

**Practices of alternative schools in Queensland in supporting
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to
remain engaged in education**

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Abstract

Alternative schools are an emerging model of education offered to young people who have been disenfranchised from conventional schooling opportunities. The body of literature on alternative schools in Australia has not identified how many Indigenous young people are engaged with alternative schools and how alternative schools are supporting Indigenous young people to remain engaged in education. It is well documented that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience significant disadvantage including poorer educational outcomes than their non-Indigenous peers. This study seeks to contribute to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people through exploring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interactions with alternative schools in Queensland and investigating the practices of alternative school leaders in terms of how they are supporting Indigenous young people to remain engaged in education.

Critical race theory informed the development of this study. An Aboriginal researcher sought to shift the focus of this study away from Indigenous young people to Principals; to explore their perspective of their own knowledge and practices in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people at their school. Using survey methodology, a web-based questionnaire was developed to survey Principals' providing data on alternative schools in Queensland including the demographics of the alternative school; self-reported knowledge of Indigenous cultures and communities and practices that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people at their alternative school.

There are nine key findings that emerged through the analysis of this study: key finding one is the high percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people enrolled in schools surveyed; key finding two is there is a high percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in the schools; key finding three is the majority of the schools are located in low socio-economic areas; key finding four is the strong willingness of Principals' in this study to engage in self-directed learning in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; key finding five is the limited demonstration of understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities; key finding six is the most prevalent practice of Principals' in this study is the celebration of cultural events and cultural activities; key finding seven is the limited Principal engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, their families and the local community; key finding eight is the practice of alternative schools provides limited support and nurturing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young person's cultural identity and key finding nine is that Principals' are relying heavily on informal discussions with staff to know what their staff's knowledge and skills are in relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

There are multiple implications that have arisen from this study. The data demonstrated high numbers of Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander students and staff. The data also revealed that Principal's demonstration of knowledge in relation to Indigenous cultures and communities was limited, as well as limited Principal engagement with Indigenous young peoples, families and communities. Therefore a major practical implication of this study is the urgent need for quality cultural learning opportunities for leaders of alternative schools to improve practices. Additionally, the implications of this study support an urgent need for further

research on the role alternative schools are playing in supporting Indigenous young people to remain engaged in education.

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List of Abbreviations

AITSL – Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

COAG – Council of Australian Governments

EREA – Edmund Rice Education Australia

NAIDOC – National Aborigines and Islander Day Observance Committee

SSLC – Stronger Smarter Learning Communities

Statement of Original Authorship

The work contained in this thesis has not been previously submitted to meet requirements for an award at this or any other higher education institution. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Acknowledgments

As a point of protocol, I acknowledge my ancestors and identify myself as a (maternal) descendent of Nangiomeri people of Daly River, Northern Territory. I acknowledge and pay my respects to all custodians of the land and seas of this country. I have not been raised on country though I strongly and proudly identify my Aboriginal heritage that informs my decisions and motivates me to continue learning, for my people and my community. I acknowledge and thank my Elders, tiddas, family, and those that are nearest and dearest to me who have supported me throughout this project.

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I acknowledge and thank all of the participants who took the time out of their very busy schedules to complete the survey. Completion of the survey represented that there is enthusiasm and preparedness of Principals to consider their own knowledge and practices in the role of leading education for a significant cohort of our young people. This both motivates me and inspires me to think that there may be the change approaching that our communities so desperately need.

1. Introduction

The term Indigenous refers to the First People of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The terms Indigenous and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander will be used inter-changeably throughout this thesis though it is emphasised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander is the preferred term to encompass and acknowledge the great diversity of the two cultures. The diversity within Aboriginal nations and Torres Strait Islander cultures is also acknowledged.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people experience significant educational disadvantage. There is surfeit literature on the topic of ‘Indigenous Education’, heavily focused on developing an understanding of what is causing Indigenous young people to disengage from education and how to improve educational outcomes. The overwhelming majority of this literature is focused on conventional schooling contexts. This study is focusing on a schooling context in Queensland. There is varying language used to describe the context including alternative schools, flexi schools and learning choices. All of these terms describe a model of education outside of conventional schooling that aims to provide young people the opportunity to remain engaged in education. Alternative schools and flexi schools are the terms used throughout this thesis and will be used inter-changeably.

The level of participation of Indigenous young people in alternative schools is relatively absent in the literature on alternative schools in Australia. The objectives of this study is to create new knowledge to provide some demographic data focusing on Indigenous participation in alternative schools; develop an understanding of

Principals' self-reported knowledge of Indigenous cultures and communities and practices of alternative schools in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people at their alternative school. It is anticipated that this knowledge will support informed and improved practices in working with Indigenous young people in alternative schools; develop direction for future research and contribute a new perspective to the large body of literature on 'Indigenous education'.

This thesis comprises six chapters. Chapter one outlines the background to the study (Section 1.1), the context of the study (Section 1.2), the principal objectives of the study (Section 1.3), and the significance of this research (Section 1.4). Lastly, it includes an outline of the remaining chapters of the thesis (Section 1.5).

1.1 BACKGROUND

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are First Peoples or Indigenous peoples of Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are custodians of the lands and seas of the continent of Australia, caring for this country for approximately 60, 000 thousand years (Fozdar, 2008). In 1778, the first fleet arrived marking the beginning of the colonisation of Australia by the British. From the beginning of colonisation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have not been recognised as First Peoples of this land, the British claiming the land "terra nullius" or land belonging to no one (Cunneen, 2001, p. 232). From this point in the early history of a colonised Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been subject to exclusion and control measures of the Australian Government. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century had very little control over their lives; subject to an array of legislation ranging from protectionist to assimilationist ideologies of the time (Aboriginal & Torres Strait

Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2000). Whilst the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have improved considerably over the past few decades, Australia's First peoples have been described as "the most educationally disadvantaged group in Australia" (Dockett, Mason, & Perry, 2006, p. 139).

Phillips (2012) emphasises the role history plays in understanding the significance of past events and how these impact on all Australians (p. 11). The educational disadvantage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience today is grounded in the events of the past that have shaped the Indigenous education landscape today (Gunstone, 2012). From early post-colonial times, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been viewed as "uneducable" or not as able to learn as white people (Price, 2012, p. 2). Legislation such as *The Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897* all serve as a reminder of the expectations and vision of the Australian Government for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in this country. This particular legislation saw thousands of Aboriginal peoples in Queensland dispossessed of their lands, separated from their families and herded onto missions to be controlled and trained as domestic servants for wealthy white families (Blake, 1998, p. 52). Many Aboriginal children of this time were lucky to be educated to a year three level before undertaking their "vocational training" (Wilson, 2005, p. 54). This power of the state to control Aboriginal peoples on reserves remained entrenched in policy until the mid - 1960's (Donovan, 2008, p. 176). This legislation was at a time where the dominant discourse in relation to Indigenous peoples was concentrated on separatism and to keep 'the white race pure' (Blake, 1998, p. 53). Those of mixed heritage were particularly at risk of being controlled under this legislation (Donovan, 2008). These racial based

ideologies continue to impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples cross-generationally today (Williams-Mozley, 2012).

The legacy of the past continues to contribute to the disadvantage Indigenous people experience currently. The research problem underpinning this project is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are still not achieving the same educational outcomes as their non-Indigenous peers (Department of Families Housing Community Services & Indigenous Affairs, 2013; Ministerial Council for Education & Affairs, 2010). The level of achievement in direct comparison to their non-Indigenous peers is a social justice issue and interlinked with the myriad of other areas Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people continue to experience disadvantage in. Whilst this brief background does not have the capacity to highlight the trauma and survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experiences of colonisation, the background must acknowledge the complexities of history and its contribution to current Indigenous educational disadvantage (Gunstone, 2012).

1.2 CONTEXT

The focus of this study will be a preliminary examination the role Principals are playing in alternative schools in Queensland in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to remain engaged in education. Alternative school sites are complex to define as they are incredibly diverse in nature (te Riele, 2007, p. 54). Defining alternative schools is discussed in depth in section 2.1 of the literature review. This research project is undertaken by an Aboriginal researcher who is a qualified teacher and is an experienced educator in flexi school settings. Though the link between current educational attainment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their engagement with alternative schools has not been formally

made through the literature, there is evidence of the need to explore this further through research.

1.3 PURPOSES

This study has multilayered purposes. Alternative schools in an Australian context are recognised as playing a significant role in the educational landscape yet there is limited literature on the role they are playing. The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of Indigenous participation in alternative schools in Queensland, an understanding of what Principals of alternative schools in Queensland report their knowledge is in relation to supporting Indigenous learners and what current practices the Principal is leading to support Indigenous learners in their school. Creating this new knowledge will gain insight into a phenomenon not explored previously through research and will support the direction of future research. This study seeks to contribute to developing an understanding of whether alternative schools are significant in the Indigenous education field and ultimately contributing to the policy agenda of ‘closing the gap’.

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE

There are several reasons why this research needs to be undertaken. Alternative schools provide vital pathways enabling disenfranchised young people to remain engaged in education (te Riele, 2012b, p. 5). Educational attainment and social well-being are inextricably linked; therefore it is in the national interests to explore a model of education that is engaging young people who have previously disengaged from mainstream education options (te Riele, 2012b). This is particularly significant in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who have been

identified through literature as being one of the most ‘at risk’ groups of disengaging from education (Ministerial Council for Education & Affairs, 2010).

National priorities outline the need to ‘close the educational gap’ for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and alternative schools are contributing significantly to this agenda; 46% of alternative schools are reporting that they are targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (Holdsworth, 2011, pp. 6-7). The link between how alternative education is contributing towards the ‘close the gap’ policy needs to be explored through research. Finally, the lack of empirical research and literature on the topic of alternative schools overall suggests the urgent need for research to be undertaken (te Riele, 2012b, pp. 39-41).

1.5 THESIS OUTLINE

This thesis contains a total of six chapters. The remaining sections of this thesis include chapter two: literature review; summarising the literature on alternative school settings, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in Australia and cultural implications of leadership in schools. Chapter three will discuss the methodology underpinning the project, how participants were selected, instruments used to collect data, research procedure and how the data will be analysed. Chapter four provides the results of the study. Chapter five provides the analysis, summarising the nine key findings that emerged. Finally, Chapter six discusses conclusions and summarises the implications of the study, practical implications, limitations and recommendations for future research.

2. Literature review

This chapter provides a review of the literature on the following topics: Alternative school settings (Section 2.1); Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education (Section 2.2) and cultural implications of leadership in school settings (Section 2.3). Section 2.1, alternative school settings will provide a summary of national and international literature on alternative schooling and will define alternative schools. Additionally, an analysis undertaken of research on alternative schools provides a summary of key themes that emerged from the analysis. Section 2.2 summarises the literature on Indigenous education in Australia. An analysis of the literature resulted in the identification of six key themes. The six key themes will be highlighted and linked to the analysis of alternative school research. Finally, section 2.3 explores the literature on school leadership and the absence of discussions of race. Critical race theory is highlighted as the theoretical framework of this study and contributes to the analysis and discussion of the literature on school leadership in this section.

2.1 ALTERNATIVE SCHOOL SETTINGS

Alternative education programs include schools, flexi schools or Learning Choices sites. These are all terms used to describe an emerging model of education in Australia. The aim of these programs or schools are to provide young people an opportunity to remain engaged in education outside of conventional schooling options (te Riele, 2012). te Riele (2007) discusses the problematic nature of defining 'alternative schools'. This is due to the sudden emergence of alternative schools and the diversity of programs on offer to young people (p.54).

The term alternative education in international literature describes all educational programs that would be considered outside the conventional or traditional educational system (Aron, 2006, pp. 2-3). The Learning Choices website, developed by the Dusseldorp Skills Forum was established to create a centralised space for anyone involved in alternative schooling in Australia (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2013). The Learning Choices website describes alternative schools or Learning Choices programs as “offering vital pathways to enable young people to remain in school or to return to complete their education in an inclusive, innovative and flexible setting” (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2013).

Defining and selecting language is significant to this study because of the sporadic nature of previous research undertaken in the field of alternative education. Alternative schools and flexi schools will be the language used inter-changeably throughout this thesis. This is the language selected by the researcher as most appropriate to this study. As a previous practitioner in alternative schools, this was the language used most commonly by young people and staff within this context.

Improving retention rates of young people in education has become a national priority in Australia (McKeown, 2011, p. 69). McGregor and Mills (2012) summarise factors affecting early school leaving including social/economic status; family circumstances; language and/or cultural barriers; Indigenous background; poor achievement and a wide range of school based factors (p. 844). Disengagement of young people from education results in significant short term and long term disadvantage (McGinty, Stemp, & Wilson, 2011, p. 33). Disconnection from school results in lessening the likelihood for young people to participate in further education and training. Thus, increasing the chances of reliance on government assistance of those non-completers and the chances of them earning significantly less than those

who complete year 12 or equivalent qualifications (Cain, 2012; McGinty et al., 2011). Furthermore, consequences of reliance on government assistance and lower income ranges can result in social dislocation and poorer health outcomes (McGinty et al., 2011, p. 34). The social and economic effects of disengagement are concentrated for those who already experience disadvantage, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (McGinty et al., 2011, p. 34).

The Australian Government identified the statistics on educational attainment of young people as a matter of concern and in 2009, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) set a number of ambitious goals (COAG, 2009). One goal was increasing educational attainment of young people to 90% by 2015 through a partnership agreement with the states and mandating full time education, training or employment until the age of 17 years (COAG, 2009). The COAG Education Reform specifically supports outcomes for disadvantaged young people including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Explicit goals in the agreement support the 'Close the Gap' policy aimed at halving the gap for Indigenous student outcomes in direct comparison to non-Indigenous student outcomes (COAG, 2009). The current policy agendas supporting retention of young people and specifically Indigenous young people, all highlight the urgency a focus on improving retention rates of young people in education. Government focus over the past couple of decades has resulted in an increase in alternative programs supporting young people to remain engaged in education (te Riele, 2007, p. 54).

An overview of the literature will provide an example of two typologies used to describe characteristics of alternative schools. The two models selected will be described and the strengths and weaknesses of each model will be explored. Model One, Raywid (1994) is a typology developed in the United States through a meta-

analysis of international literature on alternative schools. Model two, te Riele (2007) is a typology used pragmatically to map alternative schools in the state of New South Wales in Australia. A preferred typology will be selected for the purpose of defining schools within this research project. Additionally, emerging themes from previous research establishing what is known about alternative schools in Australia and internationally will also be reviewed.

Model 1, developed by Raywid (1994) defines alternative schools into three categories: popular innovations; last-chance programs and remedial focus schools (p. 27). Popular innovations, based on systemic transformative changes are usually larger schools doing things ‘differently’ (p. 27). Last-chance programs are when students are usually forced into the programs because they have exhausted their opportunities at conventional schooling options programs. Remedial focus schools usually concentrate on supporting students to re-engage with conventional schooling options (p. 27). Some alternative schools are acknowledged as encompassing more than one of these ‘types’ of alternative school characteristics (p. 27). Also emphasised is “the departure from bureaucratic rules and procedures” (p. 26) as a key feature of alternative schools, the focus in alternative schools being the individual needs of the young person.

Model 2, developed by te Riele (2007) who describes the mass of programs as leading to “confusion and inefficiency”, thus providing a considered framework in New South Wales to map “the alternative education landscape” (p. 54) in this State of Australia. The map will effectively encourage more collaboration for those working in the field. The mapping produces an effective two dimensional model. The first dimension is identified by the purpose of the program, essentially categorising programs based on the aim. This categorisation occurs through identifying if the

program is aimed at “changing the young person” or “changing the provision of the education provided” (p. 59). The second dimension is based on the “stability of the alternative program”, factors influencing this dimension include duration of the program and allocation of funding provided (p. 59). Within these two dimensions, te Riele provides four sections with further characteristics to describe the alternative school in order to place the type of program within this archetype.

Model 1, Raywid (1994) does provide a simplistic approach to categorisation of alternative schools, incorporating a wide range of literature internationally on alternative school settings. The challenge with use of this model in the context of this research project is the model fails to encapsulate the range of models operating in Australia. For example, Edmund Rice Education Australia, Youth + Flexi Schools schools “provide young people with a place and an opportunity to re-engage in a suitable, flexible learning environment” (EREA Youth + Flexi Schools, 2008). The EREA Youth + schools respond to communities by invitation, with the aim of providing young people who are disenfranchised the opportunity to re-engage in education. The schools are registered, delivering accredited curriculum with a range of practitioners delivering programs including registered teachers (EREA Youth + Flexi Schools, 2008). The EREA Youth + schools do not identify they are aiming at re-engaging young people back into mainstream, nor accept enrolments from young people who are forced to enrol as a last chance option. The schools are not existing, larger schools, doing things differently. This is one example of a larger network of alternative schools operating in Australia that is not recognised by the model offered by Raywid (1994).

Model 2 (te Riele, 2007) encapsulates the wide variety of alternative education programs on offer in Australia through the typology offered in the mapping of alternative education programs in New South Wales. te Riele (2007) is not so concerned with categorisation of the school to fit a particular model rather developing the typology to acknowledge diversity amongst alternative education programs by being able to place schools within the spectrum of the dimensions named. This model is particularly significant in providing researchers the ability to chart findings to this model as the sporadic nature of the literature relating to alternative schools provides challenges to researchers in more clearly defining the context of the research. This model will be employed and discussed further in the research design chapter. The following section of the literature review will discuss what is known about alternative schools through research in Australia and internationally.

In a report published on the Learning Choices website, Holdsworth (2011) identified the characteristics of alternative education programs and an estimate of how many young people are interacting with alternative schools across Australia. The scan included responses from 410 programs nationally, resulting in an estimated 4% of 12-17 year olds identified as being currently engaged in alternative programs (Holdsworth, 2011). All programs were asked to identify their target groups for participating in their programs, providing 13 options for selection. The most prevalent selection was “at risk of not completing education” at 86.1%. Second to this was “suspended/expelled from school” at 48.4% and the third highest target group was “Indigenous” at 44.7% (Holdsworth, 2011). Year 12 certificate or equivalent educational attainment for 20-24 year olds shows a 32% difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Department of Families Housing

Community Services & Indigenous Affairs, 2013). While the data is representative of Indigenous Australians still being significantly behind their non-Indigenous counterparts in educational outcomes (Department of Families Housing Community Services & Indigenous Affairs, 2013), the data from the national scan on alternative schools indicates that alternative schools are recognising this through including Indigenous young people as a target group within their programs. This is an important yet unexplored link.

Further to the national scan undertaken by Holdsworth (2011), a summary of what is known about alternative education in Australia and internationally will be discussed though empirical research on alternative schools is limited. There are some examples of small studies exploring the alternative school context in Australia, though varied in nature, all report similar positive messages about the role alternative schools are playing in the Australian education setting in supporting young people to remain engaged in education (Deed, 2008; McGregor & Mills, 2012; McKeown, 2011; Mills & McGregor, 2010; te Riele, 2007). National and international literature provides thematic patterns used to describe key features of alternative school environments. An emphasis on relationships (Lohmann, 2009; McGinty et al., 2011; McGregor & Mills, 2012; McKeown, 2011; Mills & McGregor, 2010; Morgan, 2013); a feeling of community and belonging to the school community (Lohmann, 2009; McGinty et al., 2011; McKeown, 2011; Mills & McGregor, 2010); and student voice and inclusion in decision making (McGinty et al., 2011; McGregor & Mills, 2012; Mills & McGregor, 2010; Richardson & Griffin, 1994) are all key themes that emerged from the small amount of literature available on alternative education settings.

It is evident through the literature that relationships are a significant feature of alternative schools. Though the research is sporadic in nature and the alternative schools featured in the studies diverse, all deliver the key finding of the prevalence of relationships as a key feature in the success of supporting young people to remain engaged in education in alternative school settings (Lohmann, 2009; McGregor & Mills, 2012; McKeown, 2011; Mills & McGregor, 2010). Further, McGinty et al. (2011) concluded that an emphasis on relationships should be the focus of an idealised alternative school after a review of the literature summarising best practice in alternative education settings. A feeling of community and belonging to the alternative school, also a key theme emerging from the literature, supports the significance of relationships. This is emphasised in the literature, where it is reported that relationships between young people and staff are a focus. However, the relationships are then extended on through the creation of community and a sense of belonging (Lohmann, 2009; McKeown, 2011). Mills and McGregor (2010) reported young people identifying “a sense of common purpose and community as significant elements of their alternative school environment” (p. 29). Additionally, McKeown (2011) reported the “concept of being part of a community as resonating” (p. 74) strongly with the young people in this study. Though diverse in its meaning for young people between studies (possibly due to the diversity in young people geographically and culturally in the cohorts), the concept of community and belonging is a prominent theme in the literature available. The final theme emerging from the literature, student voice and inclusion in decision making, is also clearly inter-linked with relationship and sense of community and belonging. The distinctness of this theme sits within the democratic style young people describe within alternative education settings in empowering young people to be involved in

critical decision making affecting them (McGregor & Mills, 2012; Richardson & Griffin, 1994).

Alternative schools are playing a vital role in the educational landscape (Cain, 2012; McGregor & Mills, 2012; McKeown, 2011; Mills & McGregor, 2010). There are serious consequences for young people that disengage from education who are already marginalised in society; a well-known reality for many Indigenous young people. Whilst there is no literature currently available that specifically outlines how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are engaged in learning in alternative schools, there is fragmented reports of high enrolments and alternative education providers specifically targeting Indigenous young people to participate in their programs (Holdsworth, 2011; McGregor & Mills, 2012; Ministerial Council for Education & Affairs, 2010; te Riele, 2007). A thorough search of the literature failed to locate any studies specifically on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interactions with alternative schools, however, the link between alternative schools and Indigenous education is important. The evidence discussed in section 2.2 suggests a relationship between known strategies to support educational attainment of Indigenous young people and the alternative schooling sector. This provides clear backing for the need for research.

2.2 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

It is well documented that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience disadvantage across a number of areas resulting in an urgent agenda from the Australian Government to address this disadvantage (Department of Families Housing Community Services & Indigenous Affairs, 2012). The National Indigenous

Reform Agreement, endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) used the comparative statistics available in relation to Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes and called for a framework for immediate action. This framework has been named the 'Close the Gap' campaign, where a collective, targeted approach has been taken toward Indigenous policy across a number of key areas (Department of Families Housing Community Services & Indigenous Affairs, 2012). The 'Close the Gap' framework has a number of areas for immediate action including life expectancy; infant mortality; education and employment.

There have been a number of targets set in relation to education specifically. In 2008, COAG set the targets in relation to education stating the gap would be halved in reading, writing and numeracy levels; all Indigenous 4 year olds in remote communities would have access to early education by 2013 and to halve the gap of Indigenous students attaining year 12 qualifications (Department of Families Housing Community Services & Indigenous Affairs, 2012). The Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report (2013) outlined the most current figure available in relation to educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. 53.9 % of Indigenous people, aged 20-24 years of age reported having completed year 12 or certificate II level qualifications. This is in direct comparison to 86% of non-Indigenous young people aged 20-24 years who reported having year 12 or certificate II level qualifications. Other plans supporting the goals outlined in the Close the Gap policy include The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 (Ministerial Council for Education & Affairs, 2010); the Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians 2008 (MCEETYA, 2008) and the National Partnership Agreement on Youth Attainment and Transitions (2009) (COAG, 2009). This literature review will identify factors

known to cause disengagement of Indigenous young people from education; key themes emerging from the literature on what is known to support engagement of Indigenous young people in education; the relationship between alternative school settings and educational outcomes of Indigenous young people and school leadership.

Purdie and Buckley (2010) reported the reasons for Indigenous disengagement as well documented through a wide range of literature. Strong connection to the failure of schools to recognise and value Indigenous cultures and histories; inability to fully engage parents, carers and community as well as the ongoing disadvantage Indigenous people's face daily are all recognised contributors to the current educational outcomes for Indigenous students (p. 3). As emphasised in the background to the research problem, history and colonisation of Australia is another significant contributor to Indigenous disengagement (Gunstone, 2012). In stark contrast to this, staff in education jurisdictions believe that parental attitudes are more influential in the outcomes achieved by students (Purdie & Buckley, 2010, p. 2). There is a clear paradox between what is understood through research to be the largest factors influencing Indigenous student disengagement and what is believed by predominantly non-Indigenous staff in education jurisdictions to be the cause of Indigenous disengagement. Whilst this gap in understanding remains, Indigenous young people continue to seek alternatives to remain engaged in education.

An analysis of the literature identified **six key themes** that emerged about what factors support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to remain engaged in conventional school settings. **Theme one**, schools nurturing cultural identity of students, highlights the active role of cultural identity and how it relates to school success. There are many scholars who state how essential it is for Indigenous

young people to be in an environment that nurtures, strengthens and supports their cultural identity as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Armstrong & Buckley, 2011; Kickett-Tucker, 2008; Purdie & Buckley, 2010; Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, & Gunstone, 2000; Rahman, 2010; Russell, 1999). The **second theme** is awareness and cultural competence of educators. This theme emerged through continual identification by authors of the need for educators, educational leaders and school staff to be ‘culturally competent’, for staff to have the cultural knowledge and skills to interact appropriately and support Indigenous students effectively. It is thought that if teachers were more culturally competent, they would be more likely to create environments supportive of Indigenous students and the ability to embed Indigenous perspectives into curriculum (Burton, 2012; Goodwin, 2012; Radich, 2012; Wanganeen & Sinclair, 2012). The **third key** theme is engagement with Indigenous families and communities. Engagement includes developing meaningful, authentic relationships and partnerships with Indigenous families and communities. This is necessary because historically and politically Indigenous people have been subject to paternalistic policies in Australia and relationships are key to supporting Indigenous involvement and decision making (Blackley, 2012; Buckskin, 2012; Burton, 2012; Dockett et al., 2006; Grace & Trudgett, 2012; C. Sarra, 2007).

The **fourth theme** is presence of Indigenous cultures in schools. Presence of cultures includes spaces such as outdoor learning spaces or yarning circles, bush-tucker gardens, visual Indigenous art work and display of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags. Also, Indigenous knowledges and perspectives embedded throughout curriculum (Dockett et al., 2006; Goodwin, 2012; Helme & Lamb, 2011; Sarra, 2011). The **fifth theme** is employment and presence of Indigenous peoples in

schools. This has been noted in the literature for some time, however, there is currently a national project called the “More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative” that highlights the critical shortage of Indigenous teachers and aims to address the shortage through a range of initiatives (MATSITI, 2012) It is imperative that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people be included in employment opportunities available in schools so Indigenous students see visually that schools value employing Indigenous peoples as well as having Indigenous perspectives included through the presence of Indigenous people (Buckskin, 2012; Grace & Trudgett, 2012; Malin, 1994; Rahman, 2010; Winkler, 2012). Grace and Trudgett (2012) do acknowledge on this point though that reliance on this strategy alone must be met with caution. This caution is in recognition that Aboriginal people have reported difficulties in engaging with Aboriginal families despite their Aboriginality. Finally, the **sixth theme** that emerged is the role leadership plays in outcomes for Indigenous students. Whilst most of the literature is not empirical research, many scholars (prevalently Indigenous scholars) agree that leadership does impact on engagement of Indigenous young people in schools (Blackley, 2012; Hughes, Khan, & Matthews, 2007; Jorgensen, Sullivan, & Grootenboer, 2012; Mason, 2009; C Sarra, 2007; Winkler, 2010, 2012).

Rahman (2010) discusses the notion that there is no one size fits all approach to engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, this is largely due to two key factors; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not a homogenised group and it has been argued that the research available on this is often localised and small scale for a particular group of Indigenous students (Purdie & Buckley, 2010). The aforementioned notion that one size does not fit all is important. However, it is imperative to note that the themes drawn out of the literature are based on

empirical research or experienced practitioners reporting higher levels of engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in education settings through the actions presented. The relationship between what is reported to support engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in education and alternative schools becomes clear through the themes emerging from the literature presented on alternative schools in section 2.1. The following diagram presents an analysis of the literature that demonstrated a clear relationship between the key themes emerging from the literature on engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners and alternative schools:

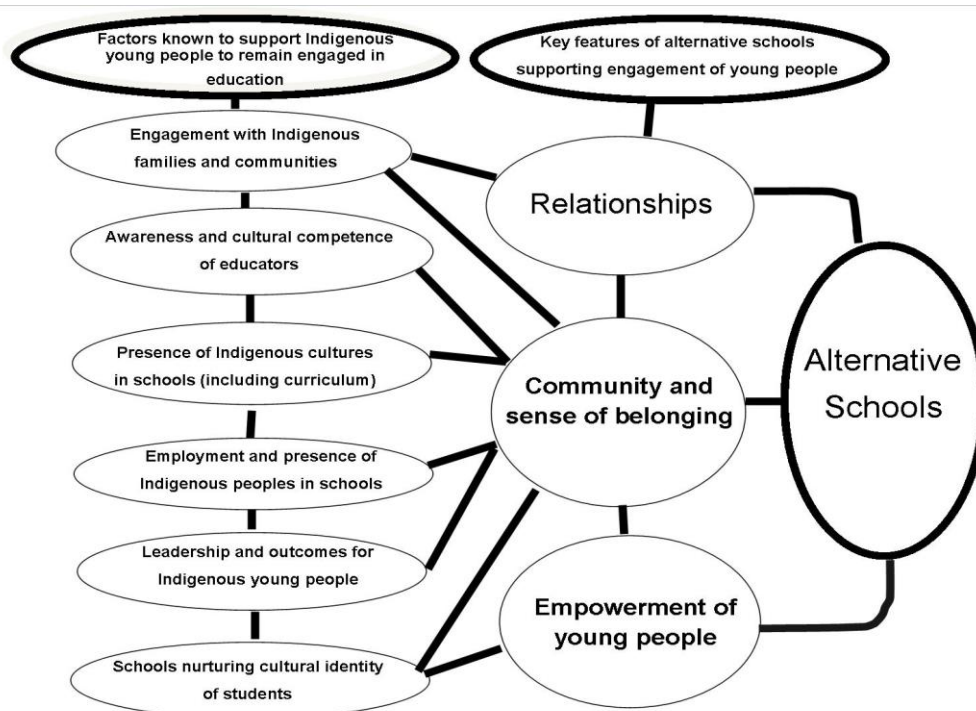


Figure 1 Alternative schools and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learn (Shay 2013)

The links illustrated in Figure 1 shows the relationship between what is known to support engagement of Indigenous learners with the three key characteristics emerging from the alternative schools literature. As there is no literature currently

that explicitly discusses the links, the diagram has been developed through synthesising the aspects of engagement of Indigenous learners through an Aboriginal lens and how they relate to an alternative school environment. ‘Engagement with Indigenous families and communities’ involves development of relationships between school staff and Indigenous families and communities, hence having a strong connection with the relationships focus of alternative schools and leading to a sense of community within the alternative school. ‘Awareness and cultural competence of educators’; ‘presence of Indigenous cultures in schools (including curriculum)’; ‘employment and presence of Indigenous peoples in schools’ and ‘leadership and outcomes for Indigenous young people’ are all closely connected to the focus on community and sense of belonging in alternative schools.

The literature on alternative schooling emphasises community and creating a sense of belonging. The known factors that support engagement of Indigenous learners would in practice also support this notion of community and sense of belonging. ‘Schools nurturing cultural identity of students’ has a clear relationship with the empowerment of young people and community and sense of belonging. Though it is currently unknown if alternative schools are enacting the six practices, it provides a focus for developing an understanding through this research project and future research. The focus of this research project is on the leadership of alternative schools in Queensland and developing an understanding of current practices in supporting Indigenous young people to remain engaged in education and the knowledge and skills of the Principal or lead teacher. The following section of the literature review will discuss the role of leadership in relation to educational outcomes for Indigenous young people.

Empirical based literature explicitly on the role of leadership and links to outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is limited. However, there is no shortage of professional published papers outlining stories from practice or sharing positive narratives from experiences in implementing initiatives aimed at focusing on leadership with the goal of improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners, as cited above. National initiatives such as Dare to Lead and Stronger Smarter Institute have highlighted the need for change to be led in relation to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners.

The Dare to Lead website provides an overview of the project and information of the projects history. As stated on the Dare to Lead website, Dare to Lead is a commonwealth funded national project, focusing on improving outcomes for Indigenous students (Principals Australia Institute, 2013). The project sits within the Principals Australia Institute that acts on behalf of its members and governs the overall implementation of the project. The Dare to Lead website information emphasises the role of school leadership in improving outcomes for Indigenous students. The flyer explains that the coalition is “not a program in the ordinary sense of the word” and continues to expand on this by explaining Dare to Lead is a network of support for school leaders providing peer support by those leaders who achieved success in Indigenous education initiatives and a range of professional development resources (Principals Australia Institute, 2013).

However, critics of this program argue that the reported outcomes of the initiative has not been based on empirical research thus not proving its effectiveness in improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Purdie and Buckley (2010) provided an evaluation of Indigenous education initiatives in Australia, including Dare to Lead. Purdie and Buckley highlight the

lack of evidence provided by Dare to Lead to support their claims of this particular initiative supporting outcomes for Indigenous students (p. 16). Conversely, whilst there is no empirical evidence available on this particular initiative, the generalised literature and empirical research on educational leadership and student outcomes is suggesting that teachers have the greatest impact and Principals thus have an influence on student outcomes through leading and supporting teachers (Coelli, 2012; Gurr, Drysdale, & Mulford, 2005; Jorgensen et al., 2012). This factor must be considered when critiquing the lack of empirical evidence of programs such as Dare to Lead, as well as the problematic nature of capturing a Principal's personal values such as social justice or attitudes in relation to their beliefs and values towards Indigenous people.

Another example of a national initiative focusing on leadership and improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is the Stronger Smarter Institute. The Stronger Smarter Institute website describes the Institute as “working with school and community leaders who are committed to creating Stronger Smarter realities for Indigenous children” (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2013). The Stronger Smarter website states the approach of the Institute is supporting transformational leadership experiences implemented through the leadership program to influence improved outcomes for Indigenous students through school and community leaders. There is a heavy emphasis on the philosophy underpinning the Institute, of “high expectations and excellent-oriented school cultures as well as schools supporting cultural identity as a strength” (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2013).

A summative evaluation of the Stronger Smarter Learning Communities (SSLC) project was undertaken in 2009-2012 by a team of researchers from Queensland University of Technology (Luke et al., 2013). The Stronger Smarter Learning Communities, part of the Stronger Smart Learning Institute though it is important to note the two have two different functions. The Stronger Smarter Institute is the overarching body that governs the delivery of a number of programs that support the ‘Stronger, Smarter’ approach and philosophy. The Stronger Smarter Leadership Program, developed to support leaders to foster high expectations, non-deficit approach to Indigenous learners, was the extension of the “Stronger Smarter Learning Communities” program. This program is based on the “communities of practice” (p. 53) model whereby it facilitates networks of schools who have committed to the ‘Stronger Smarter’ approach to learn from each other through regular communication (p. 55).

The review focused on providing a description of the operation and analysed the effects of SSLC and non-SSLC schools (Luke et al., 2013). The evaluation provided “the largest empirical data base on Indigenous education to date” (p. 1). The Stronger Smarter Evaluation by Luke et al. (2013) is particularly significant to this study because it provides an example of the only survey known to be developed in Australia aimed at gaining an understanding of what educators and Principals know in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities using rigorous empirical methodology (Luke, Shield, Theroux, Tones, & Ville-gas, 2012). Luke et al. (2012) highlighted the scarcity of published work on the measurement of educator’s engagement and knowledge of Indigenous communities. Further, the complex nature of how to measure the knowledge of a cultural ‘other’ is challenging (p. 8-9). The team of researchers developed a survey measurement

instrument, which provided data for the Stronger Smarter evaluation and valuable understanding of the understanding and knowledge of educators and Principals in a variety of conventional settings. The findings in relation to non-Indigenous educator's knowledge and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities was disquieting. Overall, self-reported levels of knowledge of educators on Indigenous culture, history and language appeared to be low (Luke et al., 2013, p. 4). Furthermore, engagement with Indigenous young people and Indigenous people generally was low, with only 13.5% of educators surveyed reporting that had visited an Indigenous student within their home (Luke et al., 2013, p. 145).

The findings of the Luke et al. (2013) Stronger Smarter evaluation are not dissimilar to that of other empirical studies broadly on the topic of educational leadership and links to student outcomes. Key finding 46 outlined that there was “no statistically significant SSLC effects on improved school level attendance” (p. 7). Yet, there are some differences in other important factors influencing student outcomes such as community engagement. Key finding 21 outlines “teachers in SSLC schools report higher levels of engagement with Indigenous communities and cultures than teacher in non-SSLC schools” (p. 4). Teacher's engagement with Indigenous students and communities in the study is reported to be low in the research findings. However, the reported increased engagement by teachers working in SSLC schools is a small but encouraging finding. The Stronger Smarter Evaluation is highly relevant to this study as it provides evidence of the need for further studies of this nature, particularly in a setting such as alternative schools where there has been limited research in examining the role alternative schools are having in engaging Indigenous learners.

There is enough evidence through small scale, case study research and literature based on anecdotal evidence to support the importance of strong leadership in improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (Blackley, 2012; Harbutt, 2007; Lewis, 2008; Mogensen, 2009; Wilkinson, 2009). Other identified themes such as schools nurturing cultural identity, competence of educators, presence of Indigenous cultures and peoples and engagement with families and communities are largely influenced by the philosophy, knowledge and attitude of the schools leaders. Therefore it is the intent of this research project to focus on the exploration of school leadership.

In summary, it is evident that through policy the Australian Government acknowledges that significant changes need to be made to support improved educational outcomes for Indigenous young people. Causal factors of disengagement are complex and intertwined within the post-colonial context of Australia. However, it is suggested that alternative education settings are contributing to supporting Indigenous young people to remain engaged in education. The literature on the role of leadership and its relationship with outcomes for Indigenous young people concludes that empirically there does not appear to be direct statistical linkage however other literature urges more investigation into the relationship between leadership and Indigenous student outcomes.

2.3 LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOL SETTINGS: CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

There is a large amount of literature broadly on the topic of educational leadership and its relationship to outcomes for all students. National and international studies

highlight the paradoxical nature of the literature and conflicting evidence depending on the nature of the study. In essence, the majority of studies have reported that students themselves, family and community context and teachers play the most crucial role in affecting student outcomes in schools (Brewer, 1993; Coelli, 2012; Gurr et al., 2005; Jorgensen et al., 2012). However, there is a wide body of literature that is focused on the role of educational leadership. The reason for such an emphasis on school leaders is the profound level of influence the leader of the school has in relation supporting teachers; overseeing curriculum design; supporting implementation of pedagogy supportive of students and the level of community engagement between the school and community (Blackley, 2012; Coelli, 2012; Gurr et al., 2005; Jorgensen et al., 2012; SA Aboriginal Education and Training Body, 2011). Although these studies support an indirect link to the role of educational leaders impacting on student outcomes, it is of importance to note that limited empirical studies factor in cultural impacts of leadership nor do they explore the impact that this may have on cultural minorities such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners.

Fitzgerald (2006) discusses the role of ethnocentrism in research that is carried out in exploring the relationship between school leadership and student outcomes. The study investigated the experiences of Indigenous women educational leaders from three countries; Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The study highlights the absence of culture in previous empirical studies on Principal effectiveness and the link to student outcomes through emphasising the unique positioning of the women in the study as both women and Indigenous Principals (Fitzgerald, 2006). Seldom do studies on educational leaders and their effectiveness seek to understand the cultural knowledge and standpoint of the subject (school

Principals) that results in an absence in the understanding of the cultural knowledge and practices of the Principal but it also fails to recognise the unique experiences of cultural minorities in dominant educational discourse. One example of Australian scholarship that names Whiteness of educators and critically discusses the implications of Whiteness in relation to school leadership and outcomes for Indigenous students, highlights this important point: “Rarely do white men or women leaders question their whiteness, whereas indigenous and other minority groups, as a consequence of their being ‘other than white’ are expected to explain their exclusion” (Blackmore, 2010, p. 45).

In Blackmore’s (2010) critique, the naming the cultural privilege that exists with being White, emphasises that there needs to be considerably more focus on leaders examining their own position and standpoint. In contrast to the focus in leadership literature on ‘transforming the Other’, Blackmore argues that schools are racialised spaces (structurally, culturally, implicitly in their values) (p. 52) therefore there is a critical need to transform leadership cultural discourses. Moreton-Robinson (2000) supports the stance that scholarship should announce Whiteness (if this is the standpoint of the author) as inherent in the epistemological, axiological and ontological lens of the author. In the context of educational leadership, this would promote the visibility of Whiteness and its relationship with power (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Also named is the avoidance and resistance by educators (pre-service and practising) of discussions related to race in education (Blackmore, 2010, p. 54). This phenomenon of resistance is known to contribute to the cause of significant issues in progression of minority racial groups in education (López, 2003; Phillips, 2011). The emergence of critical race scholarship coincides with an education policy environment that is being directed towards higher level

accountability on the individual's part in ensuring they are engaged in cultural learning. The selection of the theoretical framework underpinning this project was influenced by the need for more research that seeks to transform the dominant discourses related to the activity of current research. The theoretical framework used in this research project is critical race theory aimed to address this concern.

Critical race theory has been used effectively in education research to uncover stories from people who are 'other than White' to "identify, analyse, and transform structural and cultural aspects of education that maintain subordinate and dominant racial positions in and out of the classroom"(Solórzano & Yosso, 2002, p. 25) . The origins of critical race theory stem from a legal theory of how race and racism interact within law and the community (Brooks, 2008; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Critical race theory underpins the conceptualization of this research project as the researcher is an Aboriginal woman who is motivated by key principles of social justice and social transformation (Hylton, 2012). Indigeneity is relevant in the justification of theoretical positioning as research is a place of resistance and tension between western and Indigenous knowledges (Hylton, 2012).

The current policy environment requires educators to understand and know how to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people yet very little research uses a critical framework to explore the role of educators and leaders in relation to race and racism (Blackmore, 2010). An overview of the implementation of the new national teacher and Principal standards will summarise the new requirements of educators and Principals, specifically in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners. This summary will provide further context to the need for this study and the relevance of this study to current policy.

The implementation of the nationalised standards for teachers and Principals introduced a higher level of accountability in the requirements of educators in specifically supporting the needs of Indigenous learners (Ma Rhea, 2013). The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) developed the standards for teachers and Principals in consultation with the profession, systems and sectors with the aim of ‘promoting excellence’ in the profession (AITSL, 2011). The standards for teachers have the explicit inclusion of two standards focused on increasing knowledge and skills of teachers in relation to Indigenous learners. Figure 2 shows the two standards related to Indigenous learner, from a graduate to a lead standard:

Focus Area	Graduate	Proficient	Highly Accomplished	Lead
1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students	Demonstrate broad knowledge and understanding of the impact of culture, cultural identity and linguistic background on the education of students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds.	Design and implement effective teaching strategies that are responsive to the local community and cultural setting, linguistic background and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.	Provide advice and support colleagues in the implementation of effective teaching strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students using knowledge of and support from community representatives.	Develop teaching programs that support equitable and ongoing participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students by engaging in collaborative relationships with community representatives and parents/carers.
2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians	Demonstrate broad knowledge of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.	Provide opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.	Support colleagues with providing opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, Cultures and languages.	Lead initiatives to assist colleagues with opportunities for students to develop understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and languages.

Figure 2 National Teacher standards 1.4 and 2.4 (AITSL, 2013, pp. 2-3)

The standards for Principals have a focus on five professional practices: leading teaching and learning; developing self and others; leading improvement, innovation and change; leading the management of the school and engaging and working with the community (AITSL, 2011). The standards for Principals emphasise inclusivity, stating “All Principals have the responsibility to work with the members of the school community to ensure a knowledge and understanding of the traditional rights, beliefs and culture of our Indigenous peoples” (AITSL, 2011, p. 3).

Although the introduction of the standards supports other national agendas focused on improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students, there has been significant concern for the preparedness and resistance from the educational community (Ma Rhea, 2013). As mentioned previously, resistance for discussions of race in education is a known entity. Ma Rhea (2013) reported findings from a study undertaken on the new teacher standards in Australia that teachers have an “fear and resistance” to the inclusion of standards 1.4 and 2.4, further highlighting the need for a focus on practitioners in the quest to improve Indigenous student outcomes (p. 8).

The introduction of the AITSL teacher and Principal standards are of significance to this study. The accountability for teachers and Principals meeting the standards does not lie only with the individual. All Principals and education jurisdictions will need to ensure there are relevant, high quality professional development opportunities for education practitioners to engage in (Ma Rhea, 2013). It is exceedingly difficult to know what type of professional development or learning is required to achieve standards such as 1.4 and 2.4 when cultural knowledge and understanding is subjective. As is an individual’s understanding of the standards and how they relate to their own the individual’s epistemological standpoint. There is no homogeneity in understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contemporary

cultures as our cultures are incredibly diverse, rich and complex. There is a need, however, for education practitioners to know themselves; understand their culture and cultural experiences and critically reflect on the way this impacts how they see others and why (Phillips, 2012). It is this concept that underpins the approach to this project in that the study seeks to understand how Principals are supporting Indigenous young people to remain engaged in education and their representation of their understanding of how to support Indigenous young people in alternative education settings. This is in contrast to understanding the culture of Indigenous young people or why they are disengaging.

In summary, the cultural implications of leadership in education settings in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners is not often mentioned in Indigenous Education literature. Some suggestions by authors above propose the implication of whiteness as an exposition in the absence of critical race discussions in relation to Principal positioning in schools. Nonetheless, educational policy is moving towards greater explicit accountability in relation to outcomes for all students, including racial minority groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Through the implementation of the AITSL teacher and Principal standards, teachers and Principals now need to demonstrate their understanding and knowledge in how to support Indigenous young people to remain engaged in education. Using a critical race theoretical framework, this research project seeks to support principals of alternative schools. Participating in this research project provide space for Principals to gain an understanding of their current practices in supporting Indigenous young people in their schools, identify what they would like to be doing more of and what barriers are preventing them from doing so.

2.4 IMPLICATIONS

The literature provides insight for what is known to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in conventional schooling and what is causing disengagement, a direct correlation between both disengagement and engagement evident. Though there is an absence in the literature in relation to how alternative schools are supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to remain engaged in education in alternative settings, there is evidence that alternative schools are providing young people vital opportunities to re-engage with education with some reported success (Holdsworth, 2011; McGregor & Mills, 2012; Mills & McGregor, 2010; te Riele, 2012b). Using the research from the literature review, the researcher was able to develop a diagrammatic link (see Figure 1) demonstrating a potential relationship between the key themes that emerged from the literature on what supports engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in education and the key features of alternative education settings. Figure 1 illustrates the need for research to be undertaken to explore this relationship through research.

Additionally, the implementation of the AITSL teacher and Principal standards demonstrate a shift in policy expectations of teacher and Principals. The AITSL standards emphasise the need for educators to demonstrate their skills and knowledge in relation to effective teaching and learning for Indigenous young people though Ma Rhea (2013) expresses concern for the resistance and lack of preparedness for the implementation of the standards. This research seeks to support current Principals or school leaders of alternative sites in developing further self-awareness of their current practices in engaging Indigenous young people and provoking thought for further improvement.

3. Research design

This chapter defines the design implemented by this research to achieve the goals and process objectives stated in Section 1.3 of Chapter 1. Section 3.1 discusses the methodology to be used in the study; Section 3.2 details the participants in the study; Section 3.3 lists all the instruments to be used in the study and justifies their use; Section 3.4 outlines the procedure to be used and the timeline for completion of each stage of the study; Section 3.4 discusses how the data will be analysed; finally, Section 3.5 discusses the ethical considerations of the research and its potential problems and limitations.

3.1 METHODOLOGY

The epistemological underpinning to this qualitative study is Indigenist epistemology and constructivism. Indigenist epistemology recognises Indigenous knowledge stems relational theory, whereby “ways of knowing is to know your stories of relatedness” to your people and country (Martin, 2012, p. 82). Indigenist epistemology will work alongside a western constructionism view, that knowledge is not discovered but it is constructed (Crotty, 1998). As an Aboriginal researcher, Indigenist epistemology has influenced the conceptualising of the project and will continue to influence how the data is analysed. However, this project is framed on a western methodology therefore it supports rigour to name both western and Indigenist ways of knowing that have influenced the researcher. Theoretically, critical race theory will also provide the framework that will support provision of process and context in the analysis of the data.

Survey methodology will be used for this research project, using a web based questionnaire as the method for data collection. Survey methodology is an established methodology proven to be efficient in investigating issues related to trends, attitude, beliefs and practices (Creswell, 2008). There are several advantages to using survey methodology, particularly in a small scale project such as this research project (Mertler, 2002). This is a qualitative study because the analysis of short answer responses remains focused primarily on the descriptive questions and the qualitative information that will emerge from these. Numerical demographic data will emerge. However, this will be analysed from the research paradigm of interpretivism and will use the qualitative data to focus the meaning of the demographic data from the respondents and analysis from the researcher (Punch, 2009).

Lin (1998) argued that positivist and interpretivist research can co-exist and even complement each other. The reason for incorporating some quantitative demographic data is because demographic data specifically about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interactions with alternative schools does not exist from earlier research. Therefore it is essential to help provide context for this research project and provide direction for further research. The quantitative data can produce a positivist “causal relationship”, summarising what exists logically and factually (p.164). Further, employing an interpretivist paradigm will support exploration of “causal mechanism” or how the relationship between the quantitative and qualitative data exists (p. 165). It is emphasised that whilst this research project is a qualitative study, using a survey methodology has enabled a small amount of quantitative data such as enrolment numbers to emerge. Lin (1998) supports surveys as a method for collection when positivist and interpretivist qualitative methods are being used

because open ended questions can accompany quantitative questions. This is followed by caution, however, that the depth of qualitative data is best supported by traditional methods such as interviewing. This is acknowledged and will be discussed further in the limitations section.

Due to the short time frame for data collection and analysis for this project, a web based questionnaire has been developed with the express purpose of being time and cost efficient, as well as fitting with the overall design of the project (Creswell, 2008). This is a cross-sectional survey design, aimed at finding the trends, attitudes, beliefs and practices of this group at this particular time (Bishop, Berryman, Wearmouth, Peter, & Clapham, 2012). Cautions outlined with survey methodologies such as inability to reach participants or participants access to the internet are not issues in this case because of the demographics of the participants being Principals or lead teachers of schools (Creswell, 2008). It is safe to assume that this group will have access to the computer. The open-ended questions in the survey design allow participants to provide data required to answer the research question ‘How are leaders in alternative schools in Queensland supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to remain engaged in education?’.

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

Purposeful sampling is the most common term used for qualitative research aimed at describing a phenomenon in a particular group; in this study Principals or lead teachers of flexi schools in Queensland. Homogenous sampling is used in this project as the sampling will involve selection of participants focusing on two characteristics; being a Principal or lead teacher and being in a flexi school context in Queensland (Creswell, 2008). Alternative schools are defined in the literature as an emerging

model of education in Australia providing young people an opportunity to remain engaged in education outside of conventional schooling options (te Riele, 2012b). For the purpose of identifying participants for this study, the national website developed by Dusseldorp Skills Forum 'Learning Choices' was used to develop a list of potential participants who registered on the national database as offering an alternative educational program for young people. The Learning Choices website provides an overview of programs by selecting 'listing view' (Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2013). The webpage acknowledges the diversity in programs but states that all listings have the following in common:

- young people can attend by choice;
- they offer general education at secondary school level, enabling young people to achieve recognised credentials;
- they aim to adapt the offer of education to suit the young people who attend.

(Dusseldorp Skills Forum, 2013)

Further, the listing contains the option to filter searches through a number of criteria including age group, program duration, credential, program target group and program activities. In selecting participants for this study, the filter was used to select participants through choosing 'a program of one year or more' and 'at risk of non-completion in the target group'. The reason for the selection of 'a program of one year or more' is due to te Riele's (2012) discussion defining alternative schools, alternative schools can be either short term programs or longer term options offering accredited learning outcomes. This study is framed around the principle of alternative school settings and supporting the concept that alternative education settings are as valid as educational providers as conventional school settings. The

Learning Choices website emphasises the diversity of the programs that identify as ‘alternative’, yet many of the programs are short term options with the goal being that young people re-engaged with conventional schooling options. By selecting the option ‘a program of one year or more’, this eliminated short term programs that are usually a short term remedy for young people who have disengaged as opposed to an alternative school setting. Selection of target group ‘at risk of non-completion’ links closely with the review of the literature which delineated how Indigenous young people are much more at risk of non-completion than their non-Indigenous peers therefore the target participants are ideally schools which identify their target group as such.

Te Riele is a significant contributor to the literature on alternative schools in an Australian context (te Riele, 2010, 2011, 2012a, 2012b). te Riele (2007) developed a typology discussed in the literature review that is ground breaking in the emergence of the field alternative school research in an Australian context. The typology distinctly covers the breadth of ‘alternative education’ opportunities available to young people in the state of New South Wales in Australia, discussed in depth in section 2.1 of the literature review (te Riele, 2007). Figure 3 is a map of educational alternatives developed by te Riele and is mapped into four quarters:

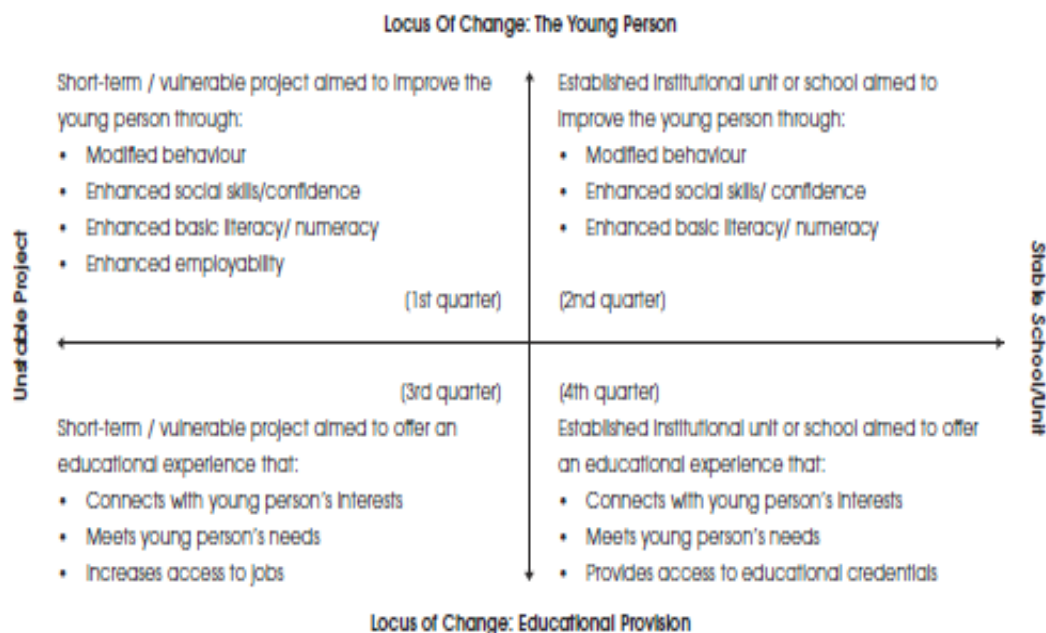


Figure 3 Map of educational alternatives for marginalised youth (te Riele, 2007, p. 59)

The selection of participants for this research project has been concerned with stable schools/units. The two criteria selected ‘program of one year or more’ and ‘at risk of non-completion’ through the Learning Choices database. This selection ensured a variety of established schools or units that place them in either the second or fourth quarters. It is difficult to ascertain whether the locus of change was on the young person or the educational provider though nine of the eighteen who were sent the survey link to participate were EREA Youth + Flexi Schools. A publication by Edmund Rice Education Flexible Learning Centre Network (EREFLCN) in 2008 indicated that this network of schools would be categorised into the fourth quarter of (te Riele)’s typology. The EREFLCN described their programs as operating on common ground through principles with young people; emphasis on staff and young people relationships; flexible pedagogy to suit young people and provision of state

and national curriculum as well as nationally accredited vocational education and training courses (EREA Youth + Flexi Schools, 2008). This operationalizes EREA Youth + Flexi schools as being described as a stable school or unit with the locus of change on educational provision.

Three categories of schools were identified and invited to participate in this study: Edmund Rice Education Australia Youth + Flexi Schools; other alternative schools either registered independently or attached to an independent school or organisation and schools linked through partial funding arrangements or attached to Education Queensland schools. EREA Youth + Flexi Schools have nine schools located within Queensland. EREA Youth + Flexi Schools required additional internal ethics approval before approaching schools to participate. This was granted August 20 2013. EREA Youth + Flexi Schools are the largest network of alternative schools in Australia and required ethics approval as does Education Queensland. The other category of schools were emailed independently with the assumption that should they require further ethics approval, they will respond with this action as a requirement. An ethics approval to Education Queensland was submitted August 20 2013 requesting nine Education Queensland schools identified through the Learning Choices website as alternative schools to participate. Education Queensland state their processing time as a minimum of six weeks. Education Queensland did not respond to the ethics application and after seven weeks it was decided there was not enough time to pursue this approval in time to complete this research project.

3.3 INSTRUMENTS

An electronic survey was used to collect data for this research project. The web based survey was administered through Survey Monkey, an established online survey collection program (Survey Monkey Inc, 2013). This method was selected over sending to participants via email to assure participants anonymity and security of the data collected (Mertler, 2002). Web based surveys are known for time and cost efficiency (Fan & Yan, 2010; Mertler, 2002) as well as protection against loss of data (Mertler, 2002). It is acknowledged that there are potential disadvantages of using web based surveys though these potential issues have been addressed where possible. For example, Mertler (2002) raised sampling as a potential issue in reducing the probability of the sample. This is not an issue for this research project as this study targets a specific participant and all identified as Principals or lead teachers of alternative schools in Queensland were invited to participate. Another example is participants not being able to access computers or not having the capacity to answer the questions. This is not an issue for this research project as all participants are Principals or lead teachers and it is a requirement of their position that they are literate and have access to ICT and basic skills.

All of the questions were developed after an extensive review of the literature and are clearly aligned to the literature. A combination of close-ended questions and open-ended questions were used to collect data to answer the three sub-questions of this research project (Dawson, 2007). Appendix 1 (page 85) is a whole version of the survey that participants completed. Theoretically, critical race theory has underpinned the design of the survey. Critical Race Theory is by nature concerned with the emancipation of minority groups (such as Indigenous Australians) through acknowledging racialised privilege and uncovering the role of racism in structures

such as schools (Hylton, 2012; López, 2003; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Critical Race Theory can be “a tool through which define, expose and address educational problems” (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 7). The survey questions were framed to provide Principals the opportunity to critically reflect or uncover any notions of power relations or race in relation to their own practices in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Critical Race Theory and how it relates to this research project is discussed in depth in section 2.3 of the literature review. Table 1 demonstrates the three sub questions of this research project, how these questions aligned to the survey questions and links to the relevant literature:

Research sub-questions	Survey questions	Link to literature
What is the context of the alternative school site?	<p>Q2. Does the local community where your flexi school is located have an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population higher than the national 3% average?</p> <p>Q4. How many staff are employed at your flexi school?</p> <p>Q6. The flexi school site I lead has the following total number of young people enrolled</p> <p>Q9. Please provide the number of staff who are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander along with their employment status</p> <p>Q11. Is your flexi school site located in a low socio-economic area?</p> <p>Q12. Please provide the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people enrolled in your flexi school site, alongside your total enrolment figure. For example, 33 out of 98 young people enrolled identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander</p> <p>Q13. Choose a location which best describes your flexi school site location as described by the Australian Bureau of Statistics</p>	<p>(Holdsworth, 2011): national scan of alternative school identified a large number (44.7%) of alternative schools are ‘targeting Indigenous young people’ to participate in their programs indicating there may be high participation of Indigenous young people. The scan failed to capture data specifically on Indigenous enrolments however. This literature supports the need to capture this data for the purpose of exploring the high number of alternative schools targeting Indigenous young people and gaining an understanding of what the actual participation rates are with some other demographic information to provide context.</p> <p>(te Riele, 2012b) ‘A Map for the Future provide a summary of research undertaken in alternative schools in Australia to date and provides a number of recommendations for future research. Recommendations 3 and 13 support the data collected for this research sub-question and will be discussed further in the analysis.</p>
What knowledge/understanding does the Principal/site leader have in relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people?	<p>Q7. Select an answer which best describes your knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities</p> <p>Q8. I have gained my understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities through:</p>	<p>(AITSL, 2011, 2013) The new national standards for Principals and teachers require registered teachers to have both understanding and knowledge about Indigenous cultures and communities as well as skills in how to effectively teach Indigenous students.</p> <p>(López, 2003) theoretically, critical race theory underpins the framing of this question providing opportunity for discussion of race and racism (safely and only if participants choose to) as well as interrogating systems and leadership positions which traditionally privilege certain groups.</p>
What are the current practices of the site leadership in supporting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people?	<p>Q3. Describe your understanding of how much your staff know in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities</p> <p>Q5. I actively encourage staff to nurture and strengthen the cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people</p> <p>Q10. Are you actively engaged with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families who are enrolled at your flexi school? For example, do you have parents or family members involved in activities within the school? Do you meet outside of the school with young people and their families on a regular basis?</p> <p>Q14. Do you engage with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community where you flexi school site is located? For example do you meet regularly with local Elders?</p> <p>Q15. Does your flexi school site celebrate events such as NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee)?</p>	<p>Practices supported by literature:</p> <p>Nurturing and strengthening cultural identity (Armstrong & Buckley, 2011; Kickett-Tucker, 2008; Purdie et al., 2000; Rahman, 2010; Russell, 1999)</p> <p>Engaging with Indigenous young people, their families and communities (Blackley, 2012; Buckskin, 2012; Burton, 2012; Dockett et al., 2006; Grace & Trudgett, 2012; C. Sarra, 2007)</p> <p>Presence of Indigenous cultures (physically and through curriculum) (Dockett et al., 2006; Goodwin, 2012; Helme & Lamb, 2011; Sarra, 2011)</p>

Table 1 survey question design: link to the literature

Ensuring rigour was a priority in the development of the questions. Dawson (2007) provides some important contemplations for survey design. The following were key considerations to ensure rigour and effective response rates: making survey as short as possible; ensure respondents will be able to answer questions; not assuming knowledge; start with easy questions; mix question formats; don't cause anger/offence/frustrations; avoid words with emotional connotations; avoid words with multiple meanings; avoid leading questions and provide all possible responses in closed questions (pp.93-103). Additionally, piloting the survey was undertaken to ensure the format would obtain results required (p. 99). The survey was piloted to three people including a senior staff member of a cluster of alternative schools (ineligible to participate). Respondents were sent a link to the Survey Monkey site and the survey was then administered through survey monkey.

Response rate

A total of nineteen Principals of alternative schools in Queensland were invited to participate in completing the survey. Eight completed responses were received. The response rate to the survey administered for this study 42%. Babbie (2013) discusses the general issues in relation to response rates and suggests that the survey would most effectively sent to respondents directly and with a deadline for participation. This is how participants were approached to complete the survey for this study. Cook, Heath, and Thompson (2000) provide an example of expected response rates through their meta-analysis undertaken on survey response rates. The findings of

their analysis of mail surveys found a mean response rate of 39.69% (Cook et al., 2000). A typical response rate reported for electronic surveys is 15-30% (Cook et al., 2000) with no follow up though it is proposed that response rates may even double if reminders are sent (Cook et al., 2000; Fan & Yan, 2010).

There have been several studies exploring the complexity of survey responses (Sax, Gilmartin, & Bryant, 2003; Schwarz, 2007; Witte, Amoroso, & Howard, 2000). Fan and Yan (2010) provided a summary of three theories that examine the decision of participants to complete surveys. The first, social exchange theory, is in relation to whether participants decide whether “rewards of responding will the anticipated outweigh costs” (p. 136). The second, social psychological theory is explained as “heuristic based on peripheral aspect of the options” (p. 136). Finally, leverage-saliency theory is about examining different aspects of the request to complete the survey and how weight is assigned to these different aspects (p.136). How these theories have potentially influenced the response to the survey will be discussed in the results section.

PROCEDURE AND TIMELINE

Participants were selected as outlined in *Section 3.2 Participants*. The three categories of alternative schools were: Edmund Rice Education Australia/Youth +Flexi Schools; Education Queensland Flexi Schools and other alternative schools either registered independently or attached to an independent school or organisation. Each organisation was approached differently according to their protocols with a request for the Principal or site leader to complete the survey online. The timeframe for data collection was a four week period between August and September 2013. The survey was live during this period where any participants could respond to the

survey. All organisations were approached with respect to their ethical research protocols. Each organisation has different requirements in undertaking research in the schools:

Education Queensland required the submission of an ethics application. The ethics application submitted August 20 2013. A response to this application was received on the 23rd of November. The response was well outside of the six week response that was indicated on the ethics application form. The alternative schools administered by or attached to Education Queensland are not included in this study because of the late response to the ethics application.

Edmund Rice Education Australia/Youth + The National Executive of EREA Youth + met initially to discuss the research project and tendered his support for access to all EREA Youth + Queensland Flexi School sites. An official ethics application was approved with EREA Youth + and a senior staff member was assigned the contact person. The research project information sheet, email to participants and link to the live survey were sent directly to the senior staff member. These were then sent by the senior staff member to participants (*n*9). There was no direct contact between the researcher and participants.

Other alternative schools either registered independently or attached to an independent school or organisation. All of these alternative schools sites (*n*10) were emailed directly by the researcher. It was assumed that if the school required further ethical clearance that the researcher would be notified. Participants who responded by email and indicated they would like to participate were then sent the live survey link via email. None of the schools in this category responded that they required ethical clearance further to the University ethics approval. No reminder emails were sent from the researcher.

3.4 ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis is used to analyse the data for this project. Thematic analysis is a common choice for qualitative researchers and there is no set way that researchers approach thematic analysis. However, there is a common definition identified in the literature for thematic analysis. This definition is that thematic analysis is a method that identifies, analyses and reports themes or patterns of data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Liamputtong, 2009; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Braun and Clarke (2006) provided a six phase model for thematic analysis of qualitative data. This model will be used to analyse the data for this project. Additionally, the epistemological lens is Indigenist and constructionism. Critical race theory will also influence the analysis of the data. A summary of each phase will be provided:

Phase 1: familiarising yourself with your data refers to the immersion of the researcher into the data. This includes reading repeatedly and initially searching for patterns and themes from the beginning of this process. This process is latent and involves taking extensive notes and initial thoughts.

Phase 2: generating initial codes this phase has the researcher begin the coding process, identifying features from the data. The codes develop from the researcher's knowledge of the research question and what appears most interesting to the researcher.

Phase 3: searching for themes this phase provides a focus for sorting the codes developed in phase 2 to themes. There may be a variety of codes that fit into one theme. This phase may include the use of mind maps and table to chart the themes with the codes.

Phase 4: reviewing themes where themes are refined into the significance and relevance to research questions and may be expanded or broken down into separate themes. This phase will provide clear direction in relation to themes for further analysis.

Phase 5: defining and naming themes after phase 4, clear themes will be mapped and will be ready to define and analyse. A detailed analysis of each individual theme will be undertaken in this phase and how this fits with the overall project. Essentially, this analysis phase brings each theme together to create a whole description of what emerged from the data.

Phase 6: producing the report writing the findings of the analysis is the final phase of this model. Evidence of the themes that emerged will be report in the results section of the thesis. A detailed analysis will be supported by an ‘analytical narrative’ to support the story in relation to the research question. (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87)

3.5 ETHICS AND LIMITATIONS

Positionality is significant in relation to the ethics of this project because of two factors. Firstly, the role of power in this project as in all research projects is significant (O’Leary, 2010). What is unique about power relations in this project is the implication of cultural positioning and the use of critical race theory which has shifted traditionally imbalanced power discourses in relation to research concerning Indigenous people. Historically, research undertaken about Indigenous Australians has been undertaken by non-Indigenous researchers imposing cultural bias and excluding Indigenous peoples from our rights to own our knowledge and tell our stories (Martin, 2012). It is argued that the use of critical race theory and Aboriginal

directed research will shift the balance of power and changing the focus away from the 'racialised other' will only serve as transformative and deconstruct notions of power (Martin, 2012). By naming this, it answers any questions of neutrality and transparency in relation to bias and assumptions (O'Leary, 2010).

This research project was considered a low risk project in relation to ethical approval (ethics approval number S/13/477). This project focused on leaders in alternative schools knowledge and practices in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The research project has no deliberate contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, it is acknowledged that the project is of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly those young people and their families who have interacted with an alternative school setting. As an Aboriginal researcher, a deep understanding of the importance of ethics in Indigenous research is foundational to how this research project has been undertaken. Martin (2008) emphasises the importance Aboriginal research and the inclusion of Aboriginal worldviews, knowledges and values in shifting older notions being the researched to informing and transforming research as a tool for emancipation for our own peoples. It is this notion that influenced the shift of emphasis on the 'Other' being researched to the 'Other' conducting the research on the dominant structure. It is also a significant strength of the project that the research was undertaken by an Aboriginal researcher.

A major limitation of this study is that the research question 'How are Principals or site leaders of Alternative schools in Queensland supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to remain engaged in education?' is only being answered by Principals or site leaders. O'Leary (2010) discusses the issue of only hearing one voice that can attribute to data through the lens of only a particular

group. Ideally, the voices and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders young people, their families, communities and staff would have informed answering the research question to ensure more valid data set from a range of sources as well as un-silencing the voices of Indigenous peoples from research (Hylton, 2012). From an Aboriginal research perspective and a critical race theory perspective; this was a major concern not including these voices. However, due to the size and time limitations of this research project, it has not been possible to include these voices. This is a major consideration for future study.

Furthermore, the methodology selected is another limitation of this study. Whilst there are a number of benefits in using survey methodology, one of the issues is that there are limitations on the depth of the data provided by participants in surveys. Lin (1998) discusses the challenges of relying on survey data without face-to-face interaction with participants. Lin argues that the data provided by participants during interviews or observations provides a far greater insight, particularly if the topic is complex in nature. To limit the impact this may have, assurance to participants of anonymity was emphasised as well as care in the architecture of the survey to ensure all participants could provide as much level of detail to support their answers.

4. Results

The results of this research will be presented through a combination of quantitative graphs and a summary of responses to open-ended questions. Each survey was assigned a code R1 – R9. Selected demographic data is reported with the assigned codes though the use of the codes has been avoided where possible to maintain anonymity of participants. A total of 19 alternative school Principals were invited to participate in the survey that resulted in 8 respondents. The total response rate for this survey was 42% and this rate is considered higher than the suggested average of 30% in the literature (Cook et al., 2000; Mertler, 2002). Rigour is of importance and there a number of considerations in relation to response rates. Firstly, social exchange theory proposes all participants consider whether the reward to participating outweighs the cost (Sax et al., 2003). The environment and context of alternative schools are incredibly complex and the role of Principal or lead teacher can be demanding of individual time and resources. For participants to give up their time to complete the survey, when they were offered no financial or other reward for participating may indicate that the participants who completed the survey saw the value in undertaking the survey in relation to their own practices and knowledge in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. This is despite the ‘resistance’ (Ma Rhea, 2013; Phillips, 2011) reported about educators and compulsory discussions and learning in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures.

Secondly, the heuristic notion behind social psychology theory (Sax et al., 2003) and whether participants would complete the survey also indicates that there is

interest from response group to have discussions and reflect on their practices in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Leverage-saliency theory explains participant's choice to complete the survey influenced by aspects of the request and how these are weighted (Sax et al., 2003). To discuss this would only lead to speculation as there was no specific question on this survey for participants to answer directly, however, as mentioned previously there is noted resistance to discussion about race in relation to leadership (Blackmore, 2010). Resistance could be noted as a possible reason for the remaining 60% of participants who did not complete the survey, particularly at a time when all educators need to prove their competency in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners through the national teacher and Principal standards (AITSL, 2011, 2013). The quality of the responses will be discussed in throughout the analysis section.

Research results will be presented according to the three research sub-questions:

1. What is the context of the alternative school site?
2. What knowledge/understanding does the Principal/site leader have in relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people?
3. What are the current practices of the site leadership in supporting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people?

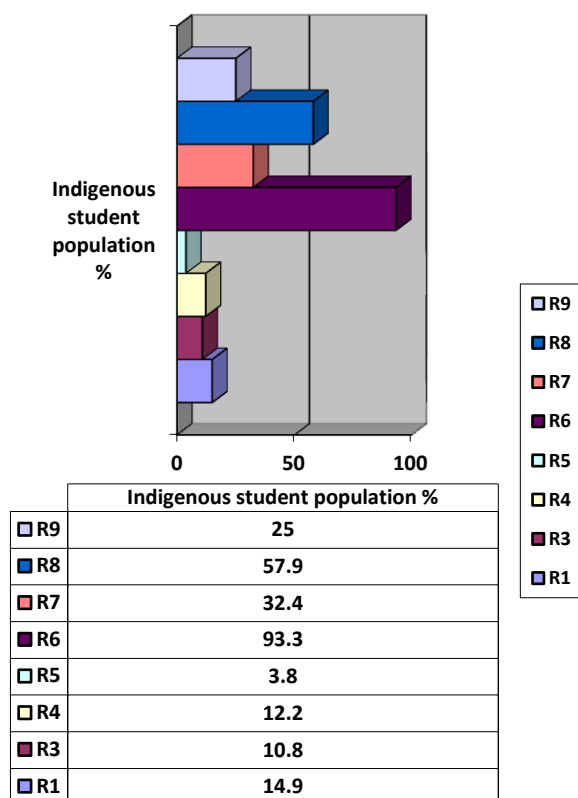
Alternative school site context

This section will outline the data gathered to provide an overview of the number of Indigenous enrolments in this study; the size of staff and ratio of Indigenous staff of this sample; geographical demographic of this sample and socio-economic status of the community the school is located in. Table 2 is a statistical summary of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments within this study. This data is central to providing context to the two further research questions.

Total enrolment figures from each school were collected as well as the number of young people who identified as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander. These figures created Indigenous enrolment statistical population figures for each site. The statistical enrolment figures for each site ranged from 3.8% to 93.3% of young persons enrolled identifying as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander. Table 2 shows the figures for each site, coded by the respondent numbers assigned from survey monkey. The table displays the statistical enrolment figures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for all sites. The average number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people enrolled in alternative schools in this study is 31.3%.

Table 2

Percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolments for each site

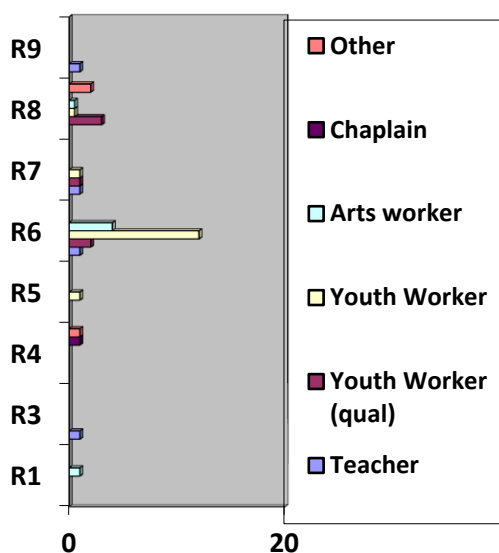


The data collected on staff size was the total size of staff; how many of those staff were Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander people; the positions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff held and whether those staff held formal qualifications. Total staff numbers from each school were collected as well as the number of those staff who identify as Aboriginal and or Strait Islander. Table 3 displays the numbers of staff who identify as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander as well as their position. This table also displays the whether those who are employed in youth worker positions hold formal qualifications or do not hold formal qualifications. This data was then calculated using the total number of unqualified Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander staff to those identified as having formal qualifications. This resulted in a calculation of 61.3% of the Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander

workforce in this sample as not holding formal qualifications. Additionally, the data generated identified that 50% of schools surveyed have a qualified Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander teacher on staff. The average number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to non-Indigenous staff is 29.56%. This number was calculated by the total number of non-Indigenous staff to the total number of Indigenous staff in this sample. This data is displayed using the survey codes.

Table 3

The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at the alternative school site and their positions



	R1	R3	R4	R5	R6	R7	R8	R9
Other			1				2	
Chaplain			1					
Arts worker	1				4		0.5	
Youth Worker				1	12	1	0.5	
Youth Worker (qual)					2	1	3	
Teacher		1			1	1		1

The geographic location of the sites varied, though there were more sites who selected urban areas than rural and remote. 62.5% of respondents selected that they are situated in an urban location; 12.5% of respondents selected that they are situated in rural location and 25% of respondents selected that they are in a remote location. The data on the socio-economic status of the location of where the schools are situated reported that 87.5% or seven out of eight respondents selected that they are located within a community of a low socio-economic status.

Knowledge/understanding of the Principal/site leader in relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

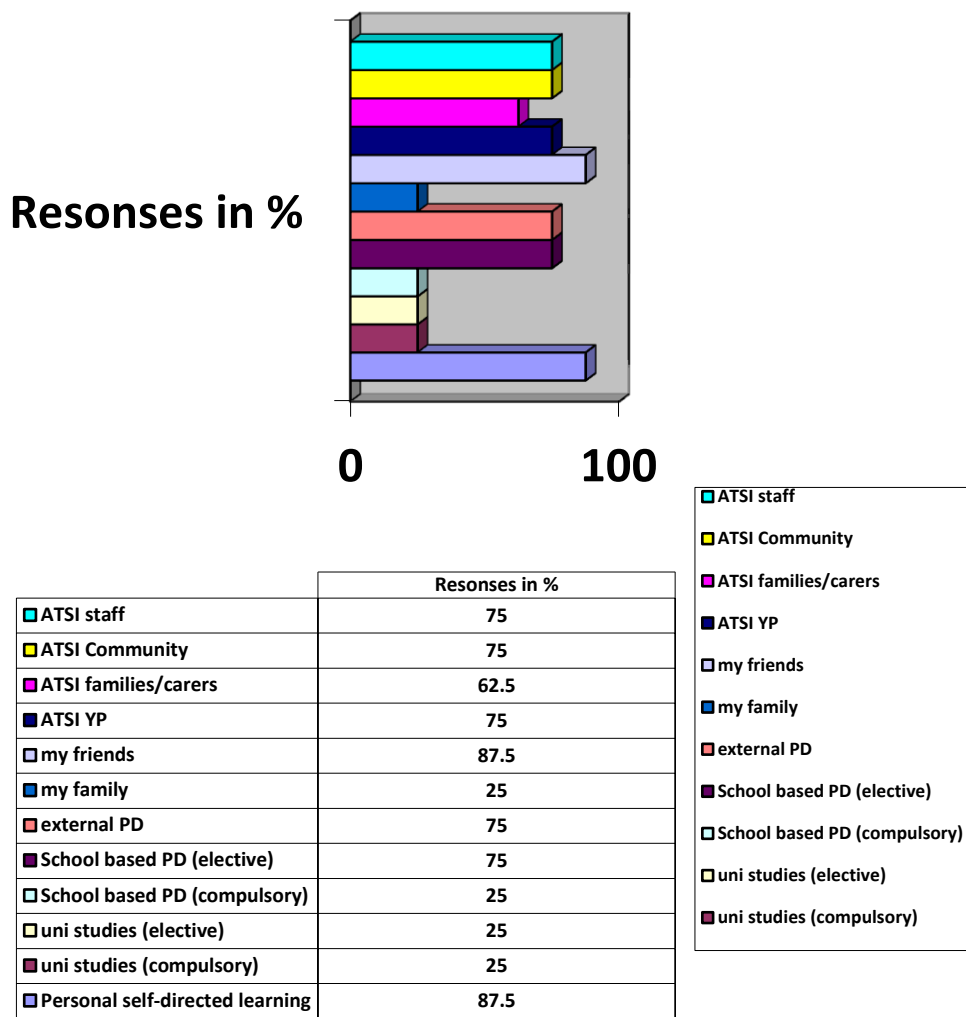
The results of this section will outline the data gathered to present the respondent's description of their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities and how respondents have engaged in cultural learning. Table 4 is a visual summary of the responses to the survey question on how respondents are engaging in cultural learning, including sources of learning and whether the engagement was elected by respondent of compulsory.

The survey tool included a question on how respondents report their own knowledge in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities. The answers included limited, okay, I am continually learning, good and excellent. Respondents were only able to select one of these answers. 62.5% of respondents selected I am continually learning; 12.5% selected limited; 12.5% selected okay and 12.5% selected excellent.

Sources of cultural learning of respondents were ascertained through the survey question on how respondents they have gained their knowledge or understanding of Indigenous cultures and communities. Respondents then selected relevant answers that described how they have engaged in learning. The options of responses included learning from Indigenous staff; Indigenous community; Indigenous young people; Indigenous families of young people enrolled; friends; family; external professional development; school based professional development (elective); school based professional development (compulsory); university coursework (elective); university coursework (compulsory) and personal self-directed learning.

Table 4 outlines the raw data, organised into percentage of responses from the whole sample. The most prevalent sources of cultural learning were personal, self-directed learning and friends, with 87.5% of respondents indicating that they engage with both of these sources for cultural learning. Additionally, 75% of respondents also indicated that they gain their knowledge of Indigenous cultures and communities from Indigenous staff; Indigenous community; Indigenous young people; external professional development and school based professional development (elective). The data showed that 25% of respondents are engaging with university studies, compulsory and elective as source of cultural learning. 25% of respondents also indicated that have engaged in compulsory school based professional development as a source of cultural learning.

Table 4
Respondent sources of cultural learning



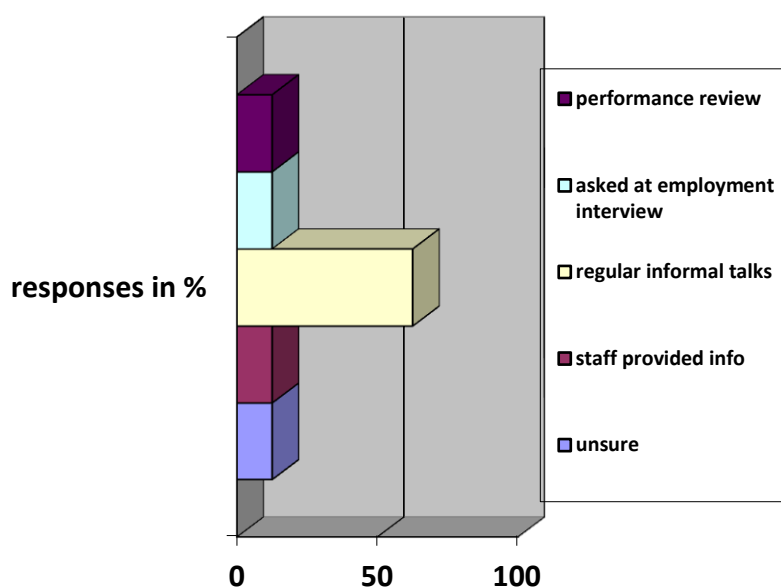
The current practices of the site leadership in supporting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

This section will outline data that will summarise the findings of how respondents gain an understanding of their staff's knowledge of Indigenous cultures and communities; practices of respondents in strengthening and nurturing the cultural identity of Indigenous young people; reported engagement with Indigenous young people and their families; reported engagement with local Indigenous communities and the practices of celebrating cultural events. Table 5 will provide a graphical summary of how respondents gain an understanding of their staff's knowledge of Indigenous cultures and communities.

How respondents are gaining understanding of staff knowledge in relation to Indigenous cultures and communities was an inclusion within the survey questionnaire. Respondents were asked to select responses most relevant including at staff performance review; asked at employment interview; regular, informal discussions; information staff provide and unsure. Table 5 outlines the responses statistically. 62.5% of respondents indicated they know what their staff's knowledge is through regular, informal discussions. A further 12.5% for performance review; asked at employment interview information staff provide and unsure was reported.

Table 5

How respondents gain an understanding of their staff's knowledge of Indigenous cultures and communities



	responses in %
■ performance review	12.5
□ asked at employment interview	12.5
□ regular informal talks	62.5
■ staff provided info	12.5
■ unsure	12.5

The data reported that 100% respondents are actively encouraging staff to nurture and strengthen the cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The question asked respondents to further support their answer by providing examples of activities and practices in place to support and strengthen the cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and factors enabling them to undertake these activities.

Four themes emerged from the responses:

Community involvement and engagement (R #1,4,7,9)

Culture in curriculum (R#5,8)

Cultural activities (R#5,6,7,8,9)

Cultural celebrations (R#4,5,7)

Additionally, encouraging staff to access cultural professional development, cultural learning and cultural resources were responses from two respondents. One respondent mentioned the practice of welcome to country and acknowledgement of country. One respondent mentioned that they are part of the 'dare to lead' program. One response related to the identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people but was answered elsewhere. The respondent commented that 'many young people choose NOT to differentiate themselves despite minimal encouragement'.

The section on respondent's engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families produced mixed responses. Three of the eight responses selected no, though two of these three had selected yes and no. The final respondent who indicated no selected the yes box to respond to this though clearly indicated no. When respondents selected no they were asked to provide information about what barriers existed for them in undertaking engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people at their school and what might enable them. Barriers identified include having no Aboriginal staff available to do this; finding appropriate activities to engage and transport and time.

Respondents who selected yes (*n*7) most prevalently stated the school meetings and invitations to families to the school was how they are engaging. Further, two respondents indicated that home visits have occurred and this has been related to attendance issues. Other responses that were unique to other responses include making decisions with young people; a parent and community engagement position has increased engagement and brings families to the school more; involvement is the same for all community members and respondent has supported young people and their family in court.

Responses to the survey question about engagement with the local Indigenous community are disproportionate because one respondent elected yes and no and provided qualitative responses for both. For the three respondents who selected no, limited data was provided in response to the question asking what is preventing participant from engaging with local community and what resources would enable them. Responses include ‘the chaplain meets with ATSI community elders on a regular basis’; ‘not regularly’ and ‘lack of understanding as to appropriateness of attending community meetings and awareness of possibilities and over reliance on Indigenous staff to develop and maintain these community relationships’.

The respondents who selected yes gave a variety of responses when asked to provide examples of engagement activities and what enabled them to. Three respondents mentioned attendance of events, celebrations or activities as examples of engagement activities. Other responses include having Elders on staff; sporadic attendance to community; school developed a reconciliation action plan with the community and that engagement with community was a priority for their site.

The practice of celebrating cultural events provided a 100% response of yes; the school site does celebrate cultural events. The question asked respondents to provide examples. Five respondents stated they celebrate NAIDOC; three respondents stated they have an event for Sorry Day and a further four respondents said they celebrate cultural activities including Aboriginal bush tucker cooking, visits to outside celebrations, community discussions, information sessions, acknowledgement and an Aboriginal art workshop. One respondent selected yes though stated they leave this up to individual classes as to what events they celebrate.

5. Analysis

The analysis section will be presented through an analytical narrative in the same format as the results section. In total, there are nine key findings that emerged through the analysis of the data. The analysis will include a discussion with reference to the literature in relation to the three research sub-questions:

1. What is the context of the alternative school site?

Key finding one: there is a high percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people enrolled in schools surveyed.

Key finding two: there is a high percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in the schools.

Key finding three: the majority of the schools are located in low socio-economic areas.

2. What knowledge/understanding does the Principal/site leader have in relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people?

Key finding four: the strong willingness of Principals' in this study to engage in self-directed learning in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Key finding five: limited demonstration of understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities.

3. What are the current practices of the alternative school leadership in supporting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people?

Key finding six: the most prevalent practice of Principals' in this study is the celebration of cultural events and cultural activities.

Key finding seven: limited Principal engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, their families and the local community.

Key finding eight: the practice of alternative schools provides limited support and nurturing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young person's cultural identity

Key finding nine: Principals' are relying heavily on informal discussions with staff to know what their staff's knowledge and skills are in relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Alternative school site context

Key findings one to three will be discussed in relation to the context of the alternative school sites. **Key finding one** is that there are a high percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people enrolled in schools surveyed; **key finding two** is the high percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in the schools and **key finding three** is the majority of schools are located in a low socio-economic areas. The study provides some milieu of Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander young people and their interactions with alternative schooling in a Queensland context. As this data was unable to be located in the literature and the sample size does not represent the total population, the discussion on this demographic data emphasises that this data is not generalizable. O'Leary (2010) states the role of population data is important though it needs to be emphasised that it is only representing the population that is surveyed. The strength in collecting this data is that it provides some knowledge of a sample of the total population of alternative schools in Queensland and provides direction for further research. However, it is stressed that this is a small sample and not generalizable to ensure credibility of the claims (O'Leary, 2010).

Key finding one was the high enrolment number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The highest enrolment figure was at 93.33% and the lowest figure 3.78%. The lowest enrolment number was still higher proportionately to the wider national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population as this particular site indicated they were not in a location that had a population of 3% or higher. The average number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people enrolled in the alternative schools in this sample is 31.3%. There is no comparative sample to liken this figure to. This data represents a breadth of diversity of this alternative school sample in factors such as location, socio economic status and the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.

The 2011 Australian census data indicated a 4.2% population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland and an estimated average of 3% of the national population (ABS, 2011). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young person enrolment in secondary schooling options in Queensland is 7.97% of Education Queensland Schools (Department of Education Training and Employment,

2013a, 2013b) and 3.4% of the enrolment of Queensland Independent Schools (Independent Schools Queensland, 2013). These figures were calculated by using the data reported on whole student enrolment numbers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student enrolment numbers in secondary schools in Queensland. It is acknowledged that these data sets are not comparable to the small sample collected for this project. However, what this data presents is an accurate representation of actual enrolments in state government and independent schools in Queensland. On initial observation, the data set in this study indicates that the overall enrolments could be significantly higher than both the state and independent school enrolments. The sample collected for this project indicates that there would be significant benefit in undertaking the same sample for all alternative schools in Queensland, as well as nationally, to be able to provide an accurate understanding of the level of participation.

Whilst there is considerable caution taken in making claims beyond this study, the data from this sample indicates a high level of participation and supports the need for further exploration of this phenomenon through research. As much of the literature on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education remains centred in deficit discourses focused on non-participation rates, there is value in exploring a model of education that appears to providing opportunities for significant numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to engage in education.

Key finding two is the significant number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed. The data captured allowed for an analysis of how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff were employed in proportion to non-Indigenous staff, providing a figure of 29.56%. This figure encapsulates staff across all roles including qualified teaching staff and qualified and unqualified youth

workers. As in the first major finding, there is no data for comparison. Winkler (2012) reported on a forum held to discuss the diverse and demanding role of 'Indigenous Educators', a term used to describe a role held in schools by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia. The role is usually an appointment at a local level where the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is responsible for a range of duties in the school ranging from individual student support, family and community engagement (a vital link to local families and community) and in some cases, anything to do with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or cultures (Winkler, 2012). Malin and Maidment (2003) provided data in 2003 that summarised figures of Indigenous staff employed as 'Indigenous Education Workers'. The figures reported were one to every thirty three Indigenous students in state schools and one to every twenty one Indigenous students in non-state schools (p. 90). These figures demonstrate that the staff ratios found in this study are significantly higher than those reported by Malin and Maidment (2003). Effectively, what Winkler (2012) reported was that often, Indigenous Educators are the only Indigenous staff members of a school community. The data represented in this study demonstrates significant representation in diverse roles while the literature is reporting a contrasting trend in conventional schools across the country.

The data also uncovered that 50% of the sample had equal representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Additionally, 50% of the sample had at least one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher employed on site. The employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, in particular teachers, is vital in supporting outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in conventional settings (Malin & Maidment, 2003; Reid, Santoro, Crawford, & Simpson, 2009; Santoro, 2011). A

national project called the 'More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teacher Initiative' was implemented in 2012 to address the critical shortage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in Australia (Patton, 2012). Lampert and Burnett (2012) reported that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers represent less than 1% of the teacher population in schools nationally. Despite this trend, this small sample revealed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher population in this sample of schools is 3.47%. Though it is unknown if this is linked to the high participation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in this sample, the data provides some knowledge of employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, producing information that has been previously unknown in the literature. This may also provide support for future research on the association between the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in alternative school settings.

Additionally, the data from this sample indicated that 63.1% of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff across all of the sites survey did not hold any formal qualifications. The role of the Indigenous educator is dynamic and diverse; yet the person is often without qualifications and not provided adequate opportunities for growth and development (Winkler, 2012). Alternative schools can be incredibly complex spaces to work within. Without further contextual information with this finding, it is difficult to know whether there are development opportunities available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in alternative schools. However, this finding also provides evidence of the need to explore this phenomenon in alternative school contexts through further research.

Key finding three is that seven out of eight respondents indicated they are located in low socio-economic areas. Alternative schools are reported in the literature to be providing vital pathways for young people to remain engaged in education (Deed, 2008; McGregor & Mills, 2012; Mills & McGregor, 2010; te Riele, 2007). These are young people that have previously disengaged from conventional school settings (McGregor & Mills, 2012). Therefore, the finding is consistent with the research that links poverty as a key feature of educational attainment in young people (McGregor & Mills, 2012). In a national scan undertaken on alternative schools in Australia, Holdsworth (2011) reported that 86% of programs or schools surveyed indicated that ‘at risk of non-completion’ were the target group for their programs or schools. Holdsworth’s scan did not ascertain the socio-economic status of the schools location, nor the young people enrolled. The target group of ‘at risk of non-completion’, however, does reveal yet another link with the findings of this study and the summary of research that links socio-economic status as an indicator of educational attainment.

In summary, the three key findings of the alternative school context in this study was the high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people enrolled, the high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed within the alternative school sites and the high number of alternative school sites located in low socio-economic areas. This provided a small empirical insight into the level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in alternative schools in Queensland. Further, it provides some context for the analysis of the knowledge and understanding of the Principal in relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and the current practices of the sites leadership in supporting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.

Knowledge/understanding of the Principal/site leader in relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

Key findings four and five outline findings that emerged in relation to the knowledge and understanding of the Principal or site leader in relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. **Key finding four** is the strong willingness of Principals' in this study to engage in self-directed learning in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. **Key finding five** is limited demonstrations of understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities. Both of the findings will be analysed and discussed with reference to the literature presented in chapter two.

Key finding four, the strong willingness of Principals' in this study to engage in self-directed learning in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures will be discussed. This finding is evidenced by the 62.5% of respondents who reported that they are continually learning in response to the survey question asking respondents to best describe their knowledge in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities. Further, 87.5% of respondents reported personal, self-directed learning as a source of their on-going professional development in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners. The majority of respondents selected that they are continually learning and that they are actively engaged in self-directed learning is a positive finding, particularly as Ma Rhea (2013) highlights the challenges facing educators as the new teacher standards are implemented. Ma Rhea (2013) discusses the level of "fear and resistance" (p.10) expressed widely by educators on the implementation of Australian Professional Standards for teachers, 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander students and 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (AITSL, 2013). The finding in this study indicates openness by the respondents through the selection of 'I am continually learning' and additionally by the strong response to the question related to how Principals' are sourcing their own learning. As avoidance and resistance are known to influence how non-Indigenous educators and leaders interact with Indigenous people, the data from this study suggests that this sample of Principals' are less affected by avoidance than what is discussed in the literature (Ma Rhea, 2013; Phillips, 2011). This is further supported by the participation rate of this survey at 42%, significantly higher than the 15-30% reported in the literature of being a typical response rate to electronic surveys (Cook et al., 2000).

Key finding five is the limited demonstrations of understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities. The survey instrument in this study did not ask direct questions about knowledge. However, the survey did ask respondents to provide examples as well as what enabled their practices and what were their barriers. This finding is supported by the responses to a number of questions asked that were linked to literature on what is known to support engagement of Indigenous learners. Overall, there was insufficient evidence in the responses that would support that there was more than a surface level of understanding within this group of Principals' about Indigenous cultures and communities.

There are two observations specifically that have resulted in the conclusion of this key finding. The survey questions were directly linked to the literature on what is known to support Indigenous young people to remain engaged in education in

conventional settings. The questions were then framed to ask if Principals were doing this or supporting this practice in their schools. Though there are responses to all questions, and many responses indicated that their answer was yes, the responses did not support that the respondent had a sound understanding of the question. For example, one question was 'I actively encourage staff to nurture and strengthen the cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, answer yes or no with further information'. One hundred percent of respondents selected yes to this question. Yet, the further information provided indicated that their selection of yes was predominantly framed on the practice of cultural celebrations and cultural activities.

There is sufficient evidence that supports the notion of the need to support and strengthen the cultural identity of Indigenous young people to increase improved educational outcomes (Kickett-Tucker, 2008; Purdie et al., 2000; C Sarra, 2007; Wanganeen & Sinclair, 2012). Kickett-Tucker (2008) published findings of a study on the importance of identity and sense of self of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The study emphasised the complexity of contemporary Indigenous identity and the importance of language and how language is interlinked with identity. Purdie et al. (2000) also emphasises that language is integral to the nurturing and strengthening cultural identity of Indigenous young people, as well as inclusion of family and wider community; inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in curriculum; cultural activities and role models. The responses to the question on strengthening and nurturing cultural identity of Indigenous young people did not include any mention of language. Moreover, the responses included extremely limited mention of curriculum and no mention at all of positive Indigenous role models. The majority of responses indicated that respondents understood that

strengthening and nurturing the cultural identity of Indigenous young people was primarily focused on cultural celebrations and activities, such as NAIDOC. Whilst cultural celebrations are a small part of what the literature describes as supporting the cultural identity of Indigenous young people, this is only one small component of what is effectively a complex task.

The second factor is responses overall suggested that there are prevalent western ideologies within the responses indicating that some of respondents do not have an understanding of Indigenous perspectives on some of the practices. For example, one survey question asked respondents if they are actively engaged with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families at the their school. The data appeared to suggest that there was pervasiveness of engagement that occurs at the school. One respondent even commented that they are engaging because they invite parents to come to the school though the parents rarely accept the invitation. Though some responses were supported by statement such as ‘I actively encourage families to come to the school’ or ‘invitations to the school’, there was a clear emergence from the data that Principals are expecting that Indigenous young people and families need to come to the school to engage with staff.

There is evidence in the literature that there is an urgent need for educators and leaders to engage in more authentic partnerships with Indigenous students and their families (Blackley, 2012; Buckskin, 2012; Burton, 2012; Grace & Trudgett, 2012; C Sarra, 2007). There is also a shift in discourse in relation to engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In recognition of historical policies that continue to impact on Indigenous young people and their families, and the power imbalance that exists as a result (Burton, 2012), there is a need for educators to be prepared to meet outside the school grounds. In the landmark study of the knowledge

and understanding of Indigenous cultures and communities of educators in conventional school settings, Luke et al. (2012) reported that only 13.5% of the educators surveyed in this study had reported visiting an Indigenous student at their home. This was identified as an issue of concern, particularly as “there can be no “cultural interface” (Nakata, 2004) in education if the face-to-face contact between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians outside of the institutional zones of schools is negligible” (Luke et al., 2012, p. 47). Another example of the western pervasiveness in the responses to this particular question was that ‘there were not any Indigenous staff available’ to engage with the families. This issue is consistent with what Grace and Trudgett (2012) identify as the continual reliance on Indigenous staff to be undertaking activities such as engagement with families. This is particularly concerning ideology as it effectively aims at removing personal responsibility of educators onto Indigenous staff (Grace & Trudgett, 2012).

In summary, there are two key findings that emerged in this section, the strong willingness of Principals’ in this study to engage in self-directed learning in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the little evidence supporting that Principals’ have a deeper understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities. It is acknowledged that the findings are not conclusive and are based on the data provided by the respondents of this survey. However, the first key finding on the willingness of Principals’ in this study is encouraging indicates that the issue of fear and resistance (Ma Rhea, 2013) is not as predominant as it is reported to be in conventional educational settings. The second finding, the limited demonstrations of understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities suggests that further development on cultural

understanding and knowledge would be beneficial to the alternative schools in this study.

The current practices of alternative school leadership in supporting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

Key findings six to nine will be discussed in the analysis of the current practices of alternative school leadership in supporting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. **Key finding six** is that the most prevalent practice of Principals' in this study is the celebration of cultural events and cultural activities. **Key finding seven** is that Principal engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, their families and the local community is limited. **Key finding eight** is the practice of alternative schools in this study in supporting and nurturing the cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people is limited. **Key finding nine** is that Principals' are relying heavily on informal discussions with staff to know what their staff's knowledge and skills are in relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. The four key findings will be analysed and discussed with reference to the literature presented in chapter two.

Key finding six is that the most prevalent practice of Principals' in this study is the celebration of cultural events and cultural activities. The celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures through hosting events such as NAIDOC and Sorry Day at the school appeared strongly throughout the responses to all questions including those unrelated to the question. There is considerable evidence in the literature supporting the practice of celebrating culture and cultural events, resulting in outcomes such as strengthening cultural identity in traditional

white hegemonic spaces (Kickett-Tucker, 2008; Purdie et al., 2000). However, Goodwin (2012) argues that ‘cultural competence’ must go beyond ceremonial events and shift educators practices to include on-going professional reflection and cultural learning. It is possible that the reliance of cultural celebrations and activities to ensure the engagement and inclusion of Indigenous young people in alternative school settings is because of limited resources. The dominance of this practice of Principals’ within this study is considered a positive finding as cultural activities and celebrations have the capacity to contribute to addressing a number of issues such as strengthening cultural identity and inclusion of Indigenous cultures into curriculum. However, as the new AITSL standards outline, there is a policy requirement of educators to move beyond these practices to engage more meaningfully with improving their own knowledge and skills in relation to working with Indigenous students (AITSL, 2013; Buckskin, 2012).

Key finding seven is that Principal engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, their families and the local community is limited. 75% of respondents selected yes to the question of whether they regularly engage with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community where the alternative school site is located. Despite the strong response indicating that respondents are engaging with local Indigenous communities, the information provided about what their current activities did not support this. The majority of respondents indicated that their engagement with local communities was through cultural events or activities. There was no specific information further to indicate whether these interactions were on the school site or within the local community setting. However, developing partnerships and engaging meaningfully with the local community is necessary to improve relationships between the school and the local community to directly benefit

Indigenous young people (Burton, 2012; Grace & Trudgett, 2012). The nature of these relationships needs to be founded on mutual goals; sustainable, long term relationships; trust; shared responsibility and an openness of the non-Indigenous person/s to work differently with Indigenous people (Burton, 2012, p. 7).

Blackley (2012) argues that in western education systems where the dominance of Whiteness in leadership is rarely questioned or disrupted, there is an urgent need for educators to critically reflect on their own standpoint to have any chance of understanding the cultural 'other'. Martin (2012) asserts that Aboriginal knowledge is epistemologically and ontologically in conflict with western knowledge systems. It is evident that through the responses to these questions, this conflict is at play. Whilst the respondents believe they are engaging with local Indigenous communities because they are interacting with Indigenous people at cultural events, an Indigenous perspective on engaging with community is in contrast with this view. There is not a homogenous Indigenous view on what engagement with community should look like, however, there is evidence in the literature that Indigenous people have urged that non-Indigenous leaders and educators engage in meaningful, authentic partnerships that may require engagement outside of their normal roles (Burton, 2012; Grace & Trudgett, 2012; C. Sarra, 2007).

Key finding eight is that the practice of alternative schools in this study in supporting and nurturing the cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people is limited. Key finding eight was used as an example in the discussion following key finding five, outlining the limited demonstrations of understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities. There is evidence in the literature that recognising, nurturing and strengthening cultural identity of Indigenous young people is a critical part of the practices schools need to embrace to

improve outcomes for Indigenous young people (Kickett-Tucker, 2008; Purdie et al., 2000; C Sarra, 2007; Wanganeen & Sinclair, 2012). Purdie et al. (2000) describes this task for educators and schools as both vital and complex. Yet, the responses to this question in the survey focused on celebration of cultures, only one small aspect of what it means to strengthen and nurture the cultural identity of Indigenous young people (Purdie et al., 2000). It is therefore imperative this key finding is considered in making recommendations for professional development for alternative school Principals.

Key finding nine is that Principals' are relying heavily on informal discussions with staff to know what their staff's knowledge and skills are in relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. Luke et al. (2012) emphasises the complexity and difficulty in measuring cultural exchanges and an individual's knowledge of Indigenous cultures and place. This finding is therefore not considered alarming. However, it is useful for alternative schools to be aware that Principals' are relying heavily on informal discussions to gauge what their staff know in relation to supporting Indigenous students at their sites. The implementation of the new AISTL standards will emphasise the responsibility of cultural learning to the educator themselves. However, as Ma Rhea (2013) highlights, there is concern in relation the assessment educators in relation to standards 1.4 and 2.4. Therefore, consideration must be given to systemic practices in relation to ensuring staff engaged in cultural learning.

In summary, there are nine key findings that emerged through the analysis phase of this study. The key findings highlighted important information that has been previously unknown in the literature. The limits of the data are acknowledged.

However, the key findings from this study will provide direction for future studies on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interactions with alternative schools.

6. Conclusions

This section will summarise key conclusions drawn from this study; implications; implications for practice and limitations. These will inform recommendations to be made for future research. The key conclusions to be discussed are: the high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and staff in alternative schools in this study; Principals' strong willingness and self-efficacy in developing cultural learning; demonstrations of knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities of Principals' in this study appear to be limited and practices appear to be focused on cultural celebrations and activities.

The high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people enrolled in this sample of alternative schools has significant implications and practical implications. The implication of high enrolments is firstly considered to be a positive and encouraging finding. The literature presented throughout this thesis emphasises the significant educational disadvantage Indigenous young people are experiencing. Yet, this study has found that Indigenous young people are over-represented in alternative schools within this sample of alternative schools. This is considered positive and encouraging because there appears to be a model of education outside of conventional schooling that is providing opportunities to significant numbers of Indigenous young people to remain engaged in education.

The practical implications of this finding are enormous. As this study has highlighted that the alternative schools appear to have large numbers of Indigenous young people enrolled, the practical implication is then that Principals' and staff have high levels of cultural competency to ensure the best outcomes are being achieved for this cohort of young people. Though a key conclusion of this study is that Principal's willingness and self-efficacy appeared strong, the conclusion that there were limited demonstrations of knowledge in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities is a significant practical implication. Very limited numbers of Principals' in this study reported they had been engaged with compulsory professional development or cultural learning therefore a recommendation emerging from the practical implication is that a specific cultural learning program for Principals or leaders of alternative schools be developed in implemented. This recommendation will directly benefit the large numbers of Indigenous young people enrolled in the schools as well as increasing the Principal's capacity to lead staff to better support Indigenous young people enrolled at their school.

The key finding that practices appeared to be focused on cultural celebrations and activities is similarly intertwined with the practical implication mentioned above. The finding is considered partly positive as celebrating cultures is considered to be an important aspect outlined in the literature on engaging and supporting Indigenous young people in education settings. However, this is only a small part of what is known to support Indigenous young people and reliance on cultural celebrations can distract from more complex issues such as competence and responsibility of educators; the importance of Indigenous knowledges throughout curriculum and the significance of strengthening and nurturing cultural identity in school spaces. The practical implications of this conclusion are entwined with the conclusion of limited

knowledge of Principals' on Indigenous cultures and communities. Therefore a recommendation for practice remains centred the on development of Principals' and leaders within alternative schools to increase their knowledge thus improving the skills. This will then support an expansion on their practices in relation to supporting Indigenous learners that appear to be heavily reliant upon cultural celebrations. The new national teacher and Principal standards are driving this recommendation additionally however the added challenge for alternative schools is the uniqueness of the context and finding ways to engage with learning that is appropriate and useful for the context.

The high number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff within this sample is considered positive, particularly as there are a high number of young people enrolled. However, there are a number of considerable practical implications that arise from this. The data showed that of the Indigenous staff within this sample, a very small percentage of these staff are qualified teachers. Though the number is higher than the numbers reported on conventional school settings within the literature, the numbers are considerably low given the large cohort of Indigenous students. Therefore, a recommendation is put forward to alternative schools to consider how they may support the development of more Indigenous teachers within their schools.

There is considerable concern about how many staff was identified as not holding formal qualifications but undertaking the role of a 'youth worker'. Whilst it is acknowledged that Indigenous workers are vital and bring a rich value and cultural knowledge to schools, it is recommended that alternative schools consider how they will support these workers to undertake and complete formal qualifications to increase their capacity to gain acknowledgement through remuneration and improve

employment outcomes for themselves. This will only benefit the Indigenous young people within their school as often Indigenous staff are inevitably role models for young people. Additionally, it will ensure Indigenous staff are being provided the same educational opportunities and development opportunities as non-Indigenous staff.

There are limitations to the data gathered in this study. It is acknowledged that Education Queensland schools are not included in this sample because of a delay in response to the ethics application. This means that data has only been collected by non-Government alternative schools. The small sample size is also acknowledged and while claims are made based on the data provided in this study, it is also acknowledged that to gain accurate population data the size should be much larger. The major limitation is also that the data provided to answer the research question has only been answered through the lens of the Principal. These limitations are considered and underpin the recommendations for future studies.

This study provided an initial understanding of a phenomenon previously not explored through research. Though the study acknowledges the limitations, the data provides direction for future research and exploration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their interactions with alternative schools. The recommendations will be numbered and outlined:

1. A national study be undertaken to ascertain how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are enrolled in alternative schools in Australia.
2. A study be undertaken to hear the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people enrolled in alternative schools to explore what it is about the alternative school context that is supporting them to remain engaged in education.

3. A national study be undertaken to explore how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are employed in alternative schools in Australia and discover the experiences of the staff. This may assist in informing practices of alternative schools to ensure number remain high and that there is opportunity for development for the staff.
4. A study be undertaken to explore the knowledge and practices of non-Indigenous Principals' and educators in how they working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people within alternative school settings.
5. A comparative study of conventional schools and alternative schools to explore whether one approach to education is supporting engagement of higher numbers Indigenous young people.
6. An exploration of the alternative school context: environmental, social and political and whether there is a relationship with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities.

In summary, four key conclusions were drawn from this study. The size of the study and time constraints resulted in limitations such as the sample size of the data and one perspective of how the research question was answered. However, it is argued that there is a considerably limited amount of empirical research on alternative schools in an Australian context available and no empirical research on Indigenous interactions with alternative schools that could be located. Therefore, this study is significant because it has created an insight into Principals' knowledge, practices and demographic data of their schools that was previously unknown in the literature. This knowledge has created six recommendations for future studies.

Appendix

Appendix 1: survey questions

Practices of alternative schools in Queensland in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to remain engaged in education

Survey questions

1. This survey is being undertaken for the direct purpose of collecting data for a research project entitled 'Practices of alternative schools in Queensland in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to remain engaged in education' (Ethics approval number S/13/477 University of the Sunshine Coast). The information obtained from this survey is non-identifiable. Completing the survey poses minimal risk to participants. If you feel unsafe at any stage of the survey you may terminate your participation at any time. Click on continue to begin.

2. Does your local community have an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population higher than the 3% total population?

Yes No Unsure

3. Describe your understanding of how much your staff know in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities

I am unsure of what my staff know

Only what information staff provide

I know through regular, informal discussions

I ask this question when interviewing new staff

This is part of my staff's performance review process

Other

4. How many staff in total are employed at your site?

Teaching

Non-teaching

5. I actively encourage staff to nurture and strengthen the cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people

YES: Provide examples of activities in place to support and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's identity and what has enabled you to do this.

NO: provide information about what is preventing you from strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's identity and what resources would enable you to do so

6. The Flexi school site I lead has the following number of young people enrolled:

10-19
20-29
30-39
40-49
50-59
60-69
70 +

7. Select an answer which best describes your knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities

Excellent
Good
I am continually learning
Okay
Limited

8. I have gained my understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities through (you may select more than one): (Please provide details for each response) if participants select one they will need to provide information in the box provided

University studies – compulsory or elective
Professional development – internal/external compulsory/voluntary
My family
Friends
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people at my school
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families/carers of young people at my school
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff at my school
Other

9. Please provide the number of staff who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, along with their employment status. For example, 3 staff in total. 1 teacher and 2 youth workers.

Role	Number of ATSI staff	Employment type FT/PT (pls include number of days/hours per week)
Teacher		
Youth Worker (with formal qualifications)		
Youth Worker (without formal qualifications)		
Arts worker (music, visual arts, performing arts)		
Chaplain		
Other		

10. Are you actively engaged with your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families?

YES: Provide examples of engagement activities. What enabled you to do this?

NO: provide information about what is preventing you from engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and their families and what resources would enable you to engage

11. Is the Flexi School site located in a low socioeconomic area?

Yes No Unsure

12. Please provide the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people enrolled at your Flexi School site, alongside your total enrolment figures. For example, 33 out of 98 young people enrolled identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

13. Choose a location which best describes the Flexi School site location as described by the Australian Bureau of Statistics:

Urban (population of 1000 or more)

Rural (not part of an urban area. For example, on the outskirts of a town)

Remote (significant distance from the next population. For example, Mt Isa or Alice Springs)

14. Do you engage with your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community where your flexi school is located?

YES: Provide examples of engagement activities and what has enabled you to do this

NO: Provide information about what is preventing you from engaging with local community and what resources would enable you to engage

15. Does your flexi school site celebrate cultural events such as NAIDOC (National Aboriginal Islander Day Observance Committee)? If yes, please provide examples of the kinds of cultural events your flexi school site celebrates

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