they would get that position. That was really hard because he had his power, he used his power to run only his family member, all of his family member, like his sister-in-law, his brother, I mean his sister-in-law's husband, his wife, all having position, but he already had a high position when he's a Principal, but giving that ET2 position to his family which no teachers there didn't get it. Even us as a yapa teacher, lawa.*

Another more insidious form of exclusion came disguised often in the form of friendship or kindness. Many of the teacher participants discussed times when they were experiencing difficulties in their personal lives – managing health problems for themselves or family

members, navigating the complex cultural obligations required of them and other personal matters. There were a number of examples given of school leaders and Principals in particular using these issues as an opportunity to relegate these qualified teachers to paraprofessional and assistant level positions.

*I used to teach you know, Maths English, Science, but now I'm only teaching language, because I'm a literacy worker.*

*...instead of just putting us into assistant teacher (roles) you know they should have given us leave, like when I've been having problem with my husband because he's sick and sometimes I always come late and so I was Principal at that time. But instead of just giving me a year (off) ... they said 'oh you just need to sign this form here and then you'll become an assistant teacher', straight away instead of giving us a hand, 'we'll just give you maybe six months leave or a year off'*

*(Principal said) 'you will still be a teacher'...but not on the salary side, palya? It's only assistant teacher pay....he was trying to help me like 'you're having problems at home and getting stressed, and I want to help you'.*

It is hard to imagine such 'solutions' being suggested to qualified non-Indigenous teachers.

### ***The power of non-local staff***

There were also numerous examples of the teacher participants experiencing exclusion in their dealings with non-local teachers as well as curriculum advisors who come from outside the community to work in their schools.

*...feels like now that we are outside. Only the non-Indigenous staff planning.*

*New staff, non-Indigenous staff, coming in and taking over....program changing ...like before when we were teaching here now we are teaching their kids now, before when we were teaching the older kids, them (the previous generation), they've learned but now we were teaching their kids now. But it's really hard, we're struggling. Before the kids used to listen to us. (Speaks in language)....kids were learning because Indigenous teacher was teaching them.... (now) we have sit, I have to sit and see the(m) teaching*

This statement is reflective of just how long these teacher participants have been working in their local schools. They have been there long enough to see the generational change happen in approaches to teaching, from a time when they were 'inside' and 'kids were learning' to now when the Indigenous teachers feel like they are 'outside' and 'it's really hard'.

One teacher participant in particular explicitly questioned how a non-local person could achieve a high level position in her school without knowledge about Indigenous culture that she felt was a pre-requisite to work in a remote school. She made the comparison that to attain an equally high position she would have to demonstrate a high level of knowledge and competence in the Western educational system,

*...this particular teacher really doesn't want to listen to me, you know when I (say) 'oh you need to...'...probably he's thinking ...I'm probably smarter than him? ...you know?*

*He don't want to listen to me. I'm really trying to open up what he's thinking yeah, and he's throwing all these other things at me yeah. That's the other reason that you know probably (I'm) a bit careful....and someone that's not really, you know...never has learned anything about Indigenous culture is always going to be throwing things at you, you know, blocking it. He pretends he knows but the way what he talks about is doesn't make any sense to me....he can't listen 'cos he can't take it, he doesn't know what to say about it, to respond... If an Indigenous person want(s) to be in a higher position (we've) got to go through all, got to face all that, but sometimes you know non-Indigenous teacher ignores and try and push it back... This is what's I think...(is) holding them (other Indigenous staff) back...They see another Indigenous person trying to have that go with the white teacher and think 'oh it's very hard, what am I going forward for?' you know (laughs)....yeah 'am I gonna deal with that, go through that when I get to a higher point/higher level'? No it makes you scar(ed).*

It is interesting that this teacher participant made a direct link between this form of exclusion, seeing the struggle of other qualified Indigenous teachers to gain recognition and equality, as a reason that would discourage other Indigenous teachers from wanting to pursue further education and training.

Some experiences of the teacher participants were actually physical acts of excluding them from participating in professional learning, as evidenced by this story,

*See this lady came into our classroom and she only talked to my team teacher and you know I was there also as a teacher, but invisible sitting there. And they were*

*whispering away, talking, opening their page and talking about some areas that they got to focus on teaching in English and I was just there listening with my ear. 'Oh what about me' you know I was thinking to myself 'I am an invisible person sitting here, I need to learn that to support my team teacher' and they didn't say '(name) come over here, you're part of this team, let's look and talk about this program that we're gonna be doing as a team teaching'. I sat there feeling sad just myself while they were yapping away talking about all these good ideas, that I was missing out. And I felt really sad. Then they finished talking and I had to sneak away, walk outside, just feeling low, feeling sad, I wanted to be part of that group to learn about that new program, new idea. I went home just feeling and thinking all about it. How could my team teacher be not letting me in, rejecting me?*

The teacher participant, rather than staying quiet spoke to her Principal about this exclusion and received a response from the curriculum advisor. The teacher participant, while standing up for herself was also able to reflect on the longer term implications of such exclusion,

*And then when she was getting ready to go back to town she called me, she said she invited me to staff room and said to me 'I'm really sad for what you told your Principal'. 'Yes I'm also a professional Yapa teacher and I want to learn your ideas' that's what I said 'you really made me look like I was an invisible person. We all teachers, both Yapa and Kardiya. I wanted to learn'. I said that to her. 'I feel really guilty but I will bring a workshop and you will be invited, Yapa teachers will be invited'. 'Well what about what you did and what you talked about? I would have*

*learned the first step'...Yep maybe after another year she did come to our school and she ran this workshop about (program name). ...Yeah I was not familiar about it, but I thought to myself 'I don't really care', see I never learned when she first came to our school. And Yapa ladies were asking 'what's this?' 'I don't know, I don't have any clue' yeah. It was that first step that would have opened my heart to learn what she was trying to teach....we had some good team teaching, Kardiya, they would sit down with me 'This is what she meant' and we would open that page 'You know how she came, long time' 'Yeah I remember', 'This is what she talked about' yeah....difficult for me to think if I would have been sitting down with them in the first place I would have learned ...I wanted to be part of it.*

This is a powerful example of both the exclusion that the teacher participants have experienced throughout their careers as well as the unequal regard in which they are often held by colleagues and leaders. This idea is explored further in the final theme (7.7).

### ***The power of the Department***

The teacher participants also spoke of the great shifts in power and control that they experienced at the hands of what they called 'The Department' or 'The Office'. Here they are referring to the bureaucratic, policy and financial power over the daily operation of remote schools wielded by the Education Department of the Northern Territory.

One teacher participant reflected on the school that she had helped to start under some

bean trees next to a sand dune in her community. In these humble beginnings the community and the teachers had control over how and what was taught. However, once 'The Department' got involved and started providing resources such as classrooms they also got involved in dictating what needed to be taught,

*Department of Education...You know they got a bit 'you need to start teaching the good things now, good way. Because from that tree to that classroom now, you can teach like better English you know'.*

This experience of power in relation to resources and funding was a common experience,

*...we used to have a secondary class too but government now I don't know, government cutting funding and teachers, cutting...*

Some of the teacher participants noticed a shift in this power once they became qualified as teachers and began taking on leadership roles within their schools. This was expressed in the following examples from the narratives as being 'inside' and then a powerful force coming along and pushing them 'outside',

*...must be someone in the Office is changing, awa...changing and putting whitefellas and pushing Anangu outside...wiya, ...I talked about that at the staff meeting. I did my training to be a classroom teacher. All those years I did my training.*

*Like you know that was hard work that I did learn, I've you know, it was really hard, I've struggled and tried hard and then got through and now I went through all the*

*things I did but now, you know, I've got my goal, what's now? What's happening now? It's really hard. Did all those things and I'm just doing nothing now. Outside... (of) the building, the school here. We did a lot of study, a lot of hard work....something came across and took it over. I did a little bit, maybe for couple of years I took over. Then something came over and pushed me out. People can see, you know this school here. There's two people here who reached the goal, now they are walking around outside, not taking over. We did take it over. I think we went back to the beginning, after we did all those studies. Instead we should be taking over. Maybe Education Department you know. I'm thinking you know, I'm thinking other way round, maybe Education Department you know, they're not looking at us because we are Aboriginal. That's why. Because of our skin. (speaks in language) I'm saying this same in language...We took it over and then suddenly something came across. (speaks in language again)...we know we've got a good experience...like you know working, working, working and then going back to unemployment, like that one same. We reached our goal...(speaks in language)...We've got a big Office in Alice Springs they're saying 'oh wiya we'll get this one (non-Indigenous teacher) here' (speaks in language)... (But)We've got our certificate!*

This sense of being excluded or kept 'outside' of any real power within their schools was also evident in the limited career path that was ever offered to these teachers either within their schools or within the Department,

*I wanted to change to next level which I didn't get it because of the bureaucrats. I really wanted to be next to someone who's big boss like (name) or someone. I wanted*

*to be with them so that education in Indigenous communities can you know go how we want it to go and I really wanted to step in to do that, but there was no support so I needed to, because I didn't want to stay in there and get burnt out. I then resigned.*

There seemed to be a common experience of exclusion whereby even the standard career trajectories for teachers in remote schools were consistently denied to the teacher participants.

### **Lack of support**

This lack of support was again a form of exclusion in itself. There were numerous examples in the teacher narratives of these teachers expressing interest in developing their leadership potential and being met with little to no support or mentoring to help make this happen,

*I went to lots of Principals who were there and asked them 'I want to step onto next level where I can be not in the classroom but still challenge a new job and you know offered by Department so I can be more in leadership role, that way' and no one could give me support or find a way how I can you know talk to other people and you know find out where I can get support from and that's what I got stuck on and that made me really go depressed.*

*...was questioning myself ... I'm the senior position I should be asked, I should be challenged on doing new jobs, new roles ... where I can you know get out of classroom work and challenge a new job as a senior person there instead of you know being a classroom teacher I could have done 'um a mentor role for the young*

*assistant teachers. That would have been my other job if I were being asked by senior staff ...should have offered to me...I was asking myself, why wouldn't have been offered to me, 'cos I would have you know gone a long way and you know, gone to a next level and did jobs ...that's what community sort of expect me to go to a next level ... when I see ... teachers who are there a long time I see them get into new roles, stepping out of the classroom and given a professional jobs like ESL, co-ordinator or mentor for teaching teachers who are first out - jobs like that you know, I (sh)ould have been offered (the) challenge (of the) next level.*

This lack of support was also often experienced by the teacher participants literally being excluded from conversations, professional dialogues and decision-making processes,

*Like when I was at the (school) office ... two people will talk about something which gave me a signal 'oh they talking about me, undermining me' ... They were hiding, they were locking up offices, that's the reaction I was getting...no one used to talk, no one used to give me friendship. Mmm...it changed 'cos I was more isolated, like no one used to want to have cup of tea, no one used to want to talk.*

*Cos leaders sit in one table and share ideas and share what ahead of us ... but none of them would give me any feedback or encouragement...strange things were happening 'cos I remember used to get encouragement for leaderships used to engage with it and look at next year and 'this is what we're gonna do next year' and if you don't like it then talk about it, but (after that) we never used to talk about it ... they should have engaged me in you know, to share what's going to happen to*

*school....but strange things were happening and only people that worked among themselves were you know keeping it for themselves instead of engaging me.*

*...I was a little bit feeling that, that they were criticizing me, but never seen in action, but felt...like I wasn't trusted any more... that's when I started questioning myself 'oh this is weird, and people aren't coming and asking me...parents used to come and see me and say 'oh so and so came and saw me, but you weren't there' and before I was the one who they would approach... if there was a concern with the student to go and see a parent or a community member but I wasn't told or you know being asked to come with that person. That's when I felt that I wasn't included.*

While undertaking their teacher education studies these teacher participants were often engaged in rhetoric around leadership and role modelling. However, the actual experience once they became qualified turned out to be quite a different scenario. The experience of being a qualified teacher in a school was often one of disempowerment and exclusion, often as a direct result of non-Indigenous teachers and leaders who came from outside the community but entered the school in positions of authority and power. In many cases just the fact of being Indigenous placed these fully qualified teacher participants in a less powerful position – a concept that is explored further in the final theme – ‘not looking at us level’.

## **7.7 'Not looking at us level'**

Chapter 2 of this thesis explored the colonial legacy of Indigenous teachers working in

schools in the NT. Through the teacher narratives the lived experience of this persistent colonial ideology is palpable. Many of the participants spoke of experiencing unequal treatment or, as one teacher participant named it, not being looked at 'level'.

### *Unequal conditions of employment*

The good conditions of employment, particularly in relation to teacher pay was seen as one of the real incentives to encourage young people to following a teaching pathway,

*...if you become a teacher you'll get lots of money...yeah, so we you know reached that point you know to become a proper teacher...see I try to encourage other new TAs*

It was also acknowledged that these favourable conditions were one of the things that enticed non-local teachers out to remote communities to work in schools,

*I think this is one of the things that are highly expected, you know when white teachers go out to communities...probably they thinking 'oh remote schools are better to go and teach. You get everything'. You know?*

However all of the teacher participants were aware through personal experience that the conditions of employment were not equal for local and non-local recruits, particularly in relation to the provision of housing, furniture and the provision of electricity and water while living in the community and working at the school,

*... we started asking for housing, but because we were local recruits they could only give us old housing like school houses. And now because government changed you're not allowed to keep school houses, you need to work there and go to work*

*and now we used to start talking about local recruits, we need a better house because we are teachers.*

The current Education Department policy remains that non-local recruits are provided with a fully furnished Education Department house for the duration of their time working in the community while local recruits have to find their own accommodation.

### *Unequal in the classroom*

A number of the teacher participants also experienced times when they were treated as less than equal to their non-Indigenous counterparts while in the classroom. In the teacher narratives these stories were often connected to the high turnover of non-local teaching staff and the unfamiliarity new staff had with team teaching. There was a common assumption amongst non-Indigenous teachers who originated from outside the community that all Indigenous staff in the school must be assistant teachers. Even once this assumption was rectified the attitude of many qualified non-local teachers was to treat the fully qualified Indigenous teachers as less qualified than them. This is evidenced by the following exchange,

*one day I was sitting in the classroom and 'ohhh can you look after (my class)?' (the non-Indigenous teacher) went around to all the other staff there 'can you look after my kids there?' but I was sitting here. 'Excuse me! I'm here! or you want me to walk out?'...And when the kids, you know they ask sometimes non-Indigenous not listening sometimes they ask me to go out to the bathroom 'yuwa palya you can go!' but (the non-Indigenous teacher questions) 'hey where you going?' 'Oh I bin ask (name)', 'Oh you should ask me!' 'Hey let them go, I've already told them to go!'...'You think I'm a*

*student with them?' I told them you know they should recognise us too!*

These attitudes often lead to the Indigenous teachers in the classroom only being valued as 'classroom police', there to monitor and manage the behaviour of the students, but not to actually teach,

*...and one day I said 'Yuwa I'm gonna resign and I'm just going home!' "Wiya wiya wiya wiya you can't do that (name), you can't do that, kids are only listening to you!" See that's the way. 'We really need you!' (speaks in language) they (the children) listen to Anangu staff.*

This delineation between behaviour management and curriculum roles also applies to attitudes towards what other Indigenous community members have to offer. One teacher participant questioned the need to outsource things like music programs to non-local musicians when there were local people who were more than able to take on that role,

*...we have music man coming to teach music. And I'm thinking what about the local Anangu coming in to teach them singing? We've got men that play in the band.*

Here we clearly see the skills and knowledge of the non-local Western knowledge holders being given preference over the skills and knowledge within the local community. In this way language and knowledge is being treated unequally as well.

### ***Unequal responsibility regarding the community***

Conversely, when it comes to liaison between the school and the parents and wider

community, the local staff, particularly the experienced qualified teachers, are expected to take on more than their fair share. There are countless examples in the teacher narratives of these teacher participants being asked to speak on behalf of others, to account for the whereabouts or actions of others or likewise to speak on behalf of the school to the whole community. This seems to be something that is not asked of non-local teachers.

*...like you know when classroom teacher (says) you know 'oh where's my team teacher? What's happening?' I tell them 'this problem, she's got this problem' or yeah....I think it sometimes gets hard. I just say to them 'how long have you been here for? You're part of the community!' you know. 'You know a lot of the people here now, you know where they live, you know that sort of thing' I tell them. 'You could just go and visit them'... It's best for you to go and sit down and talk to that person'...sometimes it's just me, they just ask me 'cos I'm there every day 'what's going on?' and I tell them you know 'she don't live with me! She's got another house down the road. Go and find out!'*

*...It's hard yeah, it's hard for me when I'm always put in the middle. I've got to really you know try to explain to both sides, yeah. And it's hard for me, yeah they're trying to say that and this group trying to say this and you know. It's always hard for me, yeah.*

*I'm always caught between ... and sometimes I tell them... I explain to the Principal or another teacher 'can you go and talk to them? ...I think all this needs to be explaining, we need to explain to white teachers you know. This is what's happening. You know*

*all these little things.*

All of 'these little things', as articulated by that last excerpt, are extra expectations and stresses that are carried by the local Indigenous teachers that are not part of what the non-local teachers ever have to deal with. That feeling of being caught in the middle, being the bridge between the community and the school was a common experience for these teacher participants.

### ***Unequal expectations and responsibilities***

This role of being a liaison person or bridge meant that the teacher participants had all felt their role expand over the course of the years, usually without any acknowledgment, additional remuneration or time release to take on the extra tasks expected of them. Many of the teacher participants talked about the 'bigger role' they had to take on as well as the impact that had on them.

*I think I've got that bigger role...a lot of the times it's me, called on, and I've got to be seen as the main person, the local person in the school. Yeah sometimes I don't like it! I tell them 'no, get that other person!' but really I don't ... I see it, they really want me...I guess I've worked there longer, yeah. And a lot of the things around the school, I know, yeah, sort of know... what's going on.*

*That was also challenging for me and challenging for those other Yapa teachers, ATs, because they needed me and (name) to teach them if we the leader in the school, and old teachers, you know elders, still there, so that we wanted to teach those young teachers ATs, yuwai and that's what I'm thinking about doing.*

*...see we had experience, because we were teaching and we knew some works you know...to be confident and um to speak up in um staff meeting, yeah at the meetings too with other associations.*

In their home communities these teacher participants are some of the very few people who have completed higher education qualifications. This means that they are often called upon by other organizations and committees to be members, decision makers and consultants.

*...see like childcare reference committee ...we talk about the building and how to teach new workers and we encourage them, we talk to them and how to work with um Kardiya side by side, you know. We want to grow up those people who are working right now, you know.*

*...one time was we would have lots of meetings, like remote learning partnership thing, and that was the time that they picked me and (name) to go to, but I was the only one going to that meeting and (name) would stay and teach and I would you know get community people to come along with me*

In the Warlpiri communities these additional responsibilities also extend to overseeing the Warlpiri Education Training Trust (WETT), which is funded from mining royalties. All of the Warlpiri teacher participants talked about the work they did with WETT and how proud they were of what WETT had accomplished. They also talked about how they were mentoring other young people to get involved in that work.

*WETT we just talk about money, how we use it, we talk about this is our circle, how the money is spent, how much, like we give money to childcare and world vision and Mt Theo, we don't give money to clinic, nothing, just only school area....yeah and it's really working well... WETT committee*

*So I was the representative for WETT...yeah WETT committee, like an advisory group...we was having like meetings like among ourselves talking about what's been happening in the communities see if everything's been working, if we've been working well with Kardiyas out in the community. We have to take that back to the advisory group, the big bosses so like the big chairman is like from CLC, DEET or DCIS...yuwai and from Newmont....And we have got that like every year, three times a year they come in...we've got three from each community, three that's sitting on, but we bring there only young people when they want to come for proxy, yeah we bring them in too...that's really good so they can learn.*

Once again all of this representative work is often work that is entirely shouldered by the Indigenous staff in the schools. Non-local staff are rarely involved in so many additional educational responsibilities as these teachers and if and when they are it usually involves a position of seniority or additional remuneration, which is not the case for any of the teacher participants.

### *Unequal opportunities*

Despite being asked to take on such additional workloads and responsibilities and concurrently building up their own experience, the teacher participants also talked about how unequal the distribution of senior leadership positions were.

*I learned so much from what I've seen, what I was given, but at the end I was asking for more equality like, in like senior positions, not in the classroom. Cos I've got a lot of skills in the classroom, practices. But to move me as like be a consultant or something that I wanted to ask for and they, I wasn't sure to ask, because people weren't the right people to ask. And that's why I was like I was sunk down, I couldn't move from that, I was totally bogged ...stuck to where I wasn't you know, nobody was interested to ask me or they were just asking me to do this and do that, to make their jobs you know, to make their jobs very interesting or to make their jobs easy because I knew but I was you know giving to them but I didn't get something back.*

Despite the vast experience of these teacher participants at the time of recording these narratives not one of them held a position of leadership in any of their respective schools.

### *Unequal ideas about things that matter*

Finally, it was very clear that despite the years of experience, knowledge and skills, despite having an equivalent qualification and despite the extra work that these teacher participants took on, when something was important to them they still were not supported or taken seriously. This next example related to bilingual education shows how very often

there is a completely unequal attitude when it comes to what different stakeholders value in education in remote communities.

*...they were Yapa educators, Yapa working for government, and they were getting more ideas from us and we would give them our ideas about Warlpiri way and we would ask 'if we give you Warlpiri ideas would you help us support our bilingual?'... you know we would ask them that way. 'Yes, yes we will support bilingual' but... we were giving all our ideas to them but ... you know they weren't bringing the right ideas back to us, because like bilingual teaching would be like 'literacy learning' they would bring that another word in because maybe they didn't like the word 'bilingual'. They would change that bilingual program into a 'literacy program' which was not the full idea of bilingual.*

These teacher participants are asked to trust in the process and participate in good faith, but when it comes to them asking for support in return for a way of teaching and learning that has high value to them they are not 'looked at level'. The local language, local culture, local relationships with the community, these are all things that are seen as less important, 'not level' with the all-important 'English only' agenda of the Departmental schools. The colonial, assimilationist ideology is still alive and well in remote Northern Territory schools.

## Chapter 8 - Discussion

### 8.1 Introduction

The common concern at the centre of this doctoral research has always been the low number of young Indigenous teachers currently undertaking and completing teacher education in remote communities in Central Australia. This concern is first and foremost one shared by the teacher participants at the heart of this research. They have each spent between 20-35 years working in their respective community schools and have undertaken and completed the requisite study to become fully qualified teachers. But they are now deeply concerned that they do not see any teachers from their communities coming up behind them to take over from them when they retire. The premise of this research was that by listening to the stories of these fully qualified and experienced teachers we might better understand the complex array of barriers as well as supports that people from remote communities encounter when they undertake to become qualified. The narratives of how these women came to be fully qualified teachers in their schools thus formed the data of this research. In addition to these narratives two extensive literature reviews were completed, one that focused on the historical context of remote Indigenous teacher education in the Northern Territory, and one that focused on the political and policy based positioning of remote Indigenous teachers.

The purpose of this chapter is to examine the themes that were proposed and exemplified through the analysis process in chapters 6 and 7, through a number of theoretical lenses. The themes fall broadly into two areas – barriers and supports and thus the discussion will be conducted in two parts. Part one will explore the examples of barriers experienced by

the teachers through the theoretical lens of race, primarily using Whiteness Theory and Critical Race Theory (CRT). Part two will look at the supports experienced by the teachers and will be informed by Australian Indigenous Scholarship (Martin 2008; Arbon 2008; Ford 2010), Post-Colonial Theory (Verran 2013, Rose 2004) and Collectivist theory (Addelson 1996) with additional reference to particular educational theorists (Dewey 1938, Palmer 1999).

## 8.2 Discussion part one – Race and Whiteness

*In order for students to grow, their teachers need to understand and use the students' early experiences in the process of educating them. Teachers must know their students and their environment – the physical and social experiences that have acted as the foundation for what the students know – as such influences provide students with continuity in their own world (Lipsitz 2006, p 4).*

This quote creates a strong argument for the importance of local Indigenous people becoming qualified teachers and teaching the students from their home communities. They are the ones after all who implicitly and intrinsically know their students, understand their early experiences, know the environment, understand the social experiences, speak the language and can provide the continuity required for students to be successful at learning.

However, examination of the literature and the teacher narratives of this research has shown that these epistemological and pedagogical arguments have not always been what has informed the systemic attitudes towards Indigenous teacher education in Australia and

particularly in the Northern Territory. Apart from a period between the mid to late 1970s and the early 1990s, an era which had a more social justice and culturally responsive emphasis, attitudes towards Indigenous teachers in remote communities in the Northern Territory have remained firmly entrenched in the colonial and assimilationist mindsets.

So in many ways we should not be surprised when a review into 'Initial Teacher Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' reveals that although the need to increase the numbers of Indigenous teachers has been highlighted for many years, little has changed nationally since the 1980s when there was a call for 1000 Indigenous teachers nationally by 1990 (Patton et al. 2012, p 9). Since that time numerous systemic targets have been set and have failed to be reached. Despite copious rhetoric around the systemic desire for more Indigenous teachers, the setting of targets, and the allocation of some funding, the results are simply not there (Gray and Beresford 2008; Herbert 2002; Nutton 2012; Santoro & Reid 2006; Vass 2015) and there has been little interrogation of why this failure has occurred. Vass (2015, p 374) points towards 'something bigger (and) more deep seated' that has long hindered education policy, and the first part of this discussion chapter, like Vass, argues and names that something as 'race'. Santoro and Reid (2006, p 289) concur, suggesting that 'the Australian school system remains a bastion of white cultural supremacy with regard to native and immigrant cultures and peoples.' It is the contention of this researcher that all of the major barriers experienced by the teacher participants in this study have been ideologically grounded in issues of race. These barriers,

as narrated by the teacher participants, can thus be better understood through the lens of Whiteness Theory and Critical Race Theory.

### 8.2.1 Whiteness theory

According to McGregor (2006, p 511) 'Whiteness was a treasured quality of early twentieth-century settler Australians, an emblem of their status as a civilised race ...a badge of Britishness... (a) 'crimson thread of kinship' to affirm the ethnic solidarity of white Australians, both with each other and with their British parent'. Moreton-Robinson (2004, p74) writing from an Indigenous Australian standpoint, suggests that Whiteness has taken on an 'epistemological a priori' status which 'provides for a way of knowing and being that is predicated on superiority'. She argues that this 'racial superiority becomes a part of one's ontology, albeit unconsciously, and informs the white subject's knowledge productions' (p 78). Lipsitz (2006, p 4) reminds us however that Whiteness is not something that only existed back then, in the early days of colonial settlement. He asserts that 'possessive investment in whiteness today is not simply the residue of conquest and colonialism...Contemporary whiteness and its rewards have been created and recreated by policies'. The systemic policies, structures and procedures we organize ourselves by in contemporary society are all based upon socio-historical inequality and racist ideology and thus these beliefs and the behaviours that reinforces them are deeply embedded in all aspects of our lives. Whiteness has become a hidden, unmarked, unnamed category against which difference is constructed (Lipsitz 2006, Moreton Robinson 2004, Rudolph 2013). The danger in this is that so much that is racially based is able to continue in covert

and ubiquitous ways, and racism becomes visible only at the most extreme end of a racist continuum. Lipsitz (2006, p 20) describes it thus,

*able to discern as racist only individual manifestations of personal prejudice and hostility. Systemic, collective and coordinated group behaviour consequently drops out of sight. Collective exercises of power that relentlessly channel rewards, resources, and opportunities from one group to another will not appear “racist” from this perspective, because they rarely announce their intention to discriminate against individuals.*

Taylor defines ‘Whiteness’ as a way of talking about a political and legal framework grounded in the ideologies of Western ‘supremacy’ and the impact of colonialist processes (Taylor 2009). Vass (2015, p 377) reminds us that it is important to ‘distinguish between Whiteness as a racial discourse and ‘White people’ as a socially constructed identity and group that are often the beneficiaries of Whiteness based on skin colour’. In the analysis included in this chapter the role of ‘Whiteness’ will be explored at both the systemic and the interpersonal levels.

### **8.2.2 Critical Race theory**

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is extremely useful as a tool to interrogate issues of race and whiteness. Its basic premise is to view claims of ‘neutrality, objectivity, colour-blindness, and meritocracy’ by the dominant knowledge system as ‘camouflages for the self-interest of powerful entities of society’ (Gillborn 2006, Tate 1997, Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006, Dixson and Rousseau 2006b). Gillborn (2006) suggests that these notions, despite their veneer of concern for equity and justice, in fact operate as a mechanism by which

particular groups are excluded from the mainstream. CRT's main focus is 'the business-as-usual forms of racism' that are 'normal' and ingrained into the everyday systems and practices rather than the examples of obvious discrimination (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000). CRT considers race as the central construct for understanding inequality (Ladson Billings and Tate 2006). Dixson and Rousseau (2006b p 48) state that,

*...a central tenet of CRT is to examine how whiteness as property as an ideological and oppressive construct perpetuates inequality through ostensibly "colourblind" policies and practices...CRT goes beyond race and racism as a product of skin colour and phenotype to analyse how ways of being, knowledge construction, power, and opportunity are constructed along and conflated with "race".*

CRT builds on Whiteness Theory. Whereas Whiteness Theory illuminates how whiteness is organized and understood CRT provides a deeply critical and radical questioning about the unequal outcomes that race perpetuates. The origins of CRT are in legal scholarship in the United States (Monaghan 1993). However in the last two decades considerable work has been done applying CRT to education (Dixson and Rousseau 2006a). Although still relatively new, CRT is becoming 'a mature and vibrant epistemological stance that scholars throughout the world can employ to understand persistent inequity, injustice and oppression' (Dixson and Rousseau 2006a, p xii).

According to Matsuda and others (1993, p 6) CRT 'challenges ahistorism and insists on contextual/historical analysis...(it) adopts a stance that presumes racism has contributed to all contemporary group advantage and disadvantage'. It also 'insists on recognition of experiential knowledge of people of colour and their communities' (Matsuda et al. 1993, p

6) and does this through the use of the tools of storytelling, counter storytelling and narratives (Delgado 1989; Dixson and Rousseau 2006a&b; Gillborn 2006; Ladson Billings and Tate 2006). Critical Race Theorists assert that the use of story allows people of colour to 'name one's own reality' and they prioritise this 'voice scholarship' despite mainstream academic challenges of it being 'unscientific' and subjective (Dixson and Rousseau 2006a, p vii). In response Critical Race theorists argue that political and moral analysis is situational, that truth only exists for this person in this situation at this time, and that social reality is constructed by the formulation and the exchange of stories about individual situations (Ladson Billings and Tate 2006). CRT suggests that the exchange of stories can help overcome ethnocentrism and provide the necessary cognitive conflict to jar dysconscious racism (Ladson Billings and Tate 2006, Delgado 1989, King 1991). A main goal of CRT is to use storytelling and narrative to examine race and racism. This makes CRT a good fit to theoretically analyse the inductively proposed themes that came from the teacher participant narratives at the centre of this doctoral research, particularly those that relate to the racism, exclusion and invisibility experienced by the teachers.

### **8.2.3 A discussion in three sections**

Critical Race Theory and Whiteness theory will now be used to examine the thematic finding in three sections. The first section is entitled 'White but not quite' which takes this title from the work of Bhabha (1984). It will look at the ways that race and Whiteness never allow Indigenous teachers to be fully equal to their non-Indigenous counterparts. The second section is entitled 'Knowledge status and Whiteness'. This section explores the inequality of knowledge systems that has been deeply embedded into attitudes, policy and

curricula. The third section looks more broadly at the examples of 'Systemic Whiteness' to be found in the teachers' experiences.

#### **8.2.4 'White but not quite' Indigenous Teachers and mimicry**

One of the seven themes proposed by the analysis of the teacher narratives focused on ideas of inequality. This is perhaps best encapsulated in the words of one of the teacher participants who commented 'they're not looking at us level'. The 'they' in this case are the non-Indigenous teachers, Principals and Northern Territory Education Departmental staff, as well as possibly university faculty related to teacher education. In essence 'they' is referring to all those who represent professionally the Western education system. The MATSITI report (Patton et al. 2012, p. 37) notes that many teacher education students from remote Indigenous communities are motivated to undertake study as a way of possibly overcoming the 'subservient positions (low pay, lack of respect) they encounter while employed as Aboriginal teaching assistants'. The report also notes that while it is 'hoped that gaining full qualifications as teachers will redress inequities, Aboriginal teachers also encounter attitudes towards them that act as barriers' (Patton et al. 2012, p. 37). These attitudes and barriers were openly discussed by the teacher participants in their narratives. The teachers repeatedly commented on the fact that even after they reached the status of full qualification they were still repeatedly treated as less than equal by the 'come and go' (Hall 2012) non-Indigenous Principals, teachers and Departmental staff.

Homi Bhabha (1984) connects these attitudes and behaviours to the colonial experience of the colonised in his theory of 'mimicry'. He suggests that 'Colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as *a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite*' (Bhabha 1984, p. 126). From his own colonial experience in India he reflects on the British articulated desire for 'a class of interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern – a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in tastes, in opinions, in morals and in intellect – in other words a mimic 'man' raised through our English school' (Bhabha 1984, p. 128). This has a powerful resemblance to the attitudes towards Indigenous teachers who are encouraged to pursue the education goal of full qualification as teachers, but then kept at arm's length from being treated as equals by the predominantly white or Western teachers and Principals they work with in their community schools. In Bhabha's terms they become 'Anglicized' but never 'English' (Bhabha 1984, p. 128). These teachers felt even though they had become 'qualified' in the eyes of the Western qualification system, they were never truly regarded, by those from the dominant Western culture, as equally competent.

In their narratives the teacher participants discussed times when they were treated as less than equal to their non-Indigenous counterparts while in the classroom. When they were working as assistant teachers, often studying at the same time, they were often encumbered with a fully qualified teacher who most often was non-Indigenous and did not know how to work in a team teaching environment and would end up using assistant teachers for language lessons only. At other times the assistant teacher would not be

involved in anything other than being called on to translate and monitor children's behaviour, effectively used as 'classroom police'.

*Like we are qualified teachers. They don't use us as a qualified teacher. They use us to look after the behaviour. 'You've got to talk to this child! You've got to stop them fighting!' That's what they use us for. Not like act professional like them.*

*'Oh I'm just there as a policeman in the classroom'*

The participants pointed out how this non-collegial behaviour discouraged many assistant teachers from taking their work and learning seriously.

The teacher participants also highlighted the problematic nature that the high turnover of non-Indigenous teachers had on their identity as teachers. There was a default attitude displayed by most new non-Indigenous staff arriving into the communities that all Indigenous staff in the school must be assistant teachers and the attitude of the qualified non-local teacher was often to treat the fully qualified Indigenous teachers as such.

*They're not looking at us level, where we are. We're supposed to be same professional level and they still put us down like we're an AT*

This created power and hierarchical issues in many classrooms, with the non-Indigenous teachers imposing passive hierarchical barriers through actions such as refusing to let the

Indigenous assistant teachers participate in upskilling and education courses on the basis that they were needed in the classroom or not offering Indigenous teachers access to Professional Development opportunities.

*In our school we've got tutor as well, and still that's not enough when the AT goes for study and the tutor is there. It's just really different now. In our school we've got assistant teacher and a tutor in each class and I think that's not enough for the white teacher. They're not letting people go.*

*See this lady came into our classroom and she only talked to my team teacher and you know I was there also as a teacher, but invisible sitting there.*

Other barriers and inequalities were more overt such as in the conditions of employment. The current Education Department policy remains that non-local recruits are provided with a fully furnished Education Department house for the duration of their time working in the community while local recruits have to find their own accommodation.

*we found out that there weren't any equal rights not rights for yapa teachers, Indigenous teachers. Things weren't same for us because they used to bring kardiya teachers from south, using all that money to bring them in to work in our community and we started feeling sad. I'm a teacher and I need to have same equal rights with kardiya teacher. Just giving us housing, but later on they took that away.*

This often sees fully qualified local teachers living in overcrowded housing, often with sporadic water and electricity, dependent on community resources for necessary repairs and none of the comfort and security provided to their non-Indigenous colleagues in their Departmentally provided accommodation.

Ironically one of the other ways that Indigenous teachers are not 'looked at level' is through the expectation for them to take on additional roles once they were fully qualified that were not required of their non-Indigenous counterparts. The school leadership selectively treated these teachers as fully qualified staff members or even school leaders when it suited them, like leaving someone by herself in a class with too many students,

*I've been taking the preschoolers for a year and I haven't had anyone placed with me as an assistant teacher because they think 'Oh she's Indigenous she can do everything!' Cos the requirement is ten kids, can't be alone in the classroom with any more than that, and I've got about 14 or 12. They never come and ask or look for someone to work with me. But if a white teacher had five kids oh she'll be screaming her head off 'Ohhh they're going to attack me!'*

Another example of this is pulling Indigenous teachers out of class to consult with visitors to the school.

*Sometimes it's negotiated too by the Principal and whoever is coming, they pull you out, no warning, just come and drag you out.*

These teachers are also frequently called upon to act as liaison between the school and the parents and wider community.

*I think I've got that bigger role...a lot of the times it's me, called on, and I've got to be seen as the main person, the local person in the school. Yeah sometimes I don't like it! I tell them 'no, get that other person!' but really I don't ... I see it, they really want me...I guess I've worked there longer*

They are asked to speak on behalf of others, or to account for the whereabouts or actions of others. These extra expectations and stresses that were carried by the local Indigenous teachers are not part of what the non-local teachers ever have to deal with. They were also asked to mentor new non-Indigenous staff arriving in the community, which with the high turnover of non-local staff has become an increasing burden. Often other Indigenous staff members also looked to these qualified teachers to take on the leadership role and provide guidance for how to navigate and be heard in the school environment. They also felt like they were often pointed to as 'role models' for both other Indigenous staff and students, a label that sat uncomfortably for some of the teacher participants. All of the teacher participants had felt their role expand over the course of the years, usually without any acknowledgment, additional remuneration or time release to take on the extra tasks expected of them.

However, despite the years of experience, knowledge and skills, despite having an equivalent qualification and despite the extra work that these teacher participants took on, when something was epistemologically or pedagogically important to them they still were

not supported or taken seriously. So the experience of these teachers is that they are valued as role models (so long as they demonstrate Western values towards education), and their primary role, despite having equivalent Western qualifications as other teachers, is to act as classroom police, translators and cultural liaison contacts with the community, but not as knowledge holders or pedagogues.

Herein lies the mimicry ideology. Bhabha labels it as 'an erratic, eccentric strategy of authority in colonial discourse' explaining that 'mimicry is like camouflage, not a harmonization or repression of difference, but a form of resemblance that differs/defends presence by displaying it in part' (1984, p 131). The Western system of education in remote communities uses a rhetoric of wanting qualified Indigenous teachers, but this rhetoric is embedded in colonial discourse that harks back to the days when Indigenous people were excluded from education on the grounds of being 'primitive savages' and 'feeble minded' (Russo and Rodwell, 1989), 'uneducable' (Price 2012) and 'childish' and 'backward' (Moreton-Robinson 2004). There were incremental shifts in attitude of course to where education was acknowledged to be somewhat useful for Aboriginal children to bring them up to a 'useful laborer's standard' (A.K. Elkin, quoted in Gray and Beresford, 2008, p 205), or as Price points out so long as there was recognition that they were 'only fit to learn to sew, launder, cook, clean, garden, build fences, tend livestock and generally participate in more menial tasks' (Price 2012 p 4). Rudolph (2013, p 214) reminds us that the 'remnants of colonial power relationships - in which white people were seen as superior - remain embedded in Australian education discourses and institutions, despite overt and stated

concern for equity and inclusion'. Fogarty (2012) calls it the unresolved historical legacy of institutionalized racism.

The mere presence of fully qualified Indigenous teachers in schools causes epistemic disconcertment or existential crisis (Verran 2013) within the system as a result of the colonial discourse legacy around Indigenous people and education. The falsity and inequality of attitude that the teacher participants have spoken about in their narratives and have had to fight against their whole careers stems from the colonial whiteness which is embedded in and embodied by the people they have to work with as well as the systems within which they have to operate.

Other theorists working in Whiteness Theory and Critical Race Theory also discuss this whiteness ideology, which stems from the legacy of colonization. Lipsitz (2006, p 2) suggests that 'It suited Europeans colonists to view other races as 'racially inferior people suited "by nature" for the humiliating subordination of involuntary servitude' while at the same time securing their own hegemony by manipulating them to 'seek the rewards and privileges of whiteness for themselves' (p 3). McGregor (2011, p. xiii) comments on the incremental and calculated nature of change noting that 'Aboriginal people were increasingly included in the life and meaning of the Australian nation—though this inclusion was always conditional, never complete and only ever at the behest of the dominant white settler majority'. In Indigenous teacher education this became manifest in teachers who jumped through all the hoops to 'become' teachers but this was always a

conditional membership of a club where the rules could, and frequently did, change at any time.

This changeable nature of the 'rules' is a tool of whiteness that ensures continuing hegemony. While the 'Indigenous Other' is 'given an opportunity of evolving, more or less into a white man' (McGregor 2011, p 5) this will never be fully allowed because it creates a powerful and irresolvable paradox in the White psyche. The problem at the heart of mimicry and assimilation is that White power depends on the aspiration to 'become like', without ever being able to realize it. Assimilation is a false ambition on the part of the colonizer because whiteness will always insist on Othering. In the words of Moreton-Robinson (2004, p 76) 'The existence of those who can be defined as truly human requires the presence of others who are considered less human. The development of the white person's identity requires that they be defined against other 'less than human' beings whose presence enables and reinforces their superiority'.

In the post-colonial context a requirement of 'sameness' and conformity has largely replaced the formal explicit policy of assimilation. This then often manifests as 'mimicry' and strands people in a state of limbo – never fully equal never able to be fully the same. Bhabha (1984) talks about this paradox where the 'colonial authority repeatedly turns from mimicry – a difference that is almost nothing but not quite – to menace – a difference that is almost total but not quite'(p 132). The menace is particularly obvious when fully qualified Indigenous teachers refuse to play their part and be good 'mimics' but instead move

beyond the roles assigned to them, and the limits that have been methodically put in place, and attempt to assert their own knowledge and pedagogical understandings, based not on Western epistemologies and ontologies but on Indigenous ones. This threatens White hegemony to the core and the response is usually powerful and swift. This is discussed further in the next two sections on Knowledge Status and Systemic Whiteness.

### 8.2.5 Knowledge status and Whiteness enshrined in curricula

One of the key experiences emerging from the teacher narratives was that they felt powerful forms of exclusion working against them in their work in schools as well as in their own experience of teacher education. One of the ways that they felt this exclusion was through the skills and knowledge of the non-local western knowledge holders being given preference over the skills and knowledge within the local community. Specifically all of the teachers spoke about Indigenous languages and knowledges being treated as less important and less valuable than the English language and Western knowledges and the former being crowded out of the curriculum by the latter.

This prioritisation was often made clear through the actions and decision of the School Principal. The narratives talked about the influential and powerful role played by the Principal in either supporting, enhancing and leading their school towards the kind of knowledge work the teacher participants felt should be prioritised, or being the cause of significant difficulties and barriers to this kind of knowledge work.

*...we used to go to leadership meetings and I used to see them ... couple of Principals ... not where I wanted to see them...I was you know for that particular program and they were against us. And I thought... she was gonna be with me 'cos I was going for programs, but she was against me.*

The teacher participants raised important questions about the lack of requirement for Principals to show they had the qualities required from an Indigenous epistemological point of view to lead in the context of a remote community school.

*Maybe he didn't know sorry business or things that were happening? Because I lost one of my sons in that 1990. Yeah and I stayed away for like a year maybe, from work. Maybe that...because some Kardiyas like him weren't really supportive and good....Culture, cultural things that happened.*

One teacher participant in particular explicitly questioned how a non-local person could achieve a high level position in her school without knowledge about Indigenous culture that she felt was a pre-requisite to work in a remote school. She made the comparison that to attain an equally high position she would have to demonstrate a high level of knowledge and competence in the western educational system.

*and someone that's not really, you know...never has learned anything about Indigenous culture is always going to be throwing things at you, you know, blocking it. He pretends he knows but the way what he talks about it doesn't make any sense to me.... he doesn't know what to say about it, to respond ... If an Indigenous person want(s) to be in a higher position (we've) got to go through all, got to face all that, but sometimes you know non-Indigenous teacher ignores and try and push it back....*

The teacher participants also highlighted their extensive experiences of misunderstandings and misinterpretations caused by Principals and teachers taking on roles in schools where they don't understand the important cultural nuances in that community context.

*...we had a lot of changes of our Principals, yeah they come with different ideas.*

*Some would come with 'I'm not gonna be a friend here, I'm just here to clean up the mess' you know 'with my power'.*

They made specific mention of the impact this had on community based teacher education programs when repeatedly school based support was withdrawn for the teachers who were studying when the Principal did not understand things from a cultural or community based perspective.

*He (Principal) wasn't really supportive.... because maybe he didn't help me through a lot of things, like maybe he didn't want me to study or anything like that*

*When I did my prac teaching and I was working in that little room, doing planning, no help from the Principal, lawa, no helping with planning or anything*

Ultimately each of the teacher participants had felt the effect of too much power in the hands of the non-Indigenous leadership and the blatant disrespect and disregard for Indigenous ways of knowing and knowledge systems.

Australian Indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2004) helps us to understand some of what is happening underneath the surface of these behaviours through an examination of Whiteness. She explains that 'Whiteness as an epistemological a priori provides for a way of knowing and being that is predicated on superiority' (p 75). In other words in general non-Indigenous people will come into an educational space and assume

that their way of knowing is primary and superior and therefore should take priority in the children's' learning. This behaviour is steeped in the political history that arrived in Australia with the colonists. Since the Enlightenment, the dominant epistemological position within the Western world has been the white Cartesian male subject whose disembodied way of knowing has been positioned in opposition to ... Indigenous people's production of knowledge (Moreton-Robinson 2000). Once the world moved into the period of Empire and colonial expansion these white Anglo nations, representing themselves as the holders of true humanity, 'positioned themselves as the liberators...bringing civilization to an uncivilized people' (Moreton-Robinson 2004, p 78). It is interesting that the teacher participants in this doctoral research study indicated that this form of knowledge exclusion might well be a reason that would discourage other Indigenous teachers from wanting to pursue further education and training.

The exclusion that the teacher participants have experienced throughout their careers is at times embodied in the unequal regard in which their languages are held by non-Indigenous colleagues and leaders. One participant pointed to the decisions made about curriculum, saying that Principals insist that some elements of the curriculum were taught while ignoring and not making time for other parts of the curriculum.

*How come this curriculum, this is what you've got to do in the classroom and this Principal, boss, does the wrong things...We've got that language and culture program in the school and they've got nothing to lose, white teachers, if that program goes, 'cos they've got these other programs, English ones...They can just*

*change, change, change the program. We've only got this one program that we want to hold onto and it's very sad to see it go... It's important, we want to hold onto it. It comes with our identity. They don't care.*

This is particularly so in the case of Australian Indigenous languages and culture being taught as part of the curriculum and specifically in relation to the history of bilingual education in remote communities in the Northern Territory.

*... we were giving all our ideas to them but not taking the right, you know they weren't bringing the right ideas back to us, because like bilingual teaching would be like 'literacy learning' they would bring that another word in because maybe they didn't like the word 'bilingual'. They would change that bilingual program into a 'literacy program' which was not the full idea of bilingual, only few things that they would pick out to make it look like bilingual but you call it 'literacy program' to run in the school*

These programs are constantly under threat of having their funding reduced or cut altogether and are at the constant mercy of knee jerk policy responses as evidenced by the overnight parliamentary decision to introduce a 'Four hours of English' policy in 2008 (Northern Territory Government, 2008).

As it is, these Indigenous cultural knowledge-based programs are seen as discrete units to be taught in isolation, rather than as the foundation for embedding local knowledge into the curriculum through the use of the local community language. The status of these

programs become reduced to trivial examples and artefacts of culture such as foods, singing songs or dancing, reading folktales and other less than scholarly pursuits instead of engaging with recognition of a fundamentally different but equally important conception of knowledge (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006). All too often the catchall term of 'cultural inclusiveness' (Wilson 2014, p 85) is invoked to talk about the way that 'culture' can function to support the business of the Western schooling agenda. Fogarty, Lovell and Dodson (2015, p 12) talk about how by using this approach 'Aboriginal culture need only be taken into consideration in two respects...where cultural norms or common behaviours might act as an impediment to educational success...(or) where Aboriginal involvement or cultural activities can be used as a strategy for increasing student involvement in school activities, or in increasing student compliance with the education department's objectives'. 'Culture' is only there to serve the agenda of whiteness. This indicates an important power differential in who decides what is important in a curricula sense and how that is defined. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) use a Critical Race Theory lens to explain what is happening here. They explain this with the following statement:

*When students are rewarded only for conformity to perceived "white norms" or sanctioned for cultural practices (e.g., dress, speech patterns, unauthorized conceptions of knowledge), white property is being rendered alienable. (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006, p 22)*

They further explain how the availability of enriched intellectual property defines a person's "opportunity to learn". So by enshrining what constitutes enriched intellectual

property into educational “standards” that detail what students should know and be able to do the dominant system turns standardized education into a ‘form of intellectual property’ (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006, p 18.). So in this way, through a standardized curriculum, Whiteness acts like property that can add value to your standing if you conform, or decrease value to your standing if you rebel. Indigenous knowledge is reduced to the status of ‘cultural inclusivity’ and is only included as a mechanism to channel students towards the white curriculum.

One of the four functions of whiteness as property, according to CRT, is ‘reputation and status property’. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) suggest that to identify a school program as non-white in any way is to diminish its reputation or status, and they offer the specific example of bilingual education in the United States. A recent example of this in Australia is the decision in New South Wales to make Aboriginal languages a HSC (final year of high school) subject from 2016, but the qualification that the subject will be designated as a ‘content-endorsed course, which means it will not count towards a student's ATAR’ (University entrance ranking score) (Bagshaw 2015). This means that it will not be a subject that will support students with points towards their University entrance score. As a subject it will not hold the status of English, or even of another language such as French or Indonesian.

Additionally CRT points out that another one of the four property functions of whiteness is the ‘rights to use and enjoyment’ and that this right is also reflected in the structure of the

curriculum which 'emphasizes critical thinking, reasoning and logic' (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006, p 23). The mainstream curriculum in schools is based on white cultural values and knowledge categories. Students are required to demonstrate the abilities to operate in these ways in order to be successful, which in turn advantages those learners who share this epistemological standpoint and disadvantages learners who do not. Moreton-Robinson (2004, p 79) agrees that 'Representations of whiteness continue to be enshrined in curricula' and deliberately create inequalities because 'within whiteness's regime of power all representations are not of equal value: some are deemed truthful while others are classified as fictitious' (p 76). Thus whiteness and Western epistemologies are created as 'normative representations' (p 77). In this way whiteness became 'the system of beliefs, values and knowledge that created a racial hierarchy (that) placed whiteness at the top' (p 87). It is this hierarchical belief that is guiding the decisions of the non-Indigenous Principals and teachers with regard to what knowledge is deemed important for inclusion in the school curriculum, and is guiding teacher education faculties for what needs to be included in teacher education.

A powerful example of this kind of curriculum priority setting is the relegation of Indigenous knowledge to 'Language and Culture' programs and the absolute centrality of the western (Anglo-derived) 'literacy and numeracy' agenda in Indigenous education now, as discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. It should be noted that this was not always the case. There was a period during the 1970s and 1980s when a more holistic view of knowledge and language was taken with regards to Indigenous education in remote communities. This

is exemplified in the following excerpt from the introduction of the bilingual education policy in the Northern Territory,

*...the aim is for these children to commence their schooling in their own language, proceed to the acquisition of literacy skills in that language, then acquire literacy in English and have most of their subsequent schooling in English (Tandy 1973, p 21)*

This gave rise to a generation of Indigenous teachers from remote communities undertaking teacher education and through that process finding a voice to articulate their own ideas about what education meant from an Indigenous standpoint. An example of this is the following quote from Yolngu scholar Dr Marika,

*Education means more than just having print literacy in two languages – it means having strong emphasis on Yolngu knowledge as well. In doing this we are trying to get away from the ‘Three Little Pigs in Gumatj’ idea and bring proper cultural knowledge into the school. (Marika 1999, p112)*

Marika however, sounds a warning bell about the problematic system based changes she already saw coming over the horizon at that point in time, including the introduction of standardized testing, literacy benchmarks and language profiling (Marika 1999, pp. 10-11).

Sadly, around the time that qualified Indigenous teachers from remote communities in the Northern Territory were finding ways of articulating their ideas about Indigenous knowledge and pedagogy in schools (Bunbury et al 1991; Blitner et al, 2000) the economic

rationalist, neo-liberal, market driven agenda was in full swing. In this new political and economic paradigm classroom teachers were

*expected to shape students in ways that will allow them to produce and consume in the global market place. To aid in this economic assimilation, this dehumanizing process, teachers are frequently handed scripted, standardized curricula*

(Weilbacher 2012, p 2).

A key mechanism in ensuring the production of these producing and consuming economic units was the production of a standardised curriculum that centred around measurable literacy and numeracy levels. The standardized testing became an increasingly central way of assessing these levels and became the core focus of what teachers were expected teach towards. Smee (2013) notes that as the years went by the National Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy (known as NAPLAN) results continued to paint a bleak picture about the progress being made in 'literacy and numeracy' for Indigenous students, particularly those from remote communities in the Northern Territory. This led to even more intensive emphasis on the need for teacher to focus on this at the expense of all other aspects of the curriculum.

This narrow curricula focus and heavy emphasis on standardized testing creates a number of entrenched inequalities. Young (1990, p 209) points out that 'Standardised testing, while often presented as value-free and neutral, has been found to give advantage to those of the dominant culture as the tests often reflect particular value choices and cultural

meanings'. Rudolph (2013) gives some examples of how this happens from the Australian context,

*these tests show people using English and Mathematical knowledge. When the people portrayed in these scenarios are predominantly of Anglo origin and experience, it can have the effect of suggesting it is people like this that are successful and confident users of this knowledge....students who ...can see themselves or aspects of their experiences represented and the situations portrayed are more likely to be those they have experienced, thus enabling them to connect what is being asked of them in the tests to their own experiences....while those who have to imagine these scenarios and struggle to connect their own experience (p 212).*

Vass (2015) highlights that this neo-liberal, market driven approach reductively equates improved educational 'achievements' with potential economic security, inviting those involved in education to focus on numerical (test-based) improvements, rather than a more holistic student-centred approach to schooling. In this neo-liberal paradigm education is repositioned as 'technical and bureaucratic' rather than 'socio-political and pedagogic' (Fogarty, Lovell and Dodson 2015, p 3).

More recently this strong emphasis on 'literacy and numeracy' has finally infiltrated the Teacher Education system with the 2014 'Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers' report recommending that 'entrants to initial teacher education programs...have personal literacy and numeracy levels broadly equivalent to the top 30 per cent of the population (Action Now: Classroom Ready Teachers 2014, p. 12). By 2015 a measurement mechanism had also

been developed in the form of 'The Test – a national Literacy and Numeracy test for pre-service teachers' (Australian Government Department of Education and Training, viewed 24/9/2015). By making this a benchmark requirement, the requirement for Whiteness in teachers has become entrenched. The cultural and linguistic background, knowledge, language and skills of Teacher Education candidates has all been relegated to being much less important than their level of English literacy and western numeracy. Wilson (2014 p. 196) notes that the combination of the 'low literacy level of candidates' and the Australian Institute of School Leadership's (AITSL) 'requirements that teacher education students are in the top 30% of the community in literacy' has presented barriers for Indigenous teacher education students, and suggests that this has impacted on recruitment.

### 8.2.6 Systemic whiteness and institutional racism

Both of the previous two sections on mimicry and knowledge status are examples of how whiteness permeates the entire educational system in remote Indigenous communities in Central Australia. Here we discuss additional ways that whiteness is embedded into educational institutions at the Departmental level, the leadership level and the interpersonal level.

#### 8.2.6.1 Systemic whiteness at the Department level

Despite the decades that have passed the colonial, assimilationist ideology is still alive and well in remote Northern Territory Schools. It is not as obvious as it used to be because the times have changed and with them the vocabulary and discourses used. But the ideology of whiteness remains there as firmly as it ever was. In Critical Race Theory whiteness is talked about in terms of four property functions. One of these functions is the 'absolute right to exclude' which in education was manifested most obviously in the past by initially denying anyone who was non-white access to schooling altogether, and later by the creation of separate schools (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006 p. 22). The occurrence of this in the Northern Territory context was described in detail at the beginning of Chapter 2. It is important to understanding this socio-historical context of racism and whiteness as background to many of the behaviours we see still occurring in schools, even though at times they are harder to see. Carmichael and Hamilton (1967) noted that 'institutional racism . . . is less overt, far more subtle, less identifiable in terms of specific individuals committing the acts. But it is no less destructive of human life. [It] originates in the operation of established and respected forces in the society, and thus receives far less

public condemnation' (Carmichael & Hamilton, 1967, in Cashmore & Jennings, 2001, p. 112). Some of these 'established and respected forces' present themselves in the form of government and education policies and practices. Gillborn (2006, p. 11) reinforces this critical insight and that we now find ourselves in an era of 'the development of increasingly racist and exclusionary education policies that operate beneath the veneer of professed tolerance and diversity...de-politicized and managerialist language of school effectiveness and improvement'.

The teacher participants in this research were all acutely aware of the great shifts in power and control that they experienced at the hands of what they called 'The Department' or 'The Office'. Here they are referring to the bureaucratic, policy and financial power over the daily operation of remote schools wielded by the Education Department of the Northern Territory. In particular they pointed out the vast power 'The Department' had in relation to the resourcing and funding of programs and staffing in their schools. They were also painfully conscious of the all-important re-introduction of the 'English only' agenda of the Departmental schools.

Some participants could remember the exact moment when they felt the power of 'The Department' sweep in and take control,

*Department of Education...You know they got a bit 'you need to start teaching the good things now, good way. Because from (under) that tree to that classroom now, you can teach like better English you know.*

Others spoke of experiencing this power in the form of decisions made about resources at their school,

*...we used to have a secondary class too but government now I don't know, government cutting funding and teachers, cutting...*

At other times this Whiteness was experienced as an absence of support. Some teacher spoke about the lack of support and orientation to the work of being a teacher provided by 'The Department' when they first became fully qualified,

*So when I first became a teacher in my classroom they said 'yeah go ahead this is all your stuff and...teach!' But there were also rules there, and laws from education, I was expected to learn them but I didn't have anyone telling me, I had to go alone and just trying to do my best.*

Others spoke of the fact that despite being asked to take on considerable additional workloads and responsibilities and concurrently building up their own experience they experienced an absence of opportunity, mentoring or support to help them advance their careers as they gained more experience. Many of the other stories shared in this theme related to the lack of support these teachers felt they received and how this was a form of inequality and exclusion. Teachers spoke of seeing other non-Indigenous colleague

advance around them and trying to seek guidance and support to follow in a similar career path, but being blocked or stymied throughout the course of their careers

*...at the end I was asking for more equality like, in like senior positions, not in the classroom. Cos I've got a lot of skills in the classroom, practices. But to move me as like be a consultant or something that I wanted to ask for ...(but) nobody was interested to ask me... they were just asking me to do this and do that, to make their .... jobs very interesting or to make their jobs easy ... I was you know giving to them but I didn't get something back.*

*I wanted to change to next level which I didn't get it because of the bureaucrats. I really wanted to be next to someone who's big boss like (name) or someone. I wanted to be with them so that education in Indigenous communities can you know go how we want it to go and I really wanted to step in to do that, but there was no support*

*I see you know teachers who are there a long time I see them get into new roles, stepping out of the classroom and given a professional jobs like ESL, co-ordinator or mentor for teaching teachers who are first out - jobs like that you know, I (sh)ould have been offered (the) challenge (of the ) next level*

Even more than receiving no support to advance, these teachers spoke of many times when 'The Department' intervened at the school level to remove Indigenous teachers from positions of authority and put non-Indigenous people in their place,

*...must be someone in the Office is changing, awa...changing and putting whitefellas and pushing Anangu outside.*

*We did a lot of study, a lot of hard work....something came across and took it over. I did a little bit, maybe for couple of years I took over. Then something came over and pushed me out...Maybe Education Department you know. I'm thinking you know, I'm thinking other way round, maybe Education Department you know, they're not looking at us because we are Aboriginal. That's why. Because of our skin.*

So consistent and familiar was this type of experience for the teacher participants that the only explanation that made sense was overt institutional racism.

#### ***8.2.6.2 Systemic whiteness and power in the form of the school Principal***

In many instances the school Principal became the local instrument of 'The Department' to enact policies decreed from on high. Many of the teacher participants commented on the high turnover of Principals, the power they yield and the damage they can do in the short time of their tenure at the school. In particular the teacher participants commented on Principals being openly hostile to their teaching staff and causing a great deal of anxiety and conflict at the school. This in many cases would be directly related to the high turnover

of non-Indigenous teachers at that school, adding to the instability. They also talked about the lack of power experienced by local community teachers in matters over teacher recruitment as well as deciding which ones needed to leave,

*...we had a lot of changes of our Principals, yeah they come with different ideas.*

*...some teachers left because of her, yeah they said 'I can't work when she's here, I will come back when there's another Principal'.*

*...Bad ones stay long time, but we want to try to get rid of them, we push them away but good ones they go quickly.*

One of the ways that Principals wielded their power was to create a veneer of consultation with the Indigenous teachers and the community members but to ultimately not listen to any advice or guidance offered, and then use their power to act independently, usually according the wishes of 'The Department'.

*I don't know why she comes and asks me?... if she's not going to listen, just to make me happy, show me the piece of paper, so I can't think 'Oh I'm part of this as well'... She didn't really want to listen to me.*

*He had that power for himself to rule over us and he wasn't listening, he was hurting us, he was doing things his way. He didn't want to listen to anybody.*

*...things were happening around like Principal would speak to a staff member or other Tjulkurra instead of telling or asking me ...Principal would take it over and start doing it on his own.*

There was also a number of comments about the Principals using their power to reinforce their own position and security within the system. Some examples involved the Principal circumnavigating the local staff by recruiting their own people to work in the school. This sort of 'stacking the deck' was experienced as a way of keeping all the power in a concentrated way. One participant remarked '*They come with bad powers*'.

*She wants to do it her own way...she was using her own power to run her down, run over her...she did that with her own power but she didn't share that with others*

*...he already had a high position when he's a Principal, but giving that ET2 (leadership) position to his family which no teachers there didn't get it. Even us as a Yapa teacher, lawa.*

Another more insidious manifestation of exclusionary power came disguised often in the form of friendship or kindness. Many of the teacher participants discussed times when they were experiencing difficulties in their lives. There were a number of examples given of

school leaders and Principals in particular using these issues as an opportunity to relegate these qualified teachers to paraprofessional and assistant level positions in ways that are unimaginable if the teachers were white,

*...they said 'oh you just need to sign this form here and then you'll become an assistant teacher', straight away instead of giving us a hand, 'we'll just give you maybe six months leave or a year off'*

*(Principal said) 'you will still be a teacher'...but not on the salary side, palya? It's only assistant teacher pay....he was trying to help me like 'you're having problems at home and getting stressed, and I want to help you'.*

This kind of backhanded 'help' is identified by Dixson and Rousseau (2006b, p. 41) as 'false empathy'. They identify it as a paternalistic form of empathy which is a common characteristic of white liberals. Delgado (1996) also refer to this idea of false empathy when a 'white believes he or she is identifying with a person of colour, but in fact is doing so only in a slight, superficial way' (p. 12) or indeed helping someone less fortunate than them navigate a situation in a 'fundamentally just society' (p. 91). This type of behaviour is also linked to Friere's notion of 'false generosity' (Friere 1972, p. 21), which points out that any change in the status, particularly the advancement of those being helped, threatens the position of the helper. Based on Friere's argument, in a remote school if an Indigenous teacher becomes fully qualified then that reduces the need for and threatens the status of non-Indigenous fully qualified teachers. So the racially privileged are possessively invested in the status quo and will behave in ways that protect that privilege (Lipsitz 2006).

### *8.2.6.3 Interpersonal whiteness*

Many of the examples of being excluded, made to feel inferior or even invisible happened in the everyday working of the school. It manifested usually in the selective refusal by their white counterparts to acknowledge these fully qualified teachers as equal to themselves.

*sometimes that team teacher can be like a boss in that classroom, and she's putting me down*

*We were having a staff meeting. Only non-Indigenous staff they talk to each other instead of talking to Anangu staff, and one day I banged the table and said to them 'hey we are Anangu staff here, we're not invisible. We want to share our ideas too!' They all stopped talking and put their heads down. I said 'you only come and go, but we are here, we stay here for a long time'.*

*She left me out, she didn't include me, I was just an invisible person sitting there.*

*...'You think I'm a student with them?' I told them you know they should recognise us too!*

In their home communities these teacher participants are some of the very few people who have completed higher education qualifications. This means that they were often called upon by other organizations and committees to be representative community

members, decision-makers and advisory consultants. This higher-level representative work is often work that is entirely shouldered by the Indigenous staff in the schools. However, instead of these extra roles being rewarded and acknowledged in the schools, the teacher participants spoke instead of the experience of literally being excluded from within-school conversations, professional dialogues and decision-making processes.

*... strange things were happening and only people that worked among themselves were you know keeping it for themselves instead of engaging me.*

*...I was a little bit feeling that, that they were criticizing me, but never seen in action, but felt.*

Gillborn (2006) argues that a characteristic white assumption is that racism is simple and crude and obvious. However, institutional racism is frequently unintended and hidden. At the system level its agenda is social control through the insistence on 'sameness'. At the interpersonal level such behaviour is often a product of 'dysconscious racism' on the part of those belonging to the dominant race. These differences will be discussed below.

#### **8.2.6.4 Standardisation and the quality agenda**

The race based conversations of the 1960s and 1970s during the civil rights movement advanced legal equality for people of different races in places such as the United States of America and Australia. However as Gillborn (2006, p. 26) reminds us 'racism is complex, contradictory, and fast-changing'. So now we are faced with a contemporary reality where the language has changed but not the reality of race inequality (Gillborn 2006). Racism has

certainly become well camouflaged (Tate 1997, p. 235) to the point where most commonly we are 'able to discern as racist only individual manifestations of personal prejudice and hostility. Systemic, collective and coordinated group behaviours consequently drop out of sight. Collective exercises of power that channel rewards, resources, and opportunities from one group to another will not appear 'racist' from this perspective, because those exercising the power rarely announce their intention to discriminate against individuals designated as racially different. Yet they 'nonetheless give racial identities their sinister social meaning by giving people from different races vastly different life chances' (Lipsitz 2006, p 20). Delgado and Stefanic (2000, p xvi) call racism 'an ingrained feature of our landscape' and Macpherson (1999, p. 321) defines 'Institutional Racism' as:

*...the collective failure of an organisation to provide an appropriate and professional service to people because of their colour, culture, or ethnic origin. It can be seen or detected in processes, attitudes and behaviour which amount to discrimination through unwitting prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness and racist stereotyping which disadvantage minority ethnic people.*

So how does this systemic or institutional racism manifest in education and specifically in teacher education? It happens in many ways, but one powerful example can be found in the recent creation of 'Professional Standards for Teachers' and in the discourse around 'quality teaching'. Gillborn (2006) reminds us that the use of discourse is one of the prime means by which a critical perspective is denied legitimacy and the status quo is defended. The 'quality' discourse is used because it is hard to argue against. No one wants to argue that the teachers in our schools should not be of high quality. The problem with the use of

this term is that it is defined through a cultural lens. Both the umbrella term 'quality teachers' and the set of Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership 2011), that now exist to flesh out what we mean by quality, originate from a white, English speaking, Westernized epistemological perspective. But insidiously they are presented as representatives of 'transcendent, acontextual, universal... truths or procedures' (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006, p. 20). Weilbacher (2012, p. 2) puts it succinctly asserting that 'standardization is Whiteness' and labelling educational standards a 'current powerful example of the deliberate nature of dominance'. The 'quality' discourse is portrayed as 'educational common sense' (Gillborn 2006, p. 12) but it is dangerous in that it sets up an invisible binary. If something can be measured as high quality then other things can be relegated as low or lower quality. It is increasingly ubiquitous in reports and research written about teachers in Australia, and has developed into the default position of how the system wishes to define the professional role of teachers.

In order to be assessed as 'quality' teacher candidates need to meet a set of quality 'standards' that are defined by a Western epistemology, assessed by and large by people from a Western worldview to reinforce a system that privileges the Western knowledge and power structure. Other considerations about what constitutes 'quality' in a particular context have been systematically sidelined, devalued, given a lower priority thereby creating a national 'norm'. Weilbacher (2012, p. 4) points out that within the current standards environment 'each community is forced to de-center its cultural knowledge and

attempt to reach standards that are written and imposed by entities that have little or no knowledge of the community's physical location, history, and economy and the unique social relationships to those factors'. One of the many problems with this approach is that it is a form of what Leonardo (2009) calls 'Whiteness as policy' that relies on 'race-neutral' assumptions that wilfully ignore the political and socio-historical events that originally created and now sustain inequality. Gillborn (2005) builds on this idea suggesting that policy tends to be built on what has come before it, with contemporary policy needing to be seen to improve and adapt to evolving circumstances and demands. He connects this to a sanitized or whitewashed version of history that sees policy as a rational process of change while conveniently ignoring the fact that the process remains embedded within a particular ontological and epistemological framework.

This epistemological standpoint is visible in the language around Indigenous teachers where the word quality is often qualified by reference to low literacy and numeracy skills – as if to highlight that automatically these literacy and numeracy levels are the most important aspect of whether someone is high quality or not. Or perhaps it just indicates a pecking order in the range of qualities that are valued? Nowhere in the standards is there mention of the value of the classroom teacher being able to speak the same language as the children they are teaching. Standard Australian English is assumed as both the target and the language of instruction. This is a shift further away from acknowledging and valuing the local language and knowledge that Indigenous students and teachers already have. This is what Gillborn is talking about when he describes the 'more subtle and hidden operations of power that have the effect of disadvantaging one or more minority ethnic groups' (Gillborn 2006, p. 21). The 'quality' discourse, formal standards and insistence upon

'high' literacy and numeracy skills operate here as ideological, systemic, Trojan horses of assimilation. They are based on the unquestioned assumption that proficiency in Standard Australian English literacy and Western numeracy and the possession of a Western epistemological knowledge standpoint are pre-conditions to being a 'quality' teacher. Picower (2009) calls these types of mechanisms enshrined in policy and procedural aspects of systems the 'tools of Whiteness'.

So while the rhetorical intentions of 'The Department' and school leadership might include a discussion of more qualified Indigenous teachers and the upskilling of Indigenous staff, this is conditional upon it happening within a white, unflinchingly Western epistemological system.

Frequently those tasked with protecting and defending the 'system', be they representatives of 'The Department' or the school Principal as the instrument of 'The Department' on the ground in remote schools, will feel a sense of 'epistemological disconcertment' (Verran 2013) because the standard way of operating is being questioned or challenged by the presence of qualified Indigenous teachers who bring with them different epistemological and ontological standpoints. To deal with this unease these representatives of whiteness readily employ mechanisms such as the 'quality' discourse, supported by the National Standards and literacy and numeracy levels, as ways of diminishing and/or excluding this 'alien' presence through silencing these teachers, denying them career advancement, excluding them from participation, demoting them and treating them as less than equal despite having equivalent Western qualifications. In these ways the remnants of colonial power relationships - in which white people were

unashamedly seen as superior - remain embedded in Australian education discourses and institutions, despite overt and stated concern for equity and inclusion (Rudolph 2013, p. 214).

#### ***8.2.6.5 Interpersonal dysconscious racism***

While I have argued above to expose the systemic and institutional racism that exists and positions Indigenous teachers in remote communities as less than equal, it is important to note that the literature and theoretical work on whiteness and Critical Race Theory acknowledge that at the interpersonal level much of this behaviour is not necessarily conscious or intentional. In fact a number of theorists in this field label the behaviour experienced by the teacher participants in this study as a form of 'dysconscious' racism (Delgado 1989; King 1991; Wellman 1977). King (1991, p. 135) defines the term thus,

*Dysconsciousness is an uncritical habit of mind (including perceptions, attitudes, assumptions, and beliefs) that justifies inequity and exploitation by accepting the existing order of things as given.*

Wellman (1977) posits that dysconscious racism is a form of racism that tacitly accepts dominant white norms and privileges. It is not the absence of consciousness but an impaired consciousness, a distorted or uncritical way of thinking about race. Uncritical ways of thinking about racial inequity mean that individuals accept certain culturally sanctioned assumptions, myths, and beliefs that justify the social and economic advantages White people have as a result of subordinating diverse others. This acceptance happens for a number of reasons. The primary reason is explained by Lipsitz (2006) as a possessive investment in whiteness. As King (1991) points out any serious challenge to the status quo

that calls racial privilege into question inevitably challenges the self-identity of white people who have internalized these ideological justifications. There also tends to be a defensiveness to this investment where those who belong to the dominant culture believe that:

*...racist things happened in the distant past and that it is unfair to hold contemporary whites accountable for them...(the express) irritation at what they perceive as efforts to make them feel guilty or unduly privileged because of things that they did not personally do. They feel innocent individually and cannot conceive of a collective responsibility for collective wrongs (Lipsitz, 2006, p. 21).*

Another reason is what Crenshaw (1988) calls a 'restrictive and expansive views of equality'. Crenshaw (1988, p. 38) explains that while an expansive view of equality in education focuses on the outcomes for all students,

*...in educational terms a restrictive view of equality is one where equality is viewed in terms of treatment rather than outcomes. Teachers don't connect equality to the outcomes of the students in their class only to their own beliefs about how they treat the students.*

That is, if teachers believe that they are behaving in a 'colourblind' (Crenshaw 1988, p. 39) way and treating everyone equally then they are not being racist. 'Colourblindness' plus the view of equality as process prevents teachers from reflecting on their own practices and their role in the production of the underachievement of students of colour (Crenshaw 1988, p 40).

Many non-Indigenous teachers go to work in remote Indigenous schools with 'good intentions' but Applebaum (2010) points out that the 'good intentions' of teachers can go awry because these same teachers have benefited from the education system and consequently often operate from a default position of protecting and reproducing the status quo. Delgado and Stefancic (2000, p xvii) point out that often 'white elites will tolerate or encourage racial advances for blacks only when such advances also promote white self-interest'. Vass (2015) agrees with this point, highlighting that one of the mechanisms of protecting the long-term interests of whiteness is by enabling only incremental gains for Indigenous people in education. So even though they may not be fully conscious of the impact of their behaviours, non-Indigenous educators dysconsciously act in ways that protect whiteness and assert the dominance of the Western epistemological standpoint. The examples in the teacher narratives highlight actual experiences of interpersonal dysconscious racism and the barriers it creates for Indigenous teachers.

### **8.2.7 Conclusion to discussion part one**

The teacher participants in this research have experienced many barriers during their years of being involved in the western education system. Many of these barriers can be better understood by seeing them through the lenses of Whiteness theory and Critical Race theory, as well as by developing our understandings of ideas such as dysconscious racism and mimicry. What we can see if we set these teachers against the socio-historical backdrop of colonization is that the system has always positioned them according to race. This happened in very overt and obvious ways prior to and during the 1950s. The language

used to describe Indigenous people during that era shows us that 'whiteness' was visible and considered something for all 'others' to aspire to. This is evident in the overt policies of the removal of Indigenous 'mixed race' children, the 'White Australia Policy' and the deliberate exclusion of Indigenous children from access to schooling, all referenced in Chapter 2.

However, the dominant white settler majority were increasingly denied their usual linguistic and policy based weapons of assimilation through a paradigm shift in the 1960s commonly referred to as the civil rights movement. This meant that the white systems and structures of control had to become much more subtle in its weapons of exclusion. This is particularly evident in educational systems such as teacher education. Here we see the Trojan horses of assimilation emerge, such as using the term 'quality' and a set of nationalised standards to exclude those who don't 'measure up', and further, compulsory 'literacy and numeracy' tests to determine who meets the benchmark requirements to become a teacher. At the school level we see decontextualized national curriculum that assumes the possibility of a 'universal' approach to what should be taught in schools. However these 'universal' truths and learnings are not culturally neutral. They are based on white/Western cultural norms, as are the National Professional Standards for Teachers. This ensures that those doing the teaching have to be judged as capable of ensuring the ongoing hegemony of these 'universal' educational norms through their demonstrated and approved knowledge of English literacy and Western numeracy and through demonstrating adherence to and replication of a white epistemological standpoint. This means however that what is being taught never feels familiar or relevant to those who do not fit, in terms

of their ontology or epistemology, within the mainstream dominant settler society – those who do not share the ‘crimson thread’ (McGregor 2006, p. 493) of whiteness.

From time to time there have been moments of diversity that have snuck in, when localised, contextualised programs have emerged that have sought to give voice and space to Indigenous epistemologies and Indigenous languages (such as the bilingual program in the Northern Territory) and Indigenous knowledge (such as the community based Remote Aboriginal Teacher Education program in the Northern Territory). However, when the dominant society has begun to feel unsettled by the difference of these programs it has acted to end them using the ‘tools of whiteness’ (Picower 2009) at its disposal. These tools most commonly come in the form of funding decisions, policy changes, system wide reviews and the all too common strategy of shifting the goalposts when Indigenous teachers have somehow managed to reach the goals that have previously been set. Some rare individuals have managed to persevere and complete all the requirements of sameness through credentialism, often having to compromise, negotiate, betray and alter themselves and their beliefs and knowledges – impossible epistemological and ontological choices. However the stories show that once these individuals have jumped through all the hoops they still have to face work environments that refuse to accept their professional equality.

At the interpersonal level they are often faced with attitudes and behaviours of school Principals and non-local staff for whom the cultural superiority complex is so deeply embedded that they are not even conscious of it. This dysconscious racism shows itself at

moments of disconcertment, when the assumed and taken for granted white ways of knowing are disrupted or challenged by Indigenous educators who have a different epistemological standpoint because they have their own ontology. In these moments the interpersonal tools of whiteness emerge often in the form of mimicry, false empathy and false generosity, exclusion through language or procedures, or treating these Indigenous teachers as invisible. All of these interactions at the interpersonal level serve as tools to reinforce and protect white hegemony. Thus, the stories of these teacher participants cannot be fully understood without being seen through the powerful lens of racial inequality and the subtle and not-so-subtle forces at work institutionally in Australia that act to perpetuate this form of inequality.

## 8.3 Discussion part two – Intercultural knowledge work

### 8.3.1 Introduction

*Violence is not the whole story. What lies between us, or between some of us some of the time, is love, respect, sympathy, and the determination to act together. The possibility of dialogue, and its accomplishment in many contexts, rests in the fact that our situatedness is neither wholly violent nor wholly non-violent. Entanglements give us grounds for action.*

(Rose 2004, p. 22)

While it is vital to reveal, acknowledge and better understand the role that race and racial positioning has played in creating barriers for the teacher participants in this research study, it is just as important to realize and understand that this is not the full story. These stories are being told precisely because this group of teachers persevered, in spite of the significant barriers they experienced, and continued their academic learning through to a full teacher qualification. They have been able to do this in part because of who they are as people, but also with the support of particular ways of being and doing. Included in the teacher narratives are many examples of ontological and epistemological moments that point towards how good intercultural and collaborative knowledge work can support learning in ways that grows the experience for everyone involved. These are moments Rose (2004, p 6) call ‘alternatives to the wild’, alternatives that ‘arise unexpectedly in relationships among peoples and between people and place’. As is revealed by the teacher

narratives this positive and beneficial intercultural knowledge work was embedded into policy, programs and practices in the past. Bat and Shore (2013), in their study of the 'grey literature' around teacher education in remote communities in the Northern Territory, found that this kind of intercultural knowledge work 'is exemplified by collaborative efforts between community, school and provider to produce a negotiated curriculum through co-construction. In this way, the teacher education program is part of the whole learning of the school and contributes to community development' (Bat & Shore 2013, p 12). All of the teacher participants were (and are) co-constructors and beneficiaries of just such intercultural knowledge work, particularly through their earlier stages of teacher education. The formative professional years for the teachers at the heart of this study occurred at a period of time when the vibrancy of the local school was deeply integrated with community life. It was a period when teachers, school Principals and departmental representatives worked together with parents, community leaders and Elders in good faith and through collaborative and contextually embedded practices. The local Indigenous teachers were at the very centre of these collaborative practices.

To better understand these moments of successful intercultural knowledge work at their point of intersection with the formal education system, this part of the discussion will be divided into two sections. The first section will look at the intercultural knowledge work made possible through the development of community based teacher education programs in the Northern Territory in the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s. It will explore the elements of cultural and contextual embeddedness, cultural safety and two-way learning that

contributed to the success of this delivery mode for remote teacher education. The second section will explore the parts of the teacher narratives that act as signposts to exploring epistemological differences in how Indigenous and non-Indigenous people view and experience education. This discussion of difference highlights the need to pay attention to epistemological disconcertment as a tool of good intercultural knowledge work.

### **8.3.2 Intercultural knowledge work of community based teacher education**

The teachers at the centre of this doctoral research all became involved in education in their respective communities at a particular moment in time, a fact that plays a large role in the trajectories their careers have taken. In 1993 Watson-Verran and White (p. 67) pointed out that since 1972 the direction of policy concerning development of Aboriginal Australian communities had been towards adoption of the notion of self-determination. Numerous authors link this policy of 'self-determination' to the progressive but short-lived, federal Whitlam-led government in Australia (Campbell and Proctor 2014; Willis 1985). In particular Watson-Verran and White (1993) highlight the change in discourse at this time. There is a sense of lament for the past and a promise towards difference.

*Past policies of earlier government tended to break down Aboriginality and Aboriginal heritage. We have reversed the process. No longer will insensitive policies cause Aboriginals to become rootless second class Australians through denial of their*

*own language, culture, beliefs and ideals* (Cavenagh 1974, p. 35, in Watson-Verran and White 1993, p. 68)

In the Northern Territory, the policy to introduce bilingual education is one of the first tangible acts of difference as this excerpt from the introduction of the bilingual education policy in the Northern Territory demonstrates:

*One of the most significant Australian Government innovations in Aboriginal education has been the introduction this year of bilingual education in certain Northern Territory schools... These are schools in distinctive Aboriginal communities where an Aboriginal language is the mother tongue of the children...the aim is for these children to commence their schooling in their own language, proceed to the acquisition of literacy skills in that language, then acquire literacy in English and have most of their subsequent schooling in English The educational aim of such an approach is the development of children who are thoroughly competent in their own language and able to read and write it, who are more proficient in English than they would have been under the previous system ... One would also expect psychological benefits from this recognition of the children's language and culture, and more enthusiastic support from the parents for the schooling their children are offered.*

(Tandy 1973, p 21)

The following year a report by O'Grady and Hale (1974) into bilingual education in the Northern Territory also added weight to this direction through highlighting the need for higher education for Aboriginal staff. This gave rise to the development of new Teacher Education programs that were specifically designed to bring contextually relevant and culturally responsive learning opportunities for Aboriginal teachers in remote schools in the Northern Territory. The policy and political language of the time revolved around ideas such as 'self-determination' as previously mentioned, as well as the notion of 'Aboriginalisation' of education (Rogers 1991, Reaburn 1989). The emphasis from an Educational Departmental perspective was on community controlled education (Urvet et al. 1980). It was with this context as a back-drop that these important community based, cohort models of teacher education were developed.

### ***8.3.2.1 Community based teacher education that creates deep engagement and support by family and the community***

All of the teacher participants identified their initial work in their respective schools, as assistant teachers, teacher aides or literacy workers, as being a key factor in them deciding to go on and do their teacher education. This was not something that they experienced individually but as an embedded part of a community experience. From the historical roots of Indigenous people being excluded from education, to a time where new possibilities of different ways of working are being talked about, these teachers, their families and wider communities were acutely aware of the significance of what was possible if they undertook teacher education,

*'Cos I really, from working as an assistant teacher, I really, I saw what our kids really needed, you know...Like someone in the school...and I think it was for the community as well, to see an Indigenous person at the school... As a classroom teacher, yeah.*

In fact this group of teachers had the benefit of an older generation who had embarked on teacher education in the 1970s. Inspired by others from their community who were starting to undertake further education, they experienced this inspiration as a kind of support and encouragement,

*...just inspiring seeing others on video or going to ceremony where they actually graduated, and from that that I said 'oh next one I'm going to be like her!' you know looking at students who graduated before.*

They also experienced support in the form of encouragement from family members and community members to keep going with their own education and to explore further educational possibilities through work.

*I used to say to my sister about how I wanted to go to school and then Mum said 'oh you can, if you get a job, you can still get educated'*

*Like I had my cousin there, she encouraged me 'come to work, they are looking for people like you, come and work with us...She was a strong lady ...and we also learn from her*

There was a level of commitment to and belief in education on the part of Indigenous people at this moment in time that is strongly linked to these ideas of 'community control', 'self-determination' and the 'Aboriginalisation' of education. The teacher participants noted that a crucial part of their early studies in teacher education was the fact that it was based in their home communities. This enabled their families to engage meaningfully in what they were doing, and therefore provide both support and validation as well as input,

*I think there was more support at that time and like the activities were done in the community so people could see what we were doing and that made it, you know strong.*

The significance of this program philosophy is strongly reinforced by other Indigenous teachers who undertook teacher education during this same period. Marika and White (1999, p 4 original emphasis) offer this reflection from Yolngu teachers who participated in community based teacher education around the same time as the teacher participants in this research,

*One of the main reasons we can say that our community supports us is because we are very clear about the aspirations and expectations of the communities. ... We can only help our*

*community do this if we are in our community and part of it and by us making sure that community members explore education issues alongside us ... students and other teachers. Our experience ... has shown us that this is a good way for adults to get a good education. We can see that this has allowed our communities to share in our development and training.*

and,

*...our community has been able to see us as learners and workers in our community. This is an important idea about why our community want us to train in our own community - so that they can see us themselves that we are really doing the work for their plan for our community school and what they want us to do.*

Ultimately, when the community-based programs changed to campus based workshops models, as discussed in Chapter 2, the fact that at least initially the programs had been community based provided an ongoing foundation for family and community support. For example when one teacher had to move herself and her family up to Batchelor campus for a year to focus on her studies she identified the support of her partner that made it possible,

*...we stayed at Batchelor for a year because I told Jakamarra 'I need to do study to become a teacher so I can help more out here, I can come back to be a teacher'. I really wanted to do that you know commit myself. So Jakamarra said 'yes we'll go I'll help you out with the kids'.*

Many of the teacher participants note that the shift away from community based delivery and towards a campus based workshop delivery was the most significant barrier for teachers at this time suggesting that those teacher education students who did not receive this level of family support were not in fact able to continue with their studies.

This deep level of family and community support and embedded understandings of the teacher education process, led to families navigating deep ontological and epistemological understandings such as cultural obligations. The teacher participants talked about their families giving them permission to prioritise the study over other important cultural and family commitments.

*....my family, my sisters, my mother supported me, and I was missing from funerals from my mother's family while I was studying, that was helpful, she was helping me a lot by sending me away 'you can go for your study, don't worry about the funeral'. I was doing full time study.*

To help understand how this deeply embedded family and community support came to be, it is important to understand the philosophy of these programs. At the heart of them was the idea of 'Aboriginalisation'. This word, out of vogue in contemporary times, in that era stood for a powerful set of ideas about 'less invasive practices' and education that not only maintained but 'strengthen Aboriginality' (Reaburn 1989, p. 3). The programs were designed to meet the outcomes not solely of the educational institutions, the schools and universities, but to meet the outcomes articulated by Aboriginal people (Reaburn 1989, p

4). Rogers (1991) reflects how this philosophy was translated into practice at the time in his home community of Ngukurr. He points out that since 1960 his community had pressed strongly for Aboriginal control and had been 'politically active in the struggle for Citizen Rights and Aboriginal self- determination' (Rogers 1991, p. 144). This importantly locates 'self-determination' not just as a policy imperative but as something local people were actively working towards themselves. In the realm of education he gives the example of a new system that they decided to trial in the local school,

*...the Council had discussions with the head of the Northern Territory Education Department to try a new system where all the Aboriginal assistant teachers would be doing face to face teaching in the classroom. They also reached an agreement that there would be an Aboriginal Principal with a non-Aboriginal teacher as the Local Education Adviser (Rogers 1991 p 144).*

This illustrates that a key aspect of the 'Aboriginalisation' of education in remote schools involved an inversion of the power relationship between local and non-local staff with local Indigenous teachers taking primary responsibility for teaching. Rogers further explains the deeply central role that parents and Elders played in decisions around what should be taught in school, by who and how:

*The subjects that were taught were the three R's which were Writing, Maths and Reading. The parents said that this was to be taught and the rest of the day would be spent on Blekbala Kaltja....The Blekbala Kaltja project was discussed with the elders. Blekbala Kaltja was to be part of the School's Curriculum and they agreed that it was very important for the children to learn their own Kaltja. It was decided that the*

*teachers and the elders should teach in these areas. The elders taught each clan group that they were responsible for and these were, Mambali, Murrungun, Budal and Goyal. We knew we had to change the structure of the school to make it a Blekbala school. (Rogers 1991, p. 144-145).*

'Changing the structure' as Rogers describes is a direct way of dealing with what Reaburn calls the 'embedded patterns and structure of domination and disempowerment' (Reaburn 1989, p. 4). It is also important to note that epistemological and pedagogical decisions about the school were being made locally based on local experiential knowledge. This is much more in harmony with traditional, pre-invasion, epistemological understandings as discussed by Price (2012). But it is also consistent with certain Western pedagogies such as those espoused many decades ago by Dewey who stated that learning principles should always be grounded in the 'conditions of the local community' (Dewey 1938, p 40). In particular he reminds us that,

*Experience does not occur in a vacuum. There are sources outside an individual which give rise to experience. It is constantly fed from these springs.*

He also stresses that we must find,

*...way(s) in which an educator can direct the experience of education without engaging in imposition. A primary responsibility of educators is that they not only be aware of the general principle of the shaping of actual experience by envioning conditions, but that they also recognize in the concrete what surroundings are conducive to having experiences that lead to growth . Above all, they should know how to utilize the surroundings, physical and social, that exist so as to extract from*

*them all that they have to contribute to building up experiences that are worthwhile*

(Dewey 1938, p. 40).

Who better to do this for Indigenous children than people from their own community? This pedagogical understanding of experience based, contextualized learning is a strong argument both for the located models of community based teacher education delivery that existed during the 1970s, 1980s and early 1990s, as well as for the need to have local teachers from the local community as the ones responsible for the school education of their own community's children. The example of community based teacher education and 'Aboriginalised' schooling from Ngukurr, as well as other examples in communities across remote Northern Territory during this era provide valuable insight into how local Elders and families went on the journey with the teachers and developed deeply embedded understandings of what education could become in their respective communities.

### ***8.3.2.2 Community based learning that provides for the socio-cultural needs of learners – 'marlpa' and cultural safety***

In addition to the important support of Elders, family and the wider community, the teacher participants also spoke of the significance of learning in their own community with a group of others.

*We started off in a big group and it was just community based and we were just travelling in between communities for workshops.*

*... Studying was new, something new to us, cos it wasn't really thought of ... when there's other people we can feel confident.*

*...but that was really easy we could see that we were all coming together, sharing ideas, talking up.*

This cohort approach was a deliberate part of the community based delivery model design and it is specifically identified by the teacher participants as being a key determinant in their success.

*Thats how we get to know each other becasue we were all doing the same study. See like RATE program we were all doing the same module at the same time. We didn't know anything about it but we were always in group working together, sharing ideas and presenting to each other, that's how we were learning*

People were not left by themselves to learn individually; they had what the teacher participants referred to as 'marlpa', a concept which is discussed in Chapter 5 in greater detail. These teacher education students did not feel left alone, but through the cohort model felt a part of a group working towards the same goal.

*...so I was feeling happy to start doing the teacher training because there was also couple of other Yapa teachers there who wanted to do teacher training also, so we*

*started to do teacher training through RATE program.*

This sense of 'marlpa', of not being left by yourself to do the study alone, provided a great sense of comfort and support to these teachers as they progressed in their teacher education and facilitated their mutual progress,

*...we sort of talked to one another and supported one another, you know 'feel strong, don't give up, try and get it over and done, this is good'... and that made me even become more stronger, in studying*

When the delivery model changed and they shifted to a campus based workshop model the role of 'marlpa' continued to play a role. The teacher participants formed strong support bonds with the other students both from their own communities, from the communities nearby, and from those in more distant places in the Northern Territory

*I really liked coming together and meeting the Anangu teachers from different communities like talking to them and group work and studying back and you know feeling proud and saying you know we're there for doing our best for our community and striving more and more*

*...it helped me like to be confident in my teaching and learning from other students and because we came from the same community and joining with others from the Barkly region you know and learning through that. It was really good you know*

*learning because I learned a lot of good things, what I learned from them. Because it's always different from where I come from.*

The significance of this finding can be better understood through the exploration of the importance of cultural safety for Indigenous learners as well as through a better understanding of relationality and connectedness in Indigenous ontology. Ford (2010, p. 153) states that:

*Tyikim (Aboriginal) people actively seek kindredness and connectedness amongst members of groups they find themselves in. Once established, the relationships revealed form a network that can bind the group members into cooperative arrangements based on a shared collective memory of our related past'*

This is what Ford calls 'Relationality as Pedagogy' which is one of five pedagogical principles she identified. She explains that:

*With relationality as pedagogy the Tyikim students are able to identify within the higher education study group a Tyikim cultural dimension that resonates with the kindredness and connectedness they experience in their own immediate families, extended families and communities (Ford 2010, p. 153).*

So in this way their study cohort became a supportive socio-culturally reflective microcosm for the teacher participants. The significance of this in a learning space is that the cohort provided a safe space both culturally and intellectually for the teacher participants to explore this new endeavour of higher education.

*I think we had each other, yeah to help us out, yeah...like some mightn't understand*

*what we're going to do, what we're doing, awa, and talk in Arrarnta, explaining 'oh this is what we might need to do', and being prepared 'our workshop's coming' and...reminding each other yeah.*

In 2003 Bin Salik raised people's consciousness of the important role of cultural safety for Indigenous learners in the higher education space. She offered the following definition,

*(C)ultural safety extends beyond cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. It empowers individuals and enables them to contribute to the achievement of positive outcomes. It encompasses a reflection on individual cultural identity and recognition of the impact of personal culture on professional practice (Bin Salik, 2003, p. 21).*

Since then other Indigenous scholars have also taken up this issue with Veronica Arbon (2008) exploring the power relationships and imbalances between knowledge systems operating in the tertiary education domain and Payi Linda Ford (2010, p. 16) looking at the 'potential for making landscapes established under Western education cultural regimes culturally safe places for Tyikim teaching and learning'. Martin Nakata (1998, 2002, 2007a, 2007b) disagrees with the use of the term 'cultural safety' and advocates strongly for the need for Indigenous students and scholars to engage at 'the cultural interface', which he names as 'the contested space between the two knowledge systems' (1998). Nakata sees this 'interface' as a way of supporting Indigenous learners to 'explore their experiential knowledge beyond the classroom and to bring it in to inform how particular Indigenous positions are contested' (2007b, p. 11). He argues that learners must have opportunities for developing ways of reading, and critically engaging within accepted Indigenous

discourse as well as the wider mainstream discourse. Increasingly cultural safety is being redefined so as to include understandings of intellectual safety. The importance of this is explained by Ford (2010, p. 154) who reminds us that,

*Speaking out in conventional Western classrooms...is a risk taking venture for many Tyikim academics, students and community members. The risks are deeply felt and are associated with one's anticipation of the possibility of embarrassment and humiliation.....(that) may result from the responses of Padakoot (Non-Indigenous) lecturers and students who have no common experiences...who may question the speaker's authority...or who may compare the offered Tyikim narrative with....the 'same' experiences in the Padakoot world'.*

Ford explains that 'these responses may actively undermine and diminish the significance of the Tyikim speaker's ontology and the opportunity for expanded learning' (Ford 2010, p. 154). These types of experiences for Indigenous learners in Higher Education settings was reinforced in the recent MATSITI report into Initial Teacher Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The report included in its findings a number of important elements about cultural and intellectual safety including the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students find it daunting to participate in the unaccommodating system of Universities which represent Western knowledge that is governed by dominant Western knowledge paradigms (Patton et al 2012, p. 10). The report also found that:

*While students wanted to be valued and recognized as ATSI, they sometimes experienced stigma, racism, ignorance or huge expectations about representing*

*their culture and people...(and noted) regular reports of ignorance and racism from both school/faculty staff and other students/peers (Patton et al. 2012, p. 34).*

The report noted that one way of universities trying to be more inclusive of Indigenous knowledges was to introduce discrete core or elective units in mainstream programs. However the findings were that this often only serves to create conversations where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are talked 'about' by non-Indigenous students and under qualified staff or where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are expected to be the experts on the entirety of Indigenous knowledge and culture (Patton et al 2012, p. 36). The report concluded that support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education students therefore needed to include 'having a safe place away from these situations'.

Ford suggests that a cohort approach offers a culturally safe place because there is an 'evenness in the power relationships' and people feel they are in a space where they share common experiences, have established relationships and a mode of discourse that is more familiar to them (Ford 20120, p. 154). This enables people to 'communicate freely and openly' (Ford 20120, p. 154) and discuss the issues that directly affect them without intervention, interruption or being filtered through Western epistemologies. If we want future generations of teachers from remote communities to complete their teacher education qualification then the cultural safety and 'marlpa' provided by the cohort model needs to be taken seriously. When this cohort model is also community based the

participants not only experience the cultural safety provided through 'marlpa' but the intellectual safety provided through the active engagement of and collaboration with their Elders and local knowledge authorities as they explore and expand the educational practices in their own local context.

### ***8.3.2.3 Community based delivery that creates support and two way learning within the educational system***

A common experience amongst the teacher participants was the important and supporting working relationships they had with non-Indigenous staff throughout their work and study. This could be traced back to their very earliest experiences working in the school where their work was initiated by linguists, Principals or teachers who had adopted a standpoint of 'self-determination' and 'Aboriginalisation' and understood the necessity for more Aboriginal people to work in the schools,

*...then one lady came along offered me a job. ... And I said yes I'll come to work. So one year I worked at Literacy Centre, came every day and the teachers saw me coming there and the teachers thought, 'oh she's a good worker and she comes every day, we'll get her to be our TA'. So the teachers were racing 'oh we'll get her...'*

The Principals and other staff who were identified as being helpful and supportive by the teacher participants were often described as having had experience in other places working cross-culturally and had learned how to do things at the 'right time' or in the 'right way' and that this left people with a 'good feeling' about the direction the school was

taking. It was these kinds of operators who were also the ones who most often provided the ongoing support around the community based teacher education programs.

There was a powerful symbiosis of knowledge, reflection and practice built into the community based teacher education models. Each part helped the other. Marika and White (1999, p. 5) talk about this suggesting that in a mainstream teacher education program the theory and practice are split into separate domains 'the *theory* you get at "The Institution" and/versus the *practice* you get in a school during practicum'. By contrast Marika and White suggest that:

*Community based programs can force the re-examination of this erroneous dichotomy. The two cannot be divorced in that way - the demands of the workplace require a conversation about our rationale/s for why we do things the way that we do. This is the stuff of making and using working theories. These theories are about our practice. Our practice is informed by our theories (Marika and White 1999, p. 5).*

The teacher participants also identified the benefits of the immediacy of this reflective practice as part of the Community Based model,

*...there used to be a lecturer, RATE lecturer here...we did lesson with her and we (talked about) what went wrong, you know we would talk about our lesson, we looked back everything and wrote things we had done, you know*

The presence of teacher education lecturers working with these teachers in their schools and classrooms was a crucial support during their study. This reflective practice model

where the student was able to immediately reflect on their practice seemed to be particularly effective and it meant that powerful discussions were able to be had between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff to develop everyone's understandings of what learning looked like in that situated context. These types of discussions were also happening as a part of team teaching which was another central tenet of the community based model.

*...we would do little bit of ....practice teaching and what sort of curriculum would we use to write I mean to plan a lesson, what sort of lesson would I teach...but I wasn't also confident about reading curriculum....My team teacher, she would sit down and help me ...we were doing training but we were also based in (community name) using resources, but also our team teachers would help us with the training and with the teaching.*

The strong feeling expressed in the teacher narratives was that things worked best when everyone had good relationships, worked well together and were working towards the same goals and supporting each other:

*working together and supporting each other and sitting down and planning with team teaching, but make sure we need to be there to look after kids as we are working together and be a team teacher but we gotta learn from each other,*

Of key importance here, according to the teacher participants was paying attention to power relationships in the team environment,

*It's not about you know one being great. It's being you know, it's good to be working with each other and learning together too.*

This is reinforced by Reaburn (1989, p. 3) who explains that central to the community based model is the idea that the role of non-local people is to 'support, as required, Aboriginal people in their endeavours to appropriate aspects of Western culture and society into their lives'. Reaburn notes the challenge of this for those from the dominant culture who are used to being in charge stating clearly that 'A successful program for Aboriginal people must characterize Non Aboriginal educators first and foremost as learners (p. 3)'. This whole school philosophy of ongoing two-way learning based around the team teaching model was extremely successful at the time. During this period there was strong commitment towards the idea that a school that runs a both-ways learning program requires teachers who can teach both-ways which meant the co-construction of not only the program but the conceptions of knowledge as well (Batchelor College, 1994). Based on planning together, active engagement in the teaching and learning process, and strong and balanced relationships this co-operative teaching model drew strength from the integration between the life of the school and the life of the community. While elements of this type of model still exists, it is now more of an exception than a rule. However, it provides a powerful road map for current remote schools wanting to re-engage in effective teaching and learning for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff.

#### *8.3.2.4 Significant changes to the community based model*

The teacher participants also noticed with sadness the changes that had occurred to teacher education since they had begun their study. In particular they noticed a big shift from the strong community based, reflective practice, team teaching model of teacher education that was in place when they were studying, compared to what they saw happening in their schools now.

*I think a lot of changes go on at the school, you know changes. Not at school but the course itself, the training at Batchelor...I think lecturers... that's I think the main important one, lecturers not going out visiting students in the community.*

These changes in the 1990s, discussed in Chapter 3, saw the gradual disappearance of community-based programs such as RATE programs. As observed by Brabham, Henry, Bamblett and Bates (2002) the national policy climate shifted from Indigenous specific programs to that of 'practical reconciliation', which resulted in the loss of funding for community programs and the 'mainstreaming' of teacher education. Ingram (2004) points out that this effectively signalled the end of Batchelor's community-based teacher education programs.

The recent review into Initial Teacher Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Patton et al. 2012) provides some valuable insights into this shift. First and foremost they outline the significance and importance and success of cohort models for

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher education students. Part of the explanation for this is that:

*...a unique component of cohort programs is their ability to both Indigenize and 'politicize' the curriculum and to ensure that Aboriginal voices are heard and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander politics openly discussed (Patton et al 2012, p. 17).*

They go further to assert that a cohort approach is 'not simply another 'band-aid' used to cover the infestations that culminate from Indigenous neglect but is an authentic remedy that attacks the core of the problem' (Patton et al 2012, p. 18). The report also notes that even when the community based model shifted to a more campus/workshop based model using a 'block release' mode they still proved more successful than mainstream alternatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students,

*block release programs had between 16% and 20% higher course completion rates than those who were studying in full time 'mainstream' programs on campus....programs such as these overcome some significant barriers for students who would otherwise have little or no chance of becoming qualified teachers (Patton et al. 2012, p. 18 ).*

Despite their success at both a pedagogical and statistical level however students and associated staff and faculty associated with block release and cohort-mode programs are often forced to defend the legitimacy of their courses in relation to mainstream courses.

They are often perceived by the university as the 'less credible offshoot' and struggle for recognition and therefore exist within a state of institutional and financial insecurity. The report notes that there is 'considerable pressure on providers to demonstrate their standards and prove that they are cost effective' (Patton et al. 2012, p. 17) and that 'questions around quality and certification consistently come up with regard to graduates both in Australia and in Canada' (Patton et al. 2012, pp. 17-18).

This once again demonstrates a systemic intolerance of difference and insistence on sameness. The statistics that show success can be explained away by questioning the 'credibility' and 'legitimacy' of the course and the 'quality and certification' of the graduates. The argument that these programs provide opportunities for students who would otherwise not be able to become teachers is turned into a critique to imply that they would not make it in a mainstream context. This uses a somewhat Darwinian standpoint that assumes a level playing field to begin with based on an assumption of cultural neutrality and ahistorism. The dominant education system struggles to accept that different models of teacher education might be required for different groups. The discussion of cost effectiveness fails to take into consideration any long-term socio-cultural cost benefit analysis. Once again we bump into the assimilationist intent of mainstream or 'white stream' teacher education. Cohort programs are an attempt to locate Indigenous knowledge and understandings as central and to place the community at the centre of the process. The dominant culture is deeply disconcerted by this.

As a means of allowing 'incremental' change (Vass 2015) in remote schools in the Northern Territory Indigenous assistant teachers are still involved with a pale shadow of the previous community based programs. Paraprofessional qualifications at the Vocational Education and Training (VET) level are available through a minimal community based delivery now. But if Aboriginal people from remote communities wish to become fully qualified teachers they have no choice but to study on campus or by distance education now. This effectively enforces a defacto glass ceiling on remote teachers' career progression.

Another significant point of change from the original community based delivery model that was identified by the teachers participants as significant for them on their teacher education journey was in the area of team teaching and the role this played in supporting assistant teachers to do further study. The teacher participants talked a great deal about the fact that many fully qualified classroom teachers did not understand the role they needed to play in supporting Indigenous teacher education any more.

*...at the moment I feel that they (assistant teachers) doing like what the team teacher is saying, you know 'you do this, you do that, you do this in the morning, this is what we gonna do next week' week by week, not actually you know sitting down with her or him and going through ... all that.*

*...sometimes they don't see their...program and they don't plan with each other... some of the people who they were team teaching with were sometimes critical ...yeah 'cos that person, you know the one who's fully trained might think oh 'she's no good', or 'he's no good', but actually talking and programming and sharing makes a good*

*team teacher.*

*....and that's how I thought um some of the training isn't given to people...How about you know give that training to improve in that area, and that's where the strength is. And they see the weakness...they can do it, but they need support, you know and not to be critical but actually have support and look at the strengths, look at the weakness and build on that, rather than being critical and saying, what's the word... patronising?*

*...now a days ... there are non-Indigenous teachers in the classroom all the time teaching those kids*

Marika and White (1999) noted that during the time when community based teacher education was strongest schools were required to view themselves as both workplaces and 'training' places for Indigenous educators. In this model teacher education was positioned as a whole of school approach to learning (Bat & Shore 2013). Marika and White (1999, p. 7) also noticed a shift in this practice when 'Batchelor College' started employing AEP-funded tutors which removed a significant requirement for initiating and sustaining the programs from within the staffing of the schools. Marika and White (1999) commented that within a short time this caused a cultural change in the schools. They noted specifically that 'Partnerships disappeared very quickly when workplaces (schools) could get by without having to allocate resources or accept some responsibility for the education and training of their employees or potential employees' (Marika and White 1999, p. 7). In some

ways the instability of the model is foreshadowed in Reaburn's words as well when she writes,

*The development of Aboriginal and Non Aboriginal RATE participant understanding towards a common way of seeing and acting is documented here in the hope that the experiences of some can be useful for those others yet to come, that Non Aboriginal educators particularly can recognize that together with Aboriginal people we can work towards developing a more appropriate education for all.*

(Reaburn 1989, p. 4)

The mention of 'those others yet to come' is an acknowledgment of the instability of any changes made within a system that is still so heavily reliant on those already qualified who come and go from outside these remote communities. Such high turnover as seen in the staffing of schools in remote communities brings with it the constant threat of whiteness and dysconscious racism that threatens any progress that has previously been made towards 'self-determination' for Aboriginal people. This places any program 'at the mercy of every intellectual breeze that happens to blow' (Dewey 1938, p. 51), not to mention the ideological and political cyclones that periodically wreak havoc.

These shifts away from the strong community based model of teacher education shine some light on why we are hardly seeing any qualified Indigenous teachers emerging from the remote school teacher education pathway any more. While there continues to exist some isolated examples of people working together in 'good faith' in small out of the way places, this is nowhere close to happening at a system wide level any more in remote

schools in the Northern Territory. No longer is teacher education a process of co-constructing knowledge in the local context. Now it is 'mainstreamed' to meet the national requirements for sameness. The absence of consistent and prioritised support from the school leadership and the classroom teachers and the sporadic support provided by university lecturing staff has caused the next generation of Indigenous teachers to feel left by themselves with no 'marlpa' from the system they are working within.

### **8.3.3 Difference and disconcertment**

While the models and programs of collaboration and co-construction discussed in the previous section were examples of successful intercultural work, there is a more important aspect that precedes those models, that of ontological and epistemological difference. Ontological differences between people, as expressed in what we know and how we know it, need to be central to any intercultural knowledge work. This need for difference to be understood, embraced and embedded was a key message coming from the teacher narratives.

#### **8.3.3.1 Culturally embedded difference**

The first theme discussed in the teacher narrative is one called 'our feeling for family'. This phrase uses the words of one of the participants,

*'I think technology and all this stuff has changed but our feeling for the family and the community hasn't, it's not gonna change, that need to be close to the families...I think this culture is really strong you know, family and family connection and sorry*

*business...you're expecting them to get a good education but these things are gonna come all the time'*

This comment then generated a great deal of subsequent discussion about the place of education in the more holistic view of life for children and adults in the respective communities of the teacher participants. Strong emphasis on connection to family, culture and country came through as a central, powerful and not-negotiable imperative in the lives of the participants. Engaging with western systems of education was seen to be in conflict at times with this imperative and caused deep disconcertment on the part of the teacher participants. This 'feeling' was often expressed bodily as a feeling of homesickness when people were away from their family and community, and in an educational space,

*'the change of that from (going) into the college, it was too different'*

Often the teacher participants talked about how finding 'marlpa' with other students from neighbouring communities helped when they were in formal educational settings. This company helped deal with loneliness but it never fully overcame the underlying 'feeling for family' that pulled them home. When faced with a choice between schooling and family, the participants always chose family.

The emphasis placed on this theme made it clear that the teacher participants wanted to highlight it as a point of ontological and epistemological difference. Deep and complex understandings of education exist within their knowledge systems, but those understandings emanate from an ontologically different place to Western understandings of education. It is not the intention here, or indeed my place, to in any way try to explain or define these Indigenous ontological understandings. Many Indigenous scholars have done

so very thoroughly and generously from their own perspectives. I would direct you towards Arbon (2008), Martin (2008) and Ford (2010) in particular for further understanding about the centrality of 'relatedness' in Australian Indigenous ontologies and Meyer (2001), Kahakalau (2004), Kawagley (1995), Wilson (2009), and Battiste (2002) who speak about this topic from Native Hawaiian, Alaska Native and First Nations Canadian perspectives. The way the teachers spoke of 'feeling for family as a point of ontological difference, it is clearly a not negotiable human condition for them. It is expressed in choices that are made, priorities that are decided upon and participation in the life of their families and community. It is a powerful obligatory force that will always remain more important than any other responsibility – including education and work. The teacher participants spoke of it to underline that this 'feeling for family', and the difference that it represents, must be accommodated and respected as part of the educational journey.

However, the teacher narratives demonstrated that when such points of ontological and epistemological difference were engaged with patiently, thoughtfully, relationally and deeply, then the generative knowledge and understandings that emerged could actually be powerfully enlisted to support educational success. As discussed in the previous section one of the key determinants of these teachers being able to continue on with their teacher education was the fact that, at least in the beginning, the courses in which these teachers participated were community based. This then enabled their families to engage meaningfully in what they were doing and enabled the local leaders and Elders to make valuable knowledge contributions to the programs. Additionally the cohort model allowed

participants to feel supported by the collective nature of the program. At times when obligation to family and culture was required, the deep understanding of what was trying to be achieved by these teacher education programs allowed for a negotiation of these obligations. One participant simply said

*'family supported me to go away'*

At other times family supported people in practical ways like taking on the workload left behind, caring for children or sick family members. These are all examples that indicate that, when understood and applied creatively, this point of ontological difference can actually be a tremendous support structure to help Aboriginal teachers succeed. Those pursuing teacher education qualifications will always be forced to juggle multiple responsibilities and will always feel pulled in different, and at times, oppositional directions. But generative solutions can be found when good intercultural knowledge work is done. In order for this to happen we need to create space for difference. Teacher education cannot be a one size fits all model where anyone who sits outside that model is excluded. Difference should not be a barrier to access and success.

As the teacher participants pointed out in their narratives, these deep ontological differences don't just exist in their navigation of the educational system, but also exist for the children in their home communities. The shared ontological identity between these teachers and their students and the shared language, culture and practices that embody

that identity provides these teachers with unique insights about how best to teach students from their home communities.

*for Indigenous kids they look at us and they ...we're their family and they know us, we have good relationships like we're family and kids look at us and we are the role models for them... If Indigenous kids have Indigenous teachers and language and culture programs, they'll listen to us and the elders coming in teaching them*

In fact the aspects that might be judged by a one size fits all standardized system of teacher education as reasons to exclude Indigenous teachers should be carefully and respectfully enlisted as strengths that make these teachers the kind of teachers Indigenous students need. Weilbacher (2012, p. 4) reminds us that 'In order for students to grow, their teachers need to understand and use the students' early experiences in the process of educating them'. He asserts that 'Teachers must know their students and their environment – the physical and social experiences that have acted as the foundation for what the students know – as such influences provide students with continuity in their own world'. Indigenous teachers from within local communities are uniquely placed to understand children's early experiences and provide this continuity. They are uniquely placed because they share ontological and epistemological knowledge and understandings with the children from their communities and can therefore undertake the work of a teacher 'without engaging in imposition' (Dewey 1938).

### 8.3.3.2 Navigating difference

Years of working in the intercultural space of education in their home communities have made these teacher participants experts at understanding and responding to difference. They are often required to help others navigate this space of difference as well. This is particularly visible when teachers from outside the community experience the culture shock and adjustment of living in a remote Indigenous community so different to their own. It is the local teachers, parents and Elders who give these non-locals the support and strategies to navigate the disconcertment they are experiencing,

*sometimes (they) didn't fit it well and that's when we said you know it's not the same as your culture, if you have your culture different to our culture so we should be sitting down and you know looking at this, what barriers are there, so we can work and make it better*

The teacher participants pointed out how challenging this space of difference was for school Principals who were often coming to contexts in remote community schools that are outside their comfort zone and markedly different to their previous professional experiences, but expected by the Department to take charge and produce outcomes.

*...you know when the Principals, new Principals came and it was also challenging for them because they never worked in a bilingual school before, which was like different for them. Like Principal would be a high school Principal or teacher coming into our community to teach in a school and some Principals found it difficult and*

*challenging, but as a team we worked together to try and run Warlpiri bilingual way.*

Rose (2004, p. 16) associates this with the fact that modernity has privileged a paradigm of progress that sees human agency as the driving force. The Western epistemological system, which is founded on, detached, objective hierarchical control does not really have many answers when faced with difference. It is committed to the 'grand ordering narrative' that sees education as part of a 'single space substantially defined by a competitive neo-global economy and an analogously competitive global intellectual system' (Law and Lin 2010, p. 142). Non-locals come into the communities and expect that the same ways of working from their past experience will work in this new context. The subjectivity of the different experience challenges them. The 'bodily disconcertment' (Verran 2013) that they experience is at odds with the scientific rationality that rests upon the Cartesian separation between mind and body, subjects and objects (Watson & Huntington 2008).

In the best cases, when the non-local teachers are able to become open to difference, listen to the knowledge of the local staff and become open to change this produced good results,

*I was Assistant Teacher and I said to this (teacher), young girl, and she didn't like it. She said 'oh but this is how we do it'. (I said) 'But your ways isn't working, let's do it this way and we'll see next week it might work' and she hugged me and said 'this is working, how did you do that?' (I said) 'I saw all this in a workshop where this lady was saying in this school it works like that, like this, so I take it, I bring what they're doing there to practice here' and it was working.*

However very often the response to the epistemic disconcertment borne out of the experience of difference is a very basic fight or flight,

*...sometimes responses are sometimes questionable, sometimes we would you know disagree on each other ... some non-Indigenous didn't take it so they ended up getting burnt out 'cos they weren't fitting into our culture, which sometimes can be hard.*

Blair (2015) suggests that the problem here is that difference isn't valued when different understandings emerge between knowledge systems. She suggests that when difference is not valued a space in-between emerges, muddled by ignorance and a lack of wanting to know. This is largely because the coloniser construes difference as non-existent or irrelevant. Dewey (1938, p. 30) explains this behaviour by suggesting that people will 'follow the line of least resistance provided by the old intellectual habits'.

In contrast, the teacher participants often talked about how useful they found difference to be in the development of their own knowledge and professional identity

*... I think it helped me like a lot of teachers come and go and all the different experiences and that really helped me get strong at my professional teaching, working with different people, yeah...awa and learning about differences 'oh she's got a good idea' yeah and all these different ways of teaching and different teachers that comes through, yeah....I personally really think that it's really helped me....awa makes me feel strong, yeah from a lot of the ways ... I've learned...other teachers*

*coming and going and brings different experience, style of teaching, or not only teaching but the whole thing in the school... I think I've learned enough to say 'oh this is what you need to say/do' to both sides. I've got that knowledge.*

The teacher participants saw difference as an invitation to learn and to grow and they saw it as an opportunity to try new ideas and implement changes. It was the deep aversion to difference embodied in some of their non-local colleagues that often prevented this from happening. Perhaps this is because, according to Verran (1998, p. 242) 'Aboriginal communities know how to negotiate over ontic categories' in ways that allow for disparate ways of knowing. In this way perhaps the teacher participants understood intrinsically that part of learning was being able to explore one's own discomfort (Holt 2001).

### ***8.3.3.3 The vulnerability of difference***

The experiences of these teachers suggest that an inevitable, and in fact necessary, part of doing intercultural work is experiencing difference. One of the problems with this is that due to historical colonialism and the ongoing neo-colonial ideology that persists in Australia, this difference is most commonly ignored, pressed to assimilate or dismissed by hegemonic practices of the dominant Western knowledge system. Continuing down this path only leads to what Rose (2004, p. 22) calls 'doubled violence: the practices that hurt others, and the sustained indifference to the hurt of others'. One of the keys is that difference is experienced personally, emotionally and bodily. Verran (2013, p. 145) suggests that when people experience difference at an epistemological or metaphysical level, this is experienced as bodily disconcertment. They experience a 'momentary

existential panic' when something they have always known or felt to be true is contradicted or interrupted by another truth. Our 'comfortable categories' have been thrown into disarray. These are things that we 'feel' as epistemically right, things that we are ordinarily unaware of until it is 'rent asunder' (Verran 2013, p. 146). It is experienced bodily and is hence personally but Verran suggests our discomfort is 'an expression of our solidified collective institutional habits' (Verran 2013, p. 145). This kind of personal and bodily panic leaves people feeling vulnerable in the face of difference and a common response, particularly from those belonging to the dominant knowledge system, is the instinct of self-protection by fiercely adhering to 'their' known. This is commonly done through the 'tools of whiteness', rejecting the 'other' knowledge as inferior, less scientific, less valid. Sometimes people will remain vulnerable in this space of disconcertment long enough to try to explain away the difference using allegory, or metaphor, but again draw these from the referencing repertoire available to them according to their own epistemological understandings (Verran 2013, p. 147).

Warlpiri scholar, Steven Jampajimpa Patrick (Wanta) also talks about difference in the discussion of his theory of Ngurra-Kurlu. Ngurra-Kurlu can be understood in many ways according to Patrick, but one of those ways is as *purami*, 'the path' or 'the way'. For Warlpiri people Ngurra-Kurlu highlights the essential features of being Warlpiri against the deafening background noise of mainstream Australian culture. In this story Patrick compares *purami* to the role of traffic lights in a city:

*Same thing when I looked at the city, when I went there for the first time. I thought, why does everyone have to stop for the red light? Why can't we just keep on driving? But you can see – everyone thinks about the right way of driving a car, otherwise – poof! Everyone needs to understand the colour and what that is telling them. You know that's one of the things that captured me when I first went to the city: this light is telling you when to go and when not to go. You see, ngurra-kurlu [is like the lights] – it brings people together so that they can understand each other, and like the motor cars and streets everywhere they don't pile up. Sometimes they do, you know, kardiya [non-Aboriginal people] respond to that [pile up] really quick and yapa [Warlpiri people] have ways to do that too. (Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes and Box 2008, p. 8)*

Patrick identifies Ngurra –Kurlu as the epistemological understandings through which people of difference can seek to understand each other. He also warns of the possibility the 'pile up' when the epistemological understandings crash against each other. How people respond in these moments will be very different but Patrick also calls on the need for time and space that allow us to find ways to *'turn the volume down to hear ourselves.'* (Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes and Box 2008, p. 10).

Verran (2013, p. 145) agrees that we need to find ways *'to recognize and explicitly manage the positions that are thrown up in the tensions that epistemic disconcertment expresses'*. This needs to happen in ways that recognize we will all be drawing on our own incommensurable epistemic resources. I will never be able to understanding knowledge

from a Warlpiri or Luritja or Pitjantjatjara or Western Arrarnta epistemological or ontological standpoint, and neither will the teachers I worked with ever be able to understand my own Western knowledge epistemological and ontological standpoint. But that doesn't mean that we cannot intentionally occupy a space of difference and seek to do work 'generatively and in good faith' (Verran 2013, p. 144). Verran explains what is meant by difference in this context,

*Difference in this usage is not difference allowed by a common sameness, but rather difference before coming to concepts. Learning to recognize and value such difference, learning to refuse the step which requires a colonizing reduction to a shared category, and acceptance that we may not be metaphysically committed to a common world, is what is involved in cultivating a postcolonial impulse (Verran 2013, p. 144).*

This idea of cultivating a post-colonial impulse is what the final section of this doctoral thesis will elaborate on in the context of Indigenous teacher education.

## Chapter 9 – Post-Colonial Knowledge Work and Indigenous Teacher Education

The common concern at the heart of the thesis was the question of how to support more people from remote communities to become qualified teachers. To try to find some insights into this question the teacher narratives of seven fully qualified Indigenous teachers from the remote Central Australian context were listened to, recorded, written down and analysed. The co-exploration of these narratives have given myself and the teacher participants insights into the following initial research questions:

- What have been the experiences of Indigenous teachers from remote communities in Central Australia who have completed teacher education?
- What are some of the elements that supported them and what are some of the barriers these teachers encountered?
- What are the benefits of having qualified Indigenous teachers in remote schools?

We come now to the final research question,

- How can meaningful and effective pathways be created to support teacher education for future generations of Indigenous teachers from remote communities?

To answer this question we have had to take an historical look at the journeys into teacher education of Indigenous teachers from remote communities in the Northern Territory and we have seen that some strong, effective and successful delivery models and unique programs were developed in the past. The seven teacher participants at the centre of this doctoral research are by and large products of that era. There continue to be small,

sporadic examples of 'good faith', collaborative, intercultural ways of working within remote communities but sadly these tend to be the exception rather than the rule now.

To understand why things have moved away from previous ways of working we have also had to uncover and unpack the initiatives and policies that have moved teacher education into a space of standardization and nationalization with an emphasis on 'quality' and 'literacy and numeracy'. The bureaucratic discourse surrounding this shift has been one of common sense, benefits, necessity and cultural neutrality. On closer inspection these elements have in fact proven to be mechanisms of a neo-colonial shift, which has at its core an agenda of assimilation. It is harder to recognize now because it is not populated with the assimilationist language and overtones of a previous age. However the underlying intent and outcomes are the same, and one of the major outcomes has been an insistence on 'sameness' in the body of people deemed eligible to become a teacher. This has had the effect of excluding Indigenous teachers, particularly those who speak their own languages through the use of the 'tools of whiteness' such as language testing, professional standards, standardized curriculum and the mainstream delivery of teacher education programs. Barriers have also been created through the Trojan horses of assimilation such as systemic and dysconscious racism in the workplace, the 'quality' teacher discourse and the relegation of the status of Indigenous knowledge systems as inferior and secondary to the dominant Western knowledge system. Against this background it would be irresponsible to encourage young Indigenous people from remote communities to pursue a pathway into teacher education, for to do so would be an act of 'doubled violence' (Rose

2004, p 23). It would force them into a knowledge space that requires assimilation through 'standardized behaviours'; a space that permits them entry up to but not beyond the point of mimicry, never really being able to achieve true equality; a space that rejects and disrespects the knowledge these young people bring with them: a space in which their struggle to become 'white' is not perceived as hurtful but necessary.

If we truly wish to create meaningful and effective pathways into teacher education for Indigenous people from remote communities, then we need to find ways to move beyond this space of 'doubled violence'; beyond the benign and ineffectual rhetoric of teacher diversity, and beyond the role of Indigenous teachers as 'mimics' of white teachers and 'role models' for Indigenous children. Bat and Shore (2013, p. 17) suggest that 'what is required is the scope to work with local communities to develop relevant and effective teacher education programs that can still meet the national accreditation guidelines'. I agree that the national standards, guidelines and curriculum are not going anywhere so we need to find meaningful and effective ways to work into them. However, we need to be intentional about the kind of 'work' that is being referred to here. The work needs to be the kind of work that is grounded in a consciousness of our historical colonial past, and with that knowledge seeks to co-create a decolonized future. It is with this in mind that I suggest that teacher education needs to move into a space of Post-Colonial Knowledge Work. But perhaps more importantly we cannot even think about reforming the Indigenous teacher education space until we also commit and begin working to reintegrate education with the local. The vibrancy and strength of local remote schools lie in their reintegration with the life of the community, and the framework for Post-Colonial Knowledge work can be used as a mechanism for this reintegration.

## 9.1 Post-Colonial Knowledge Work

A story:

One of the teacher participants told me this story recently. It is used here with her permission,

*The students at the school where this teacher works were lining up to collect their lunch one day. The teacher's young granddaughter was in line. Her cousins were ahead of her in the line. When they saw her standing there by herself, without her family near her they called out to her 'come and stand here with us'. Responding to this urging the young girl moved forward to stand with her cousins. A non-Indigenous teacher who had been given the task of supervising the line saw her move and immediately scalded her for 'cutting in' and punished her by sending her to the back of the line. The young girl burst into tears unsure what she had done wrong.*

This is a brief and simple story but one that I believe highlights the importance and generative possibility of doing Post-Colonial Knowledge Work in educational spaces.

The children in this story are operating from a place of knowledge. Their 'feeling for family' and sense of 'marlpa', of not leaving anyone by themselves, was guiding their thoughts and actions. The non-Indigenous teacher was operating from a different place of knowledge – a Western sense of right and wrong, of propriety, of social order amongst 'strangers/non-

relatives', of appropriate ways of performing certain tasks. When the two ways of knowing about this situation clashed, the non-Indigenous teacher imposed her assumptions and used her power to restore things to the way she believed they should be, to the bewilderment and distress of the young girl and, I daresay, of her cousins.

Imagine for a moment if the non-Indigenous teacher had realized that something felt 'wrong', had noticed her bodily disconcertment in that moment. How might things have been different if, instead of immediately reacting, instead of immediately trying to set things to 'right', she had sat with the discomfort? Imagine if she had decided to delve a bit deeper into the different understandings about what was happening in that moment. Imagine if she had taken the time to enter into a dialogue with the girl's grandmother, a senior educator and leader in the community, and asked her to explain what had happened so that she could better understand before taking action that would only serve to confuse and alienate. Imagine what deepening her understanding in that moment might have led to? Hopefully, at the very least a less reactive and censoring response; perhaps even a dialogue that led the school to finding new ways for the children receive their lunches that respected the fact that children liked to be grouped with their families. Imagine now how many of these types of instances could lead to generative solutions if everyone in that school learned how to work within a Post-Colonial Knowledge frame.

The research conducted in this doctoral research give us insights into doing Post-Colonial Knowledge Work at two levels. Firstly, through the stories of the teachers and the subsequent analysis of these narratives we can gain significant insight into intercultural

knowledge work that has been done in teacher education in the past when people have come together and worked in 'good faith'. Secondly, the process of this research itself is imbued with the ideas of Post-Colonial Knowledge Work and so examining this co-constructed process can offer insights as well.

## 9.2 A Space of Post-Colonial Knowledge Work

If we truly want more young people from remote communities to follow effective and meaningful pathways in teacher education then teacher education itself needs to move into a Post-Colonial Knowledge space and those within it need to be equipped to do Post-Colonial Knowledge work together. Others have talked about this kind of space. For example,

*the concept of knowledge spaces to refer to the space within which different knowledges are conceivable. These are the spaces from which knowledges arise but also spaces that are, in turn, shaped by these knowledges. This provides a mechanism for understanding all knowledges as situated in a particular geo-historical context (whilst going beyond understanding this context as 'local') and also for extending the notion of contextualization to one of co-creation (Wright 2005, p. 908).*

Additionally, in the development of her theory of 'Lilyology' Australian Indigenous scholar Nerida Blair talks of a space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can play with different concepts and ideas learning to value and pay respect to each other knowing that different ontologies are at work (Blair 2015).

In many ways this doctoral research has been an attempt to create and embody such a space. A Post-Colonial Knowledge space is not something that already exists, it needs to be created by its participants. As Rose (2004, p. 24) reminds us 'we have no models from the past to guide us... We have to work it out step-by-step dialogically with and among each other'. This echoes Addelson (1994, p. 1) who reminds us that 'Answers to how we should live are created in the process of living'. Canadian First Nations scholar Marie Battiste reminds us that 'Indigenous thinkers use the term 'postcolonial' to describe a symbolic strategy for shaping a desirable future, not an existing reality. The term (refers to an) aspirational practice, goal or idea ....to imagine a new form of society that they desired to create' (Battiste 2002, p. xix).

### 9.3 Ways of coming together in 'good faith'

The following four ***Ways of coming together in 'good faith'*** and the subsequent three ***Tools for Post-Colonial Knowledge work*** are offered as learnings from this journey that I have taken with the teacher participants, from their narratives and from the act of coming together to do the work around our common concern. While they draw on many ideas from diverse theorists, they arise in this form and framework directly from the learnings gained by listening to the narratives of the teacher participants and from the experience of doing Post-Colonial research work together in this doctoral study. These '***Ways***' and '***Tools***' are my interpretation, as principal researcher, of the specific elements that opened up the possibilities of the emergence of new understandings and ways of going on together. They will be a starting point for ongoing and future negotiation and renegotiation as my work goes on with the teacher participants in the future. They are included here aspirationally as

offering new possibilities for future education and teacher education work in the Post-Colonial Knowledge space.

### *9.3.1 Good Post-Colonial Knowledge work is relational...*

This research began from a place of relationship. I was known to the teacher participants and they were known to me. We had established relational trust through our previous work together and through the friendships that grew from that work. It was this relational trust that resulted in the teachers telling me their stories in the first place and that left me with a feeling of needing to 'do' something together with them. It was also this relational trust that enabled us to navigate our way through this new research based relationship together and to have this new work be something that strengthened rather than diminished our relationship with each other. One of the insights that we learned as part of our process was the importance of 'marlpa', as discussed in Chapter 5. This same presence of 'marlpa' came through in the teacher narratives as a key element that supported them to be successful in their teacher education studies and in their work in schools.

Martin (2008, p. 128) talks about the levels of relationship that people can enter into – being unknown, being known about and being known. She states that 'To remain 'unknown' is a personal decision and regarded as a temporary state of relatedness'. It is possible to see many examples where people working in intercultural spaces have chosen to remain 'unknown' to each other. However good Post-Colonial Knowledge work requires us to engage in a process of 'coming alongside' which Martin (2008, p. 128) suggests 'occurs as relatedness is expanded, strengthened and deepened from that of being known

about to being known'. Many others have talked about the centrality of relationships and relatedness (Arbon 2008; Bishop 1998; Buker 2014; Carnes 2011; Fredericks 2008; Ford 2010; Meyer 2001; Smith 1999; Wilson 2009).

Rose (2004) asserts that relationships are crucial because it is through these relationships among people and between people and place that alternatives to the ways we have done things in the past can arise. We need these relationships to derive from a new sense of ethics, an 'ethic of connection', where we see ourselves as 'mutually implicated humans whose primary duty is to respond to the calls of others' (Rose 2004, p.14). Rose calls this an ethics of responsibility not guilt, an ethic that 'demarcates a path towards decolonization...towards a human condition of living with and for others' (Rose 2004, p. 12). Post-Colonial Knowledge Work requires us to be relational in ways that are mutually vulnerable and responsive.

### *9.3.2 Good Post-Colonial Knowledge Work allows time...*

One of the important aspects in the design of this research was to pay attention to our understandings of time. This meant finding creative ways of working around the systemic constraints of the PhD frame, and allowing enough time for everyone to feel 'ready' to participate in the work. We learned that this concept of allowing time involved waiting, giving space, waiting for the right time, not filling up all the space, being patient and waiting until the other person feels ready. It was something we came to talk about as

'Anma' and this is further explained in Chapter 5. Rather than being a passive space where nothing is happening, it is an active space of reflection, preparation and foreshadowing. This waiting is a space that allows time for many things to occur. It allows time for good communication to happen and allows for everyone to feel ready and prepared, it allows for a respectful way of entering into work with people and provides enough time for everyone who needs to be involved in the process to be included. It also allowed us to be flexible when plans changed. It was a way of thinking about time not as sequential and linear, but as patterned, seasonal and emergent. It was not something that you plan for, but rather something that you pay attention to and allow to unfold. It is something that you meet with readiness only when the time is right. To an extent the flexible delivery models that were developed for remote teacher education discussed in Chapter 8 also paid attention to differing notions of time and allowed enough time at the local level for both the teacher participants in these programs, as well as their families, Elders and wider community to come on board and develop deep understandings about what kind of education was best in that place.

Parker Palmer (2009) suggests that allowing time as part of the process is 'the work before the work'. He connects this idea strongly to the idea of working relationally. In Palmer's understanding the work before the work is about taking time to come to terms with and understand our inner landscape, honestly, so that we enter into the process of doing the work in front of us relatively unencumbered. We are then able to enter into a 'live encounter' with each other that permits the work that emerges to be trustworthy and

'true' from the perspective of the participants. By paying attention to this 'work before the work' we ensure that when we actually sit down to do the 'work' the experience is good for all who are involved, and the feeling we are all left with at the conclusion is 'right', embodying a deep mutual respect for our differences. In Post-Colonial Knowledge work this is important because of radically different ontological and epistemological understandings of time. Carnes (2011) explains that non-Indigenous Australians are tuned to a linear notion of time that belongs to the positivist ideology of the dominant Western paradigm. Rose (2004) sees dealing with notions of time as crucial in the work of decolonisation. She asserts that in Western concepts of time 'life is at war with death' (Rose 2004, p. 25). This stems from the ontological disjunction brought about by Christianity, explained thus,

*Stretching time between two key moments of ontological significance – birth of Christ and return of Christ – had the effect of shrinking the present to a moment of transition...past and future were of greater significance and value than the present which was fleeting (Rose 2004, p. 15)*

This has the effect of creating a 'teleological frame' for how time is viewed. This puts a positive value on change, and believes that history, or society, is moving towards the resolution of conflict and contradiction. This creates an obsession with future orientation: everything in our lives is directed towards the creation of a more perfect future and on this basis disrespect for human or other suffering is justified or ignored (Rose 2004). Rose (2004) also points out the inherent flaw in this dismissal of the present on the way to the

future because our failure to pay attention to what happens in the present destroys whatever future we hope to inhabit. 'Our lives are thus suspended in a web of time concepts that hold us always about to be that which we would believe we truly are' (Rose 2004, p. 18).

This contrasts strongly with notions of time reflected in Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies which Carnes (2011) suggests are more circular ways of being in the world and require time for thinking, musing, reflecting as a way of doing business. Miriam Rose Ungenmerr highlights the importance of 'Dadirri' which she explains is 'inner deep listening and quiet still awareness - something like what you call contemplation' (Atkinson 2002, p.16). Miriam Rose Ungenmerr also explains in relation to time that, 'Our Aboriginal culture has taught us to be still and to wait. We do not try to hurry things up. We let them follow their natural course - like the seasons...We wait for the right time for our ceremonies and meetings. The right people must be present. Careful preparations must be made. We don't mind waiting because we want things to be done with care' (Ungenmerr n.d. p. 2). Allowing time for people to catch up, learning about what is happening and putting people into context before 'the work' gives this work a better chance of running smoothly, effectively and meaningfully for all involved (Carnes 2011). Buker (2014) talks of the importance of allowing time for the repetitive and often seasonal sharing of knowledge through stories. Allowing time, combined with building relationships, helps to both mitigate the chances of conflict arising but also provide a solid foundation upon which to resolve conflict.

This may be a challenging way of working especially to those from a Western paradigm with its focus on outcomes, destination, action and quantification (Carnes 2011). The idea of allowing room for contemplation, thinking and conferring with others, taking longer and giving up taken for granted Western privilege and authority (Dudgeon 2008) will be uncomfortable, but it is an important and necessary part of doing Post-Colonial Knowledge work. Rose (2004, p. 25) invites us to consider 'alternatives to linear time... the time of the generations of living things, including ecological time, synchronicities, intervals, patterns, and rhythms, all of which are quite legitimately understood as forms of time'. Most importantly she invites us to consider the 'possibilities of our present moment' (Rose 2004, p. 213), allowing time in the present moment which will teach us all new and generative ways of working together.

### ***9.3.3 Good Post-Colonial Knowledge work is deeply engaged in the local context and embedded in experience...***

The original premise for this research was based on the belief that the experiences of the teacher participants throughout their study and work would provide valuable insights into why more young Indigenous people from remote communities were not pursuing this pathway. Each narrative is a local, personal, experience-based account of what it is like for people from remote communities in Central Australia to become fully qualified teachers and teach in their own community schools. The teacher participants in this doctoral research, numbering seven in total, represent a majority of the qualified Indigenous teachers in the Central Australian region. The scarcity of their presence in the system makes their experiences even more important. In addition to this these teachers were

largely successful in completing their initial years teacher education because the delivery model was contextually embedded and responsive. There was space for local knowledge and the participation and engagement of the wider community. Meyer (2001, p 140) reminds us that this is important because 'context is culturally situated'. The research in this study reminded us that in part the success of these community-based programs refuted the idea that teacher education was a 'grand narrative' that could be applied to all contexts. These culturally embedded and contextualised programs instead operated in a generative way allowing for the possibility that new knowledge would emerge that would be beneficial to all.

Ladson-Billings (2014) argues that examining success among groups who have been least successful is likely to reveal important pedagogical principles as well as the social and cultural aspects that make success possible. Indeed many theorists who come from a Critical Race perspective argue that an insistence on context and lived experience provides a defence against the 'colourblind and sanitized analyses generated via universalistic discourses' (Gillborn 2006, p. 23). This view is shared by post-colonial and collectivist theorists. Law and Lin (2010, p. 137) suggest that the benefit of contextualizing and grounding things in experiences is that 'large issues can be detected in specific practices...the whole can be found within...if we examine these in the right way then large post-colonial knowledge predicaments can be found at work within specific interactions'. If we see Indigenous teacher education as an example of a large post-colonial predicament, and then the stories of the teachers can be seen as specific, experience-based interactions within that predicament. By exploring and moving deeper into the moments of both 'disconcertment' and 'concertment' contained within the stories we might better

understand what is happening in the system as a whole. We must do this, however, conscious of not creating, in the process, a 'grand narrative' (Rose 2004; Verran 2013).

The narratives themselves highlighted very strongly the benefits of teacher education programs that were strongly embedded in the local context and based around experience. Locating the learning in a context that had meaning for participants allowed them to draw on the significant knowledge resources of their families, culture and land. This approach offered an invitation for the learning to happen collectively and meant that a deep level of family and community support could be built up as well as embedded in understandings of what teacher education meant for people in each context. Perhaps this is what Dewey (1938, p 49) meant when he said that 'Attentive care must be devoted to the conditions which give each present experience a worthwhile meaning'.

These past practices of locating the teacher education programs in the local context also enabled an inversion of the power relationship habitually at play in tertiary education programs because epistemological and pedagogical decisions about the substantive 'content' of these teacher education programs were being made locally based on local experiential knowledge. These programs were both pre-planned and emergent in character, contrary to the tertiary education norm of tightly designed courses to be imposed unaltered through standardised delivery irrespective of the context for learning. Allowing space for emergent knowledge and understandings offers the possibility of producing a counter narrative to assimilation, which must be central to Post-Colonial Knowledge Work. Quijano and Rios (2000, p. 159) remind us that we must 'create space

for discourse around the impact of race on schooling so that racist assumptions can be problematized'. The experience of Indigenous people on the ground working in schools and undertaking teacher education places them as key figures in exposing racist behaviours and hegemonic practices. Rose (2004, p. 13) suggests that what is needed is the creation of 'a sense of moral engagement with the past in the present – rejecting the paradigm of future social perfection, revaluing the present as the real site of action in the world'. Thus, just as time and relationships are crucial, engagement in the local and experiential is an important part of Post-Colonial Knowledge Work.

#### *9.3.4 Good Post-Colonial Knowledge Work welcomes difference...*

In many ways the original impetus for this research was difference. When I heard the stories of the teacher participants the first time around I recognised them as different to my own story of becoming a teacher. I saw inherent possibility in better understanding this difference, but as the research went on I also came to realize the destructive impact the requirement for 'sameness' was having within the educational systems. The teacher participants were clear in the analysis process that one of the understandings that needed to be highlighted from their narratives was that we have different cultures, different ontological and epistemological understandings and that this needs difference needs to be central and embraced in the work we do together.

Western ways of thinking and knowing, which are 'dominated by a matrix of hierarchical oppositions' (Rose 2004, p. 19), have not traditionally coped well with the multiplicity of possibilities that difference allows. They are deeply disconcerted with the notion of 'pluralism and diversity in language, culture and location' (Fogarty, Lovell and Dodson

2015, p. 16) and much more comfortable with the formation of dualities 'man/woman, culture/nature, mind/body, active/passive, civilisation/savagery' (Rose 2004, p. 19) which inevitably leads to the duality of dominant and other. Verran (2013, p. 147) talks of how in 'explaining the other in terms of itself, each actually explains the other away'. As a result of these kinds of Western knowledge practices we now have a state where 'not all positioned perspectives are equally valued, equally heard, or equally included. ... some positions have historically been oppressed, distorted, ignored, silenced, destroyed, appropriated, commodified, and marginalised' (Bell 2009, p. 42). This approach allows us to 'forget the difference and...to stay focused on our own situation without grappling with the other person's reality' (Grillo and Wildman 2000, p. 649).

Post-Colonial Knowledge work requires us not only to acknowledge difference but to welcome it and the generative possibilities it offers (Verran 2013). To grasp these generative possibilities Verran counsels us that we need to be willing to go 'deeper inside' the experience of difference before the point of coming to general concepts (2013, pp. 146-147). If we move too quickly to impose our own epistemic categories on each other then we are continuing the neo-colonial project. We must learn ways to resist and counteract this instinct. Verran (2013, p. 147) suggests that people need find ways to '...simultaneously maintain and dissolve difference, in ways that are authentic and generative in terms of their own disparate knowledge practices...(and) enable the negotiation of useful links that can go along with maintaining significant divisions'. A space that welcomes difference is not a space of binaries or hierarchies, but instead is a space of hybridities (Watson & Huntington 2008) and of heteroglossic narratives where there is

discursive space for conflicting arguments (Rose 2004). Blair (2015) reminds us that engaging with the 'in-between space' is both challenging and exciting. We need to find ways for different knowledge systems to co-exist and in so doing create powerful and dynamic dialogue and discourse leading to generative learnings and new knowledge. This kind of transformational work must be the agenda of Post-Colonial Knowledge work.

Together these four insights, generated by the research done here, offer ways of people coming together in 'good faith' to embark on the process of Post-Colonial Knowledge work. They are ways of being that should inform the work we do. In addition to these ways of being we require some 'ways of doing' the work. The suggested tools for these 'ways of doing', which have become clear through this research process, are discussed below.

## **9.4 Tools for Post-Colonial Knowledge Work**

### **9.4.1 Story**

Stories were at the very origin of this research. The original idea was born out of a story sharing process. The collection of stories was the method chosen. The analysis happened through the shared reading of stories. Story provided us with a way to blur the received ontological and epistemological categories, such as time and space, as well as inverting the power structure of the research relationship, placing the control in the hands of the teller. This meant that powerful generative work could be achieved untrammelled by any sense of

allegiance to the positivist structures that still hold sway over much of Western sociological research.

Stories must therefore be the main tool of doing Post-Colonial Knowledge work as evidenced by this doctoral study. This is because they bring together the four ways of working together in 'good faith'. Firstly, stories are a way of us 'becoming known' to each other (Martin 2008). When we listen to the story of another we are drawn into a world of ethical encounter; we are witnesses, we become entangled (Rose 2004). To bear witness to someone's story we discover a mode of responding to that person that 'exceeds an epistemological determination and becomes ethical involvement' (Rose 2004, p. 31). It upsets our previous notions of who that person was and helps us to come into a deeper knowledge and understanding of that person. Stories are relational.

Secondly, stories allow time for deep listening to each other. The time allowed for the telling is determined by the teller and they can choose the structure. In a context involving Indigenous tellers this means that there is time to tell the story from a place of cultural safety and respect (Martin 2008), and in a circular way using thematic repetition, as opposed to the step-by-step, linear progression of a Western structure (Youngblood Henderson 2000). Using story means the teller remains in control of allowing as much time as is necessary for the full telling and the role of others is to 'listen with attentiveness' (Rose 2004, p. 30). Stories allow time for coming together in 'good faith'.

Thirdly, stories are personal, based in the local context of the teller and based on experience. Stories or first person accounts are a way of naming one's own reality in your

own 'voice' (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006). This takes the epistemological stance that 'truth only exists for this person in this predicament at this time in history' (Ladson-Billings and Tate 2006, p. 21), thus grounding it in the local and the present. The story might be about past experience but it unfolds in the present moment in the act of telling. It is important in Post-Colonial Knowledge work because it is a way of integrating lived experience with racial realism (Dixson and Rousseau 2006a). Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) suggest that naming one's own reality through stories can be a way of affecting the oppressor. In this way story acts as a tool of 'disconcertment' (Verran 2013). Story and experience allows identity and epistemological understandings to be centrally present in learning because our stories are shaped by how we know and who we are. Rose (2004, p. 24) talks about the importance of the 'web of stories we are able to weave out of our historically grounded experiences', which help us to explore the 'local possibilities that illuminate alternatives'. In this way stories are ways of coming together in 'good faith' that generate new knowledge between us.

Finally, stories make space for difference. It is in the very nature of stories to allow for difference. There is not only one meaning to any story. The teller's intention is filtered through their own experiential knowledge, but so too is the listener's understanding. A multiplicity of meanings are possible in any story. We are reminded that,

*Stories have layers; layers that a few people may know and more layers that everyone knows. The storyteller is often the listener at the same time they are the*

*storyteller. The storyteller is often the one being spoken to* (Armstrong, J. in King 2003, p.2)

Hokari (2000, pp. 8-9) suggests that it is not about finding a 'right' story but widening the possibilities of stories. Variation can provide us with a bundle of possibilities without judgment and different stories will often contradict each but can coexist. Stories offer us a way of coming together in 'good faith' that invite difference and invite us as listeners and tellers to become comfortable with that difference.

#### **9.4.2 Cultivation of Disconcertment**

The second tool that has emerged as important to Post Colonial Knowledge Work is the cultivation of disconcertment. What this tool offers is a way of interrupting whiteness and dysconscious racism. So many of the barriers experienced by the teacher participants in this research were directly related to the ongoing and neo-colonial experience of modern Australia. We need to find mechanisms for interrupting these deeply embedded ideological and culturally exclusive ways that dominate the educational experience. Teaching people to pay attention to and dwell in their own disconcertment is one such mechanism.

In order to ensure that we come together in 'good faith' to do Post-Colonial Knowledge work it is not enough to simply listen to each other's stories. We must learn to cultivate our own disconcertment in the process of listening. Verran (2013, p. 146) explains this disconcertment as 'a type of experience that alerts us to the tensions of the relations that exist within what we 'feel' as epistemic rightness, something which we are generally unaware of, until that is, it is rent asunder'. Lipsitz (2006, p. 2) invokes the words of Walter Benjamin suggesting the need for 'presence of mind...a precise awareness of the present

moment'. This 'presence of mind' is based on an understanding of how difficult it can be to see the present in all of its rich complexity. Cultivating one's 'presence of mind' and learning to pay attention to moments of 'disconcertment' as they arise are ways of staying grounded in the present and learning to live with the discomfort of difference. Law and Lin (2010, p. 138) explain that 'bodily disconcertment may be understood as an expression of metaphysical disjuncture' and that 'discomfited and 'personal' bodily states are crucial potential detectors of difference'.

Verran (2013, p. 146) suggests that the bodily tension we feel when we experience epistemic difference points to the 'vast inertia of the mesh of institutions, categories, arranged materials, and communicative protocols and processes, which is knowledge'. When our taken for granted ways of knowing are disrupted or challenged by an alternate way of knowing our instinct is self-protection through the invocation of and insistence upon our own single admissible meaning (Verran 2013). Rose (2004, p. 21) calls this a 'narcissistic singularity' and maintains that we need to find ways of unmaking this if we want to work towards decolonization. Presence of mind and paying attention to disconcertment can help us to individually become conscious and aware of what Adelson (1994, p. 11) calls 'the society that we act and enact every day, that we generate and regenerate through our acceptance and reinforcement of the authoritative 'norms' and 'standards'. Verran (2013) sees epistemic disconcertment as crucial for Post-Colonial Knowledge work. Perhaps this is because the experience of disconcertment is so deeply embedded and experienced daily as a part of the neo-colonial reality of the settler society. Rose (2004) explains that 'the conquest was always meant to be complete...the conquest of Indigenous peoples...was undertaken in a mode of replacement...it was imagined as a

project that would be finished when the replacement was fully accomplished'. In contemporary Australia the continuing existence of Aboriginal people rends asunder the ideological premise of colonization and causes a collective disconcertment that has been historically 'collectively denied' (Verran 2013, p. 146) and has led to the doubling of violence that Rose (2004) discusses. The default position of many is to ignore or brush off differences as cultural quirks that are unimportant.

In order to move into a Post-Colonial space Verran (2013) suggests that individuals need to become sensitized to these moments of disconcertment and that it needs to be collectively cultivated as an analytical and methodological tool. To 'sensitize' and 'cultivate' our disconcertment Verran (2013) suggests the need for 'interrupting tools'. The interrupting tools being proposed here are those of story and of 'dialogue with other people and with the world itself' (Rose 2004, p. 21). The dialogue required invokes plurality and helps us to notice the disjunctive moments and engage in questioning and conversation about the epistemological and ontological understandings that lie beneath them.

#### *9.4.3 Dialogue*

The process followed in completing this research was a dialogic one. It embraced the need for myself and the teacher participants to continue in dialogue with one another throughout the entire process. We moved back and forth between story and dialogue as we discovered the paths that felt 'right' for the research to take. This open and honest dialogue was an important aspect of working ethically together. In the community based model of teacher education both the flexible delivery and the cohort design were ways of

facilitating dialogue between the students, the schools, the university staff and the local communities. Dialogue invites a multiplicity of ideas, makes space for differences in understanding and enables a particular sort of metaphysical engagement where the gaps between categories open up the possibilities of the emergence of new ways of going on together that may have been previously unimagined. Sadly the experience of the teacher participants shows that many of the opportunities for dialogue within remote education have been shut down by the systemic insistence upon 'sameness'.

The point of Post-Colonial Knowledge work is to find generative ways of doing difference. With this in mind, based around our moments of epistemic panic and disconcertment we need to commit to a process of 'mutual interrogation, which can reveal 'our' traditions to ourselves, as much as to the other' (Verran 2013, p. 154). We need to use mechanisms for 'finding a way to go on by staying in the feeling of disconcertment...staying with that moment of existential panic rather than trying to categorize and label things according to our own epistemological understandings and knowledge' (Verran 2013, p. 157).

Both Rose (2004), Martin (2008) and Buker (2014) all propose dialogue as such a mechanism. Dialogue gives us opportunities to deepen our 'knowing about' and 'being known' by others (Martin 2008). It provides people with a chance to talk back on their own terms (Rose 2004) and requires a non-judgemental space (Martin 2008). Rose (2004) proposes that dialogue is an ethical alternative to the monologue that too often dominates our ways of being and doing. She proposes a particular kind of dialogue

*It is specifically a form of dialogue that requires difference. It seeks relationships across otherness without seeking to erase difference...dialogue begins where one is, is always situated...dialogue is open... (the) outcome is not known in advance (Rose 2004, p. 21)*

Rose and Ford (1995) also remind us that ethical dialogue requires that we acknowledge and understand our particular and harshly situated presence. This is particularly important given the violence that monologue has wrought on Indigenous people in the past, and continues to do so. It is for this reason that we must find new ways of coming together in 'good faith' and tools such as dialogue that can work across chasms of radical harm. This is the purpose of committing to a space of Post-Colonial Knowledge Work.

### **9.5 Implications of Post-Colonial Knowledge work for teacher education**

If we wish to create effective and meaningful pathways for people from remote communities into teacher education then we must find ways to do so that do not continue the doubled violence of colonialism and neo-colonialism. We have to find ways of identifying and calling out the assimilationist practices still embedded in our policies, curricula and institutional behaviours, through listening to the stories of those who experience the impact of this assimilatory intent first hand. We need to be honest about the fact that our educational systems, including schools and the courses that prepare people to work in schools, operate within structures of cultural and social reproduction that have embedded in them deep levels of hegemonic ideology. We also need to understand that many of the people who work in schools do not critique the hegemonic ideology that undergirds the structure of our educational systems (Quiocho and Rios 2000).

As Santoro and Reid (2006) point out, it is not enough to focus on just the teacher education of Indigenous teachers. There is also a need for non-Indigenous teachers to be better prepared to work alongside Indigenous teachers and within Indigenous communities.

To respond to this reality we need to intentionally move all teacher education into a Post-Colonial Knowledge space where there can be genuine dialogue and new knowledge building between people from diverse knowledge traditions with a view to finding generative ways of doing difference-work together. This is an optimistic and aspirational stance that assumes that violence and damage are not the only things we are capable of (Rose 2004). It requires of us the commitment to finding new ways of coming together in 'good faith' based on a commitment to building relationships, allowing time, grounding our work in the local and experiential and welcoming difference. This will be challenging for a teacher education system that is so strongly entrenched in notions of linear time and segregated knowledge where students are required to metaphorically 'run' the course of study from start to finish according to a pre-determined set of stages based around separate 'units' of work. These proposed new ways of working will also need to come into being cognizant of the fact that high status Western knowledge traditions are extraordinarily well entrenched (Law and Lin 2010, p. 137) and resourced. For this reason it is not enough simply to focus on teacher education for Indigenous people but on the intersections of race and education (Leonardo 2009) that exist throughout the educational systems of the West. Reflecting on the Canadian reality Buker (2014) calls on Faculties of Education to make bold curriculum and pedagogical change that acknowledges that

Indigenous epistemologies, cultural worldviews and community partnerships have a place at the table of learning. The same is true of teacher education in Australia.

To effect such a shift change needs to happen at the level of the interpersonal that is experienced in schools, at the level of school leadership, at the Departmental level, at the interpersonal within teacher education courses and in the development of university courses and delivery models. It is not sufficient to only focus on Teacher Education. Change through a commitment to Post-Colonial Knowledge Work must be effected throughout the interface between education and local Indigenous communities. The legacy of what existed before continues to happen in small out of the way places, in a sporadic fashion, with people attempting to work collaboratively and generatively in 'good faith' through genuine dialogue and knowledge building. However, this sort of work can and should be undertaken at all levels and sites starting with small local initiatives to reintegrate traditional authority into the school and build that in many different directions – working with teachers, working with departmental officials, working with parents and Elders, working with curriculum and working with policy and practices. Additionally this way of working needs to both inform and be informed by teacher education in a symbiotic relationship. Bringing those working in remote education into a Post-Colonial knowledge space holds the possibility generating new ways of working together in and with difference and ensuring that more Indigenous teachers can become the kind of teachers that Indigenous students need them to be.

## Chapter 10 – Conclusions and contribution to new knowledge

### 10.1 Answering the research questions

This doctoral research sought to explore four key interconnected questions namely,

1. What have been the experiences of Indigenous teachers from remote communities in Central Australia who have completed teacher education?
2. What are some of the elements that supported them and what are some of the barriers these teachers encountered?
3. What are the benefits of having qualified Indigenous teachers in remote schools?
4. How can meaningful and effective pathways be created to support teacher education for future generations of Indigenous teachers from remote communities?

Exploration of these questions was designed to provide clues as to why so few young Indigenous people from remote communities in Central Australia are pursuing a teacher education pathway.

#### 10.1.1 Research question 1

***What have been the experiences of Indigenous teachers from remote communities in Central Australia who have completed teacher education?***

We wanted to begin with the idea of success. Indigenous teachers from remote communities in Central Australia have been successful in completing their teacher education in the past. By listening to the stories of these teachers it was possible to get accounts of richness and depth about the insider experience of becoming a teacher in this context. Seven teacher narratives were collected and analysed and the experiences of

these teachers were grouped into seven themes: 'feeling for family', 'learning with marlpa', 'mentoring, support and encouragement', 'team teaching', 'leadership', 'exclusion and power', 'looking at us level'. Through these thematic groupings the teachers' voices clearly articulate both the elements that supported them in their success and the elements that presented barriers.

### 10.1.2 Research question 2

***What are some of the elements that supported them and what are some of the barriers these teachers encountered?***

In order to better understand the supports and barriers that underpinned the career and learning journeys of the teacher participants in this doctoral research it was necessary to explore the seven themes through some theoretical and philosophical lenses. The barriers and challenges that emerged from the narratives of the teachers were examined against the backdrop of colonisation in Australia.

The specific theories of Whiteness Theory, Critical Race Theory and the theory of colonial mimicry were used to peel back the layers of barriers experienced, as articulated in the narratives, to show the underlying ideologies at play in the context of remote Indigenous teacher education. This analysis showed that inequality played out at a three levels within the system. Firstly, due to the colonial default position within the Australian education system, Indigenous teachers were consistently treated as less equal than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Despite meeting all of the requirements for becoming 'qualified' teachers, the teacher participants consistently felt themselves held at arm's length, and were treated as 'white but not quite' as explained by Bhabha's (1984) theory of colonial

mimicry. Secondly, educational systems have developed ways of attributing higher status to White/Western knowledge than it does to Indigenous knowledge systems. The Indigenous teachers, as holders of Indigenous knowledge, were subsequently also relegated to a lower status within their schools. Finally, the teacher narratives revealed many examples of mechanisms of systemic Whiteness at work in the experience of the teachers. These 'tools of whiteness' were experienced in various forms through leadership styles, culturally biased discourses around conceptions of 'quality' and through interpersonal dysconscious racism.

The teacher narratives also revealed significant insights into those professional behaviours and programs that supported success in becoming a qualified teacher. What became clear was the central importance of Indigenous teacher education being engaged and embedded in the local context of the teachers' respective communities. The era of community based teacher education provided important mechanisms for the local community and families to engage in what the teacher education programs were doing. The cohort model of this approach provided crucial support among students and a feeling of cultural safety. These delivery models also provided flexibility and invited opportunities for two way learning. These models were generative in nature and co-created knowledge grew out of them, rather than the current model of teacher education which offers a one-size fits all standardized and imposed approach.

### 10.1.3 Research question 3

***What are the benefits of having qualified Indigenous teachers in remote schools?***

Indigenous teachers from within remote communities are uniquely placed to understand children's early experiences and provide continuity in their education because they share ontological and epistemological knowledge and understandings with the children from their communities and can therefore undertake the work of a teacher 'without engaging in imposition' (Dewey 1938). The imposition Dewey is referring to is the imposition of one way of knowing at the expense of another. The deep ontological differences that these teachers have experienced in their own navigation of the educational system also exist for the children in their home communities. The shared ontological identity between these teachers and their students and the shared language, culture and practices that embody that identity provides these teachers with unique insights about how best to teach students from their home communities

#### 10.1.4 Research question 4

***How can meaningful and effective pathways be created to support teacher education for future generations of Indigenous teachers from remote communities?***

As the teacher education system currently stands it would be an act of irresponsibility to encourage young people from remote communities to pursue a teacher education pathway. To do so would be to expose them to a form of doubled violence, such is the neo-colonial imperative of the current standardized system. It allows no room for difference. However, this thesis proposes a framework for Post-Colonial Knowledge work with the belief that supporting the creation of this kind of knowledge space at all levels of remote education, including teacher education, would provide the foundation for a new

generation of young Indigenous teachers from remote communities to successfully, effectively and meaningfully engage in teacher education pathways.

## **10.2 Contribution to new knowledge**

This thesis has made a contribution to new knowledge in two ways. First of all, by embodying a Post-Colonial Knowledge work approach to research it offers three insights into how to do research in the intercultural space. Secondly, through the examination of the teacher narratives and the subsequent analysis through theoretical and philosophical lenses, the thesis offers a framework for doing Post-Colonial Knowledge work, which would be constructive for Indigenous teacher education.

### **10.2.1 Insights into doing research using a Post-Colonial Knowledge approach**

As discussed in Chapter 5 the ‘participatory narrative’ method developed in this thesis came about as a result of intentionally inhabiting a Post-Colonial Knowledge research space. While the framework for such an approach evolved over time as a product of the work we did, we were able to focus on important generative knowledge that emerged from our processes of working together. The three key insights that we learned from working together in ‘good faith’ were as follows;

- We learned that ‘anma’ was important for how we worked together. This relates to our notions of time and allowing enough time and flexibility to ensure that things are done at the ‘right time’ and in the ‘right way’ for everyone involved. This had significance when it came to aspects of research such as ethically informed consent.

- We learned that ‘marlpa’ was important for how we worked together. This relates to ideas about connectedness and relationality. Allowing ‘marlpa’ to inform the way that we worked meant that no one was left by themselves and everyone felt included, involved and valued. This experience of providing ‘company’ for one another and basing decisions about the research around relational values provided a strong compass for the direction the research took.
- We learned that ‘ngapartji ngapartji’, ‘reciprocity’ or ‘mutual generosity’, informed how we worked together. This meant seeking ways for multiple needs being met by the research process from within the resources of the group. This required negotiation, patience and flexibility. It provided a way for everyone’s knowledge to be valued and included in the research.

These three insights are an example of the generative possibilities of Post-Colonial Knowledge work. They are the new and emergent understandings that the teacher participants and I take with us from the process of doing this work together in ‘good faith’. The insights are not offered as a prescriptive guide for how to ‘do research’. That would go against the idea of Post-Colonial Knowledge work needing to be contextualised and co-created. However, by better understanding the new knowledge that we learned through this research collaboration, others may discover the possibilities afforded by working in a Post-Colonial Knowledge work space.

### **10.2.3 Post-Colonial knowledge work – a possible framework**

The second contribution to new knowledge made by this thesis, as detailed in Chapter 9, is the development of a framework for Post-Colonial Knowledge work. This framework is

developed with the view that it needs to be inhabited and used at many levels of the educational systems – interpersonal, classroom, leadership, community, departmental and faculty. It consists of the following ways of coming together in ‘good faith’ and tools for Post-Colonial Knowledge work.

Four ***Ways of coming together in ‘good faith’:***

- Post-Colonial Knowledge work is relations;
- Post-Colonial Knowledge work allows time;
- Post-Colonial Knowledge work is engaged in the local context and embedded in experience;
- Post-Colonial Knowledge work welcomes difference.

Three ***Tools for Post-Colonial Knowledge work:***

- Story;
- Cultivating disconcertment;
- Dialogue.

The thesis’s main assertion is that locating remote education efforts, including teacher education, into a Post-Colonial Knowledge space that is guided by this framework is the most responsible way to ensure that collaborative and generative partnerships can (re)emerge. It is in this kind of knowledge space that young Indigenous people from remote communities can effectively, safely and meaningfully engage in a teacher education pathway.

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