



Queensland University of Technology
Brisbane Australia

This is the author's version of a work that was submitted/accepted for publication in the following source:

[Shay, Marnee](#)

(2017)

Counter stories: Developing Indigenist research methodologies to capture the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in flexi school contexts.

PhD

thesis,

Queensland University of Technology.

This file was downloaded from: <https://eprints.qut.edu.au/107925/>

Notice: *Changes introduced as a result of publishing processes such as copy-editing and formatting may not be reflected in this document. For a definitive version of this work, please refer to the published source:*

<https://doi.org/10.5204/thesis.eprints.107925>

COUNTER STORIES: DEVELOPING INDIGENIST RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES TO CAPTURE THE VOICES OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER STAFF IN FLEXI SCHOOL CONTEXTS

Marnee Shay

Bachelor of Indigenous Studies

Post Graduate Diploma in Education (middle schooling)

Master of Education (research specialisation) (Chancellors Medal)

Principal supervisor: Associate Professor Jo Lampert (QUT)

Associate supervisor: Associate Professor Grace Sarra (QUT)

External supervisor: Aunty Denise Proud (Community Elder, Honorary Senior Fellow, Aboriginal educator)

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Office of Education Research
Faculty of Education
Queensland University of Technology

2017

Keywords

Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Indigenous, education, flexi schools, yarning, Indigenist research, critical race theory in education

Abstract

The focus in this study is to centre the voices and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in flexi school context. The voices prominent in this study are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educative staff in flexi school and my voice, as an Aboriginal researcher. This research is focused on flexi schools that are concerned with changing the provision of education as opposed to changing the young person to meet the needs of the system. Flexi schools are engaging with high numbers of Indigenous people, yet this context of schooling is relatively absent from the broader Indigenous education discourse. Framed by Indigenous research theory and critical race theory, this qualitative study explores the experiences of Indigenous staff in flexi schools in Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. While Indigenous staff are attracted to working in flexi schools, there are clear issues of direct, indirect, individual and systemic racism still present in flexi schooling contexts. Using autoethnography, I document my experiences as an Aboriginal education researcher using yarning methodology in institutionalised education settings to consider new uses of Indigenist methodology and identify practical implications for Indigenous researchers using Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing in settings that have historically perpetuated exclusion, imperialism and racism.

Table of Contents

Keywords.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
List of figures	vi
List of tables	vii
List of abbreviations	viii
Statement of original authorship.....	ix
1. INTRODUCTION.....	1
1.1 Background	6
1.2 Context	8
1.3 Purposes	9
1.4 Significance.....	10
1.5 Thesis Outline	11
2. LITERATURE REVIEW.....	13
2.1 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in Australia.....	14
2.1.1 Historical context	14
2.1.2 Constructs of 'race' in Australia and issues of racism for Indigenous peoples	17
2.1.3 Current policy environment	23
2.1.4 Synthesis of the literature on what engages Indigenous learners	26
2.1.5 Indigenous teachers and workforce in education	30
2.2 Flexi schooling in Australia.....	37
2.2.1 Defining flexi schools in Australia.....	37
2.2.2 Flexi school environments	41
2.2.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and flexi school settings.....	43
2.3 Implications.....	46
3. INDIGENIST THEORY AND METHOD: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND STUDY DESIGN.....	50
3.1 Theoretical framework	50
3.1.1 Indigenous research theories	50
3.1.2 Aotearoa and Indigenous Standpoint Theory.....	51
3.1.3 Indigenous research theories and Australian scholars.....	53
3.2 Critical Race Theory	59
3.2.1 Origins of Critical Race Theory.....	59
3.2.2 Critical Race Theory in education.....	60
3.2.3 Gloria Ladson-Billings.....	62
3.2.4 Daniel Soloranzo and Tara Yosso.....	66
3.2.5 Theoretical framing using CRT, Indigenous research theory and my standpoint	68
3.3 Methodology	71
3.4 Participating sites and participants	76
3.5 Instruments.....	78
3.6 Analysis.....	86
3.7 Ethics and limitations	87
4. RESULTS.....	92
4.1 Participant roles and participating school data	94
4.2 Workshop theme one: us mob	99
4.2.1 Why Indigenous staff are choosing to work in flexi schools	99

4.2.2	Indigenous staff roles in flexi schools	101
4.3	Workshop theme two: race and racism.....	109
4.3.1	Indigenous staff experiences of direct and indirect racism at their schools.....	110
4.3.2	Relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff.....	114
4.3.3	Racism and Indigenous young people.....	116
4.4	Workshop theme three: practice.....	118
4.4.1	Curriculum - Indigenous knowledges in flexi school classrooms	119
4.4.2	Assessment practices and Indigenous learners.....	122
4.4.3	Funding distribution	123
4.4.4	Indigenous education and workloads	123
4.5	Workshop theme four: ideas and aspirations.....	125
5.	ANALYSIS.....	130
5.1	Indigenous staff experiences in flexi schools	131
5.1.1	Flexi schools in Indigenous education	132
5.1.2	Indigenous staff experiences and roles in flexi schools	139
5.1.3	Race and racism in flexi schools	149
5.1.4	Curriculum and Indigenous knowledges/perspectives in flexi schools	153
5.2	Indigenist research: autobiographical research reflections	157
5.2.1	Access and Indigenist research.....	158
5.2.2	Institutionalised education settings and Indigenist research.....	162
5.2.3	Gatekeeping Indigenist research in education: ethics or 'protectionism'?	165
5.2.4	Yarning methodology in education research.....	172
5.2.5	Relationality and yarning	180
5.2.6	Collecting yarning data	184
6.	CONCLUSIONS.....	191
6.1	Research design and theoretical framework	194
6.2	Conclusions: Indigenous staff experiences and roles and Indigenist research reflections.....	195
6.3	Conclusions: doing Indigenist research in education settings	197
6.4	Implications and future research.....	201
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	207

List of Figures

Figure number	Page number
Figure 1: Map of educational pathways for marginalised young people (Te Riele, 2007 p. 59)	40
Figure 2: Synthesis of the literature on Indigenous education and flexi schools (Shay, 2013)	45
Figure 3: Synthesis of the literature on Indigenous education and flexi schools using Aboriginal symbols (Shay, 2013)	45
Figure 4: Theoretical framing	70
Figure 5: Yarning (Bessarab and N'Gandu, 2010)	174
Figure 6: Research yarning in education contexts (Shay, 2016)	178

List of Tables

Table number	Page number
Table 1: Instrument	80-81
Table 2: Guided discussion questions	83
Table 3: Workshop theme questions	84
Table 4: Participant roles	94-95
Table 5: 'My School' information	97-98
Table 6: Participant roles and described duties	107-108

List of abbreviations

ACARA – Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

AIATSIS – Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies

AIEO – Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer

AITSL – Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

CRT – Critical Race Theory

CTG – Close the Gap

COAG – Council of Australian Governments

IEW – Indigenous Education Worker

IRT – Indigenous Research Theories

IST – Indigenous Standpoint Theory

MCEETYA – Melbourne Declaration of Education Goals for Young Australians

NAPLAN – National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy

NHMRC – National Health and Medical Research Council

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: [QUT Verified Signature](#)

Date: June 2017

Acknowledgements

I acknowledge my family and ancestors who made me who I am today. I am in awe of the strength and resilience of our people who have endured the terrible impact of colonisation but remained strong and humorous in the face of trauma and adversity.

A warm thanks to all who participated in my study. I admire the work you all undertake in sometimes challenging circumstances and I hope this thesis honours your stories and experiences.

To my supervisors: Jo, Grace and Aunty Denise – thank you all for your mentoring, guidance, support, laughs, lifts, coffee and advice.

Uncle Boyd, I am sorry you didn't get to see me finish this thing. I appreciate the encouragement, guidance, wisdom and support that you gave me across this journey.

To my dear little mate, Jedda, who witnessed my loneliness, joy, excitement and frustrations with loyalty, patience and unconditional love. I miss you every day.

There are many loved ones, friends and colleagues who have provided support and inspiration in various capacities over the past three years. My sincerest thank you to all of you (you know who you are) – I hope to make it up to you by being able to attend events without saying “sorry I have [insert task] due”.

To the Indigenous Studies Research Network (ISRN), thank you for the partial funding support me to present at the World indigenous Peoples Conference on Education in 2014 and the Australian Association for Education Research conference in 2015. I would also like to say thank you to NIRAKN for the support to attend one day of the Indigenous Methodology Masterclass.

Publications related to this thesis:

Shay, M. (2017). Emerging ideas for innovation in Indigenous education: a research synthesis of Indigenous educative roles in mainstream and flexi schools. *Teaching Education*, 28(1), 12-26. doi:10.1080/10476210.2016.1210594

Shay, M (2016) Seeking new paradigms in aboriginal education research: Methodological opportunities, challenges and aspirations. *Historia Social y de la Educacion*, 5(3), pp. 273-296.

Shay, M., Morgan, A., Lampert, J., & Heck, D. (2016). Editorial: Introduction to the special issue on alternative pathways in education for disenfranchised children and young people in the Australian context. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 7(2), 171-177. doi:10.18357/ijcyfs72201615716

Shay, M. (2016). Re-imagining Indigenous Education Through Flexi Schooling. In D. Bland (Ed.), *Imagination for Inclusion* (pp. 116-127). Oxon: Routledge.

Shay, M., & Heck, D. (2015). Alternative Education Engaging Indigenous Young People: Flexi Schooling in Queensland. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, FirstView, 1-11. doi:10.1017/jie.2015.8

Shay, M. (2015). The perceptions that shape us: strengthening Indigenous young people's cultural identity. In T. Ferfolja, Jones-Diaz, C. & Ullman, J. (Ed.), *Understanding sociological theory and pedagogical practices* (pp. 93-105). Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.

1. Introduction

As a matter of cultural protocol, I introduce myself as the researcher, first and foremost. I am a proud Aboriginal Australian woman. My ancestors are from Wagiman country (Northern Territory), through my Mother and Grandmother, with Anglo-Australian background including strong Scottish ancestry, through my Father. We are Scully's (great grandfather's side) and Cummings (great grandmothers side). In keeping with the theoretical framework of this research project, this thesis will be written in first person. The terms 'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander' will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis. Both terms refer to First Nations peoples of Australia. I acknowledge the diversity, strength, knowledge and resilience in our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. I approach this research from my Aboriginal standpoint that I hold experientially, through my family and my community.

My parents divorced when I was a young child and I was raised by my mother. Therefore, my Aboriginality is a core part of my identity. My Aboriginal side of my family is large. Though the Scully side of my family is connected to Burroloola, my Uncle told me we identify culturally through his mother, my great grandmother. Our totem is the Blue Tongue Lizard. My great grandmother, Barbara Scully (nee Cummings) was born on her country in the Daly River region and was removed at a young age by authorities under the guise of welfare. My great grandmother and her sister, Nellie, were placed in the Kahlin compound in Darwin, where many Aboriginal children were stolen from their families and placed there. Later in Darwin, my great grandmother met her husband, Edward Scully. They quickly started a family, my grandmother being the third born out of nine siblings. My grandmother was born in Katherine, Northern Territory, just before they all fled Darwin in World War 2.

My great-grandfather signed up as a soldier and served in the Australian army. Upon his return, he and my great-grandmother lived in the 'police paddock' for several years before moving to Brisbane. My family had many hardships and after moving to Brisbane, the four youngest of my grandmother's siblings were placed in a home in Dalby. To this day this has caused much trauma and separation amongst many members of our family across generations.

I was born in Brisbane. I am the eldest child. My sister, Lauren, was born five years later. My mother worked very hard to ensure we had every opportunity in life. She always instilled the sense of giving back to community and working for our people to contribute to change. My grandmother's eldest sibling, Uncle Boyd has also been a great inspiration for me. He has taught me a lot about our family, history and culture. Sadly, Uncle Boyd passed away just before I was to complete this thesis. I admired his strength amidst adversity, particularly within our family. Uncle Boyd was always the 'go between' when people aren't talking and always listened to all points of view. Even living through a time when racism was endemic, Uncle Boyd always says that 'you treat people as they treat you'. Uncle was a professional boxer and continued to be a role model for many young Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. He was a community man and loved our people. He served on boards and coached many young Indigenous boxers in the Northern Territory.

We moved to the Sunshine Coast (Gubbi Gubbi/Kabi Kabi country) in my early teens to be near the water. We have been part of the Aboriginal community for over twenty years and in relation to place, it holds special significance for me. Being near the water would always bring a sense of peace and help me to find the answers I was looking for. It is not my traditional country but it is a place of meaning to me.

Growing up, we knew we were Aboriginal, though it wasn't until school that I began to wonder what it meant to be Aboriginal. My mother always 'ticked the box' on our enrolment though I can't recall it ever being mentioned. I attended schools where there weren't Aboriginal workers or teachers therefore my Aboriginality almost felt as though it had no meaning in any of my learning throughout school. Having fair skin meant that I wasn't 'obviously' Aboriginal to people at school so until I mentioned it or they met my mother, they thought I was 'one of them'. This resulted in me feeling quite indifferent about school and the disinterest led to low attendance, particularly in the latter years of my schooling.

When I was in year 12, a man called Professor Ray Golding (now passed away) was getting his blood taken where my mother worked. Professor Golding was a retired Vice Chancellor (James Cook University) who had a deep interest and respect for Aboriginal people. After they had met several times my mother and he had shared stories about family and Professor Golding asked if any of her kids would consider going to university. I can't recall the sequence of events but Mum took me out to

Professor Golding and his wife, Mrs Golding's (now also passed away) place for afternoon tea. I remember sitting in his (pretty flash) meeting room where he very convincingly explained that more Aboriginal people needed to go to university and that this was a good option for me post school. Reflecting on this now, I find it interesting that a retired Vice Chancellor was having this conversation with me and not my employed guidance officer or teachers at my school. Nonetheless, I tried to hint (though I felt completely shame) that I wouldn't get the results to get into university. He then proceeded to tell me that there were 'alternative entry' programs that would assess my skills in other ways. Professor Golding's friend, Aboriginal scholar, Uncle Errol West (also passed away) was working at a place called the 'Gungil Jindibah Centre', Southern Cross University (Lismore). He thought this would be a great place for me to go.

I was accepted to undertake a Bachelor of Indigenous Studies. For the first time in my life, I learnt in a formal learning space about colonisation, black rights movements, Indigenous legal studies, Indigenous health and many other things. I met my best mate and sister, Daina (Koori, who's mob is from South Australia). We began yarning about our families and our experiences of 'being Aboriginal' (the yarns still go on nearly twenty years later). I attended classes where the majority of my lecturers were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. I describe this time in my life very clearly in this section this thesis is bound with my experiences that have shaped and influenced me over the course of my life. These years at university as a very young and naïve undergraduate student were very formational years for me and the people I learnt from in that time have had a lasting effect on me. They instilled a sense of pride in being Aboriginal; a sense of empowerment in learning about how Australian history continues to impact upon our families and communities; assisted me in understanding complex and difficult things about my life and family that wouldn't have been possible without undertaking such learning and a deep sense of commitment to use this knowledge to advocate for our people. This is something that was not offered to me in any part of my schooling experience.

The journey to Gungil Jindibah took me to places I could never have imagined. I found confidence in my academic abilities and I kept returning to study (Graduate Diploma in Education, Master of Education). I have undertaken diverse professional roles in community organisations, schools, universities and TAFE's. Though I have

had a breadth of experience in diverse roles and various contexts, the role that I continue to remain incredibly passionate about is my time teaching in flexi schools. Despite working as a youth worker in several roles with 'disengaged' young people, there was something very special for me about having the privilege to walk alongside young people who has been disenfranchised from mainstream schooling. There were so many talented, brilliant, creative young people that I worked with in the flexi schools. Yet, so many people believe that flexi schools are just for 'drop out kids' or 'naughty kids'. There is so much complexity in the lives of young people who attend the schools. I was always inspired by their resilience and ability to trust us to be part of their lives and learning even though they had been failed by the education system. I loved that we were encouraged to ensure relationships were foundational in our practice as teachers. From a cultural point of view, this was something I noticed was rare in my time working in mainstream schools. I observed the high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (and staff) in the schools. I recall having Aboriginal students who were fifteen and sixteen years old that could barely read or write. I still think about the young people I worked with and even get to bump into their families from time to time. They had rejected mainstream schooling. Yet, they had very high attendance (sometimes even when they were sick). I wondered why this way of working with our young people wasn't given more attention.

It is a culmination of my experience that has led me to undertake this research project. Moving into a research space, I have engaged in deep reflection about my beliefs and how that sits with undertaking research. After engaging in many debates over 'rights to research' and whether it's appropriate for non-Indigenous people to research Aboriginal people, I realised quickly that there are implicit things that I know as an Aboriginal person that means I have a responsibility. This responsibility includes upholding integrity of how our knowledge is shared and for what purpose it is shared. This responsibility that we have as Aboriginal researchers is different to the responsibility and accountability that non-Indigenous researchers have. It moves beyond academic boundaries to our families and communities. Upholding this responsibility is something I take seriously. I am lucky to be surrounded by support. Another great source of inspiration for me are Elders, Aunty Denise Proud and Aunty Judi Wickes. Aunty Denise is very humble and generous, always says 'we have to fight on cultural grounds' and 'white isn't always right'. Aunty Judi lives in my community

and she is also very humble. Aunty Judi generously gives many of us time through being an ear; providing (very good) advice when we are stuck and she makes a really good damper too! I have had many yarns with Aunty Denise and Aunty Judi about my discomfort at times and Aunty Denise says 'we want our people to be the dr's and professors, but with that comes responsibility to speak up and give back'. The responsibility may feel overwhelming at times but we always have our Elders to support us and give us strength at difficult times.

There are two important points that I must add here. First, I support the notion that there is no one universal Aboriginal standpoint. Our experiences are diverse and our contexts are varied. However, there are many experiences that we share and it is easy to find commonalities amongst our stories. Second, I firmly believe our cultural identities are not fixed. They shift, they are contradictory and they are emerging. This has certainly been my experience in relation to my Aboriginality.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stories, experiences and voices are deliberately distinct in this thesis. The voices of the nineteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants of the study and my voice as an Aboriginal researcher are intentionally strong throughout this thesis. Although it is not my intention to deliberately reinforce binaries to Indigenous and non-Indigenous paradigms, the dominant voices in Indigenous education literature continue to be that of non-Indigenous people. My commitment to using my position as the researcher to demonstrate the ability of our people to lead discussions about issues that impact on our families and communities in the everyday is something that I wish to state clearly and upfront.

This introduction chapter outlines the background of this study, introducing myself as the researcher and providing a summary of information that foregrounds this study (Section 1.1). Following the background is the context of the study (Section 1.2); the overarching objectives of the study (Section 1.3) and the significance of this research (Section 1.4). Finally, this chapter includes an outline of the remaining chapters of the thesis (Section 1.5).

1.1 BACKGROUND

The invasion, or colonisation of Australia has resulted in dire consequences for our people. The consequences are unambiguous when Indigenous Australians continue to experience poorer health outcomes; poorer education outcomes and gross over-representation in the criminal justice systems than any other group in Australia (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2000; Australian Government, 2014b). Considerable efforts from the Federal and State Government continue to try and address the ongoing disadvantage Indigenous peoples experience, particularly regarding education and health (Australian Government, 2014b). However, the discourse around these policies rarely includes discussions about constructs of race in Australia and issues of racism that are implicated in the ongoing disadvantage Indigenous Australians continue to experience (Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolopenuk, Robinson, & Walter, 2012). Addressing the disparity that exists in outcomes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous, Australians must critically explore the role constructs of race and issues of racism has for people individually and systemically (Smallwood, 2011). How race is constructed and whereby racism permeates through all aspects of Australia, is central to any study that aims to provoke change in any context. This study deliberately includes exploration of the role constructs of race and issues of racism, as affecting change has always been what I aspire to achieve. Moreover, social justice in education is unlikely to be achieved until issues of race and racism are identified and addressed systematically (Ladson-Billings, 2007).

Australian research on Indigenous education has largely been based on deficit notions of cultural difference as the inhibitor to educational parity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people. The focus on cultural deficit has shifted in some examples to examine the roles of schools and education systems. Much of this research continues to focus on ‘why’ Indigenous young people were not succeeding in conventional school settings, and ‘how’ schools could engage and improve outcomes for Indigenous young people (Armstrong & Buckley, 2011; Bodkin-Andrews, Dillon, & Craven, 2010; Lonsdale, 2013). There is extensive evidence that schools are places of alienation for many young Indigenous people (Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe, & Gunstone, 2000), yet there has been limited research on the types of learning that Indigenous young people have subsequently re-engaged with after being

disengaged. Similarly, there has been considerable emphasis on the roles of Indigenous staff (teachers and non teaching staff) in conventional schooling contexts (Buckskin, 2012; Gower et al., 2011; Lampert & Burnett, 2012). However, there is very limited literature on the role Indigenous staff are undertaking in education contexts outside of conventional settings.

In response to policy changes over the past decade that have focused on retention of young people in formal education settings, there has been an emergence of 'flexi schools' or 'alternative programs' (te Riele, 2007, 2014). Flexi schools, alternative education and learning choices are all terms used in the literature to describe diverse models of education operating outside of conventional schooling contexts (te Riele, 2012b). Supporting the position that flexi schools is a more positive terminology, with much less deficit stigma attached (Morgan, Pendergast, Brown, & Heck, 2014), flexi schools is the preferred term that will be used throughout this thesis.

Indigenous young people are frequently mentioned in flexi schooling literature (Holdsworth, 2011; Mills & McGregor, 2010; te Riele, 2012a). Conversely, there was little concrete data on the actual numbers of Indigenous young people or Indigenous staff interacting with flexi schools. My Masters research collected demographic data on a small sample of flexi schools in Queensland (Shay, 2013; Shay & Heck, 2015). This data revealed that 31.3% of students were identified as Indigenous young people. This finding indicates that Indigenous young people are significantly over-represented in this sample as the average Indigenous population figure in Queensland is 4.2% (ABS, 2011). The sample size limits the ability to generalise the finding; however, the data suggests that a more comprehensive study is needed to explore this phenomenon. Further, in addition to high Indigenous student numbers, there also appeared to be high numbers of Indigenous staff employed. 29.6% of staff reported were Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. It was reported that Indigenous staff were employed in a range of roles including: Chaplain; Arts Worker; Youth Worker (qualified); Youth Worker (unqualified) and Teacher (Shay, 2013).

My Master's study did not have the capacity to explore whether there was a connection between the high numbers of Indigenous staff and Indigenous young people engaging in flexi schooling contexts. However, the centrality of relationships in flexi schools (McGregor & Mills, 2012; Morgan et al., 2014) suggests that the focus on relationships may be a potential reason Indigenous people are drawn to this approach to education. There remains a large gap in the literature on the phenomena

of Indigenous young people and Indigenous staff and their experiences in flexi schools. Moreover, the existing research on Indigenous education continues to focus on conventional schools. Non-Indigenous researchers largely undertake this existing research. This study intends to create some knowledge through research about the experiences and roles Indigenous staff are undertaking in flexi schools to support what appears to be many disenfranchised Indigenous young people. Additionally, my experiences as an Aboriginal education researcher, will also contribute as Aboriginal voice through documenting my experiences for the purpose of contributing to Indigenous methodological scholarship.

1.2 CONTEXT

Flexi schools in Australia are defined as being "aimed at re-engaging marginalised young people within education and enabling them to gain secondary schooling credentials" (te Riele, 2014, p. 14). However, there are many different approaches that flexi schools take in re-engagement of young people (te Riele, 2012). te Riele (2007) differentiates the key differences in these approaches include that the flexi school aims at changing how education is provided to meet the needs of the young person; or the flexi school aims at changing the young person to meet the needs of the system.

I am concerned with bringing new ideas forward to the Indigenous education agenda. Therefore, this study excludes models of flexi schools that are short term and principally intent on modifying or changing the behaviour of young people to be re-integrated back into conventional schools. This approach is attached to notions of assimilation that continue to oppress our young people (Townsend-Cross, 2011). This decision to exclude models based on modification of young people is not, however, because I don't think that a study on that approach would be valid or useful. It is a deliberate decision to support the differentiation of the two approaches within the flexi schooling literature. Additionally, it supports my personal stance that education systems and approaches continue to exclude groups of young people based on cultural, social and economic capital that they may or may not possess, through no fault of their own. Therefore, my focus is Flexi schools that provide longer term opportunities and

focus on changing the provision of education to support the needs of young people in were invited to be part of this study.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in flexi schools three States participated in this study. This is a qualitative study, using a multi-method approach to collection of data. The theoretical framework for this study is Indigenous research theory, to reflect my standpoint as an Aboriginal researcher. Further, Critical Race Theory will be used to explicitly explore constructs of race and issues of racism within the context of this study.

1.3 PURPOSES

There is a large gap in knowledge about Indigenous engagement with flexi schooling contexts. This study endeavours to contribute new knowledge in both Indigenous education discourse and flexi schooling literature, through centralising the voices of Indigenous staff in flexi schools and my voice as an Aboriginal education researcher. Flexi schools play a critical role in supporting disenfranchised young people in our communities, who experience multiple complexities, to re-engage in education (Mills & McGregor, 2010). Thus, the purpose of this study is to explore the important roles and experiences Indigenous staff in flexi schooling contexts. This exploration will investigate what can be learned through listening to Indigenous staff in an education context that is supporting young people who have been marginalised or excluded from conventional schools. Further, the implications of listening to Indigenous staff may lead to ideas and recommendations that could improve the educational experiences, particularly of Indigenous young people, in flexi schools. These ideas and recommendations may also be relevant for conventional schooling practices.

Although not the original purpose of undertaking this study, it emerged that there were also many gaps in Indigenous methodological and theoretical research literature. As an Aboriginal researcher undertaking this study, I felt it was my responsibility to journal my experiences and consider what the implications were for future Indigenous researchers. I added my autobiographical research reflections to this study for the purpose of building on existing scholarship to name barriers and obstacles clearly to find practical solutions for how critically under-represented our people are in the academy. To encompass both experiences of Indigenous participants working in

flexi schools and my experiences as an Aboriginal researcher undertaking research in flexi schools, the over-arching question to guide this study is: What are the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals (staff and researcher) in flexi school settings?

This study will be guided by the following research questions:

- 1) How do Indigenous staff describe their experiences and roles working in flexi schooling contexts?
- 2) How do Indigenous staff believe constructions of race and issues of racism impact upon their roles with respect to pedagogy, curriculum and policy?
- 3) What Indigenist methodologies are necessary in undertaking ethical Indigenous education research with Indigenous participants?

1.4 SIGNIFICANCE

The significance of this study, which aims to examine the experiences of Indigenous staff in a selection of flexi schools is to determine the extent to which Indigenous staff have the capacity to influence the sites of re-engagement for Indigenous young people. It is widely acknowledged that a key element of the success of Indigenous education programs is the presence of Indigenous teachers (Santoro, Reid, Crawford, & Simpson, 2011). However, less is currently known about the experiences of those Indigenous staff, who already teach (whether they are employed as teachers or otherwise), and especially their experiences in alternative and flexi schools. This might be imagined as giving ‘voice’ to Indigenous staff in ways that mainstream schools may not. Furthermore, there is an overall lack of research or discussion in the literature about where a large cohort of Indigenous young people re-engages in education when they have disengaged from conventional schooling. This lack of discussion in mainstream educational discourse suggests that there is limited appreciation for this educational approach that appears to be supporting high numbers of disenfranchised young people, particularly Indigenous young people. This study aims to redress this lack of discussion through positioning flexi schools as playing a critical role in supporting young people who experience social exclusion and marginalisation.

The study is also framed by my Aboriginal standpoint whereby the research design is differentiated from that of a non-Indigenous researcher. The research design deliberately posits stories, experiences and narratives Indigenous staff and myself as the researcher as being central to this study. Moreover, the research design is particularly concerned with ensuring ethics, cultural protocol and cultural integrity are core elements that uphold respect and safety of participants. The research design poses significance in relation to the plethora of research on broadly on the topic of Indigenous education. This study then also seeks to consider what my experiences are as an Aboriginal education researcher in understanding the practical and ethical issues Aboriginal researchers can encounter when undertaking Indigenous focused research in institutionalised settings such as schools.

1.5 THESIS OUTLINE

In general, this thesis follows a conventional thesis design, though for reasons explained in Chapter Three, the Theoretical Framework and Methodology Chapters are merged to best reflect how Indigenist methodologies and theory are inseparable. In chapter 2, I provide the context for the study through a critical analysis of previous work in the field as well as historical constructs of race and issues of racism in Australia, current policy environment, a synthesis of the literature on Indigenous educational engagement/disengagement and selected literature on the Indigenous educative workforce in Australia. The second section of the literature review outlines definitions of flexi schools in Australia, and provides an analysis of flexi school environments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement with flexi schooling contexts.

Chapter 3 outlines both the theoretical framework and the research design of this study as both are informed by the field of Indigenist studies. In the case of this study the theoretical frameworks have integral influence over the overall design and approach to this research. The Chapter explains the methodologies on which it draws as well as the procedural approach used in the study: how participants were identified; instruments for data collection; method for analysis and discussion on ethics and limitations.

Chapter 4 reports on the data from Indigenous staff in flexi schools during the yarning sessions. Data is reported under headings of the workshop themes used during data collection. The themes that emerged from the workshops are identified under the titles (1) Us Mob; (2) Race and Racism; (3) Practice and (4) Ideas and Aspirations.

Chapter 5 analyses two sets of data, with the second emerging during the study. In the first section of this chapter I analyse the data on Indigenous staff experiences and roles in flexi schools gained in the workshop and documented in the previous chapter. However, as the study progressed, issues around methodology and my experiences as an Indigenous researcher became increasingly significant to the study itself. An unanticipated addition to this thesis was the inclusion of my own research reflections as an Indigenous researcher undertaking this study. The title of this section of the chapter is 'Indigenist research: autobiographical research reflections' (5.2). Unconventionally, and because this analysis emerged as an important part of the research study during the project, some new literature around Indigenous researchers is introduced in this section of the chapter to add depth to my self-reflection. As a result, this section includes critical analysis of some literature not previously introduced in Chapter 2.

Finally, chapter 6 outlines the conclusions drawn from both the data from Indigenous participants about their experiences and roles in flexi schools and my experiences in undertaking Indigenist research. The implications of this study and suggestions for future research are included in this chapter.

2. Literature review

As identified in Chapter One, the overriding research question is: what are the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals (staff and researcher) in flexi school settings? This chapter will review the literature considered to be most relevant to the research context – Indigenous education. In this chapter the salient literature consists of two topics. The first set of relevant literature is that concerned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education (Section 2.1). This section of the literature review provides the historical context of educational inequity for Indigenous people including the impact of colonisation on First Australians (section 2.1.1); how 'race' has been constructed in Australia and issues of racism (section 2.1.2); the current Indigenous education policy environment (section 2.1.3); a synthesis of the literature on what engages Indigenous learners (section 2.1.4) and an analysis of Indigenous teachers and workforce in education (including teaching and non-teaching staff) (section 2.1.5). The second set of literature is on flexi schooling in Australia (Section 2.2). This section defines flexi schooling in Australia (section 2.2.1); provides a synthesis of the literature on flexi schooling environments (section 2.2.2) and defines what is known about the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and flexi school settings (section 2.2.3). Finally, Section 2.3 highlights the implications from the literature impacting on this study.

The context of this study has to do with Indigenous education, the experiences of Indigenous educators (teachers and non-teaching staff) and, as explained in the first Chapter, the specific focus is on flexi schools in Australia. As the design of the study itself became increasingly important, questions around research methods, voice and my own role as an Indigenous researcher became increasingly central to the study itself. Many of these methodological concerns are addressed in Chapter Three, where the study design is explained. A third set of literature – the scholarly literature on the context of this study, institutionalised education settings and Indigenous research is not included in this chapter. Instead, this literature set will be used to support the unexpected findings that became Chapter 5.2 where I analysed my own journey in undertaking this research.

2.1 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EDUCATION IN AUSTRALIA

2.1.1 HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Aboriginal people are First Peoples or Indigenous peoples of Australia. Torres Strait Islander peoples were included in the group 'Indigenous Australians' and were recognised as Indigenous by the Government in the late 1800s (Davis, 2004). Both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are custodians of the lands and seas of the continent of Australia, with Aboriginal people caring for this country for approximately sixty thousand years (Fozdar, 2008; Poroch, 2012). Therefore, Aboriginal cultures are the "oldest living cultures in the world" (Poroch, 2012, p. 383). The role history plays in our understanding of the significance of past events and how these events impact on all Australians is critical in improving outcomes for the future (Phillips, 2012a).

From the time of invasion, Aboriginal peoples were not recognised as First Peoples of this land. The British claimed the land "terra nullius" or land belonging to no one (Cunneen, 2001, p. 232). From this point in the early history of colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been subject to exclusion and control measures of the Australian Government. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, Indigenous peoples had very little control over their lives. Indigenous peoples were subjected 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 (2012b) emphasises the role history plays in understanding the significance of the past and how this impacts on all Australians. The educational disadvantage Indigenous peoples experience 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, 2012a, 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

Indigenous 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. Similar legislation was in operation throughout all States of Australia. Masked as being a policy that was about 'caring' for Indigenous peoples, this policy saw Indigenous people controlled and trained as domestic servants for wealthy white families (Blake, 1998). 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). The power of the state to control Aboriginal peoples on reserves remained entrenched in policy until the mid nineteen sixties (Donovan, 2008). This legislation was at a time where the dominant discourse in relation to Indigenous peoples was grounded in ideals of 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 racially based ideologies continue to impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples cross-generationally today (Williams-Mozley, 2012). Throughout this review of the literature on Indigenous Education, discussions of race and racism will be intertwined

Education research has also played its part in reinforcing racialised notions of inferiority and primitivity (Martin, 2012). As was the case in most research that involved Indigenous peoples historically, our people have been the subjects and objects of pseudo-scientific observation with very limited scope for meaningful participation in the research process (Rigney, 2001). Moreover, scores of education research undertaken by a primarily non-Indigenous research workforce has not resulted in any significant change (Harrison, 2007). Critical discussion about right to research has led some non-Indigenous scholars to question the role of positionality and indeed the role of non-Indigenous researchers in Indigenous research (Aveling, 2013; McConaghy, 2000). Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson (2014) state that it is time for education research to move beyond the limits of Western methods and theories that have been favoured in place of Indigenous epistemologies. They further argue that the pervasiveness of Western agendas and ideologies within education research has resulted in a form of "epistemological racism" that continues to impact upon the Indigenous education research agenda (p.3).

Education research is situated within institutionalised settings. Schools have long been recognised in the literature as an institutionalised performative that functions

far beyond that task of educating children (Berg, 2007; Jakobi, 2011; Ramirez & Boli, 1987). Institutional theory "highlights cultural influences on decision making and formal structures" (Barley & Tolbert, 1997, p. 93). Ramirez and Boli (1987) argue that the institutionalisation of education has resulted in the creation of mass schooling in almost every western European country. Moreover, Ramirez and Boli (1987) further discern that the purpose of mass schooling is "part of an endeavour to construct a unified national polity" (p. 3). Schools thus function as a mechanism to serve broader societal interests. Berg (2007) concludes that schools as institutions are then "the agency responsible for the reproduction of society, that is for instilling, e.g. social norms, cultural traditions, and the transmission of the knowledge and skills necessary to the individual and society" (p. 581). Analysis of the types of institutions and critique of how they discursively constitute the agendas of nation states are critical in understanding Indigenous education discourse and how it is historically situated.

Education institutions such as schools and universities reinforce dominant social norms, expectations and agendas. In the historical Australian context, the colonial project that originally saw Indigenous peoples rendered as sub-human through the declaration of 'terra nullius', continues to permeate through institutionalised, racial discourse in all institutions, including schools. Schools as institutions in Australia continue to uphold a national identity that ignores the brutality and dispossession of Indigenous peoples and constructs white Australians as the social norm. Some overt support of this statement is reflected in the data that demonstrates the under-representation of Indigenous principals, teachers, support staff or politicians who influence education policy (Australian Government, 2012, 2014a; Lampert & Burnett, 2012). Further evidence is in the western curriculum that has excluded teaching about the massacres and dispossession of Indigenous peoples in place of the 'Captain Cook' narrative of discovery of a great foreign land; the refusal to include teaching the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages; the ongoing practices of deficit and stereotypical re-presentations by teachers of who Indigenous people are and the resistance to embedding of Indigenous perspectives and knowledges in the national curriculum (Ma Rhea, 2013; Phillips & Lampert, 2012).

The next section defines 'race' and racism as it is used in this research and explains how these constructs continue to impact on Indigenous peoples. There are two reasons for this inclusion: first, constructs of race and issues of racism are strongly

implicated in any discussions about Indigenous Education (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012). Second, including discussion about race and racism and how it relates to Indigenous Australia serves to contextualise the theoretical framing of this research project, Indigenous Standpoint Theory and Critical Race Theory (explained further in Chapter 3).

2.1.2 CONSTRUCTS OF 'RACE' IN AUSTRALIA AND ISSUES OF RACISM FOR INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Constructs of Race

The power of race in our society must not be overstated. Race mediates every aspect of our lives (Lopez, 2013). Biological and essentialist constructions of race have long been disproven (Chong-Soon Lee, 1995; Figueroa, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Lopez, 2013), yet Lopez (2013) evaluates that the "human fate still rides upon ancestry and appearance" to categorise individuals that we encounter (p. 238). Though how race is categorised is a human invention and not scientifically 'real' (Crenshaw, Gotanda, Peller, & Thomas, 1995; Lopez, 2013), Chong-Soon Lee (1995) proposes that "the term race may be so historically and socially over-determined that it is beyond rehabilitation" (p. 441). Parker and Lynn (2002) states that race is fluid and a socio-political construct that continues to be defined and re-defined. Nonetheless, Chong-Soon Lee (1995) argues that once race is constructed, reconstruction becomes difficult.

The obsession with race categorisation goes back as far as the middle ages, where three race categorisations can be traced back to "[E]uropean imagination" (Lopez, 2013, p. 241). There is an emergence of scholars who all agree that race is socially constructed (Chong-Soon Lee, 1995; Figueroa, 2012; Lopez, 2013; Obach, 1999). However, the pervasiveness of racial categorisation based on disproven biological and scientific constructs remains entrenched in all aspects of our societies including institutions, laws and policy (Lopez, 2013; Obach, 1999). Crenshaw (1995) argues that white cultures created these constructions. The upholding of racialised constructions by white cultures has resulted in many policies that are premised on the continuation of white superiority (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). This critique of whiteness and the powerful role it plays in race construction and categorisation will be discussed further in this chapter as it holds significant importance in contextualising the discourse in Indigenous education and in how Indigenous teachers may be perceived. Whiteness does play a powerful role in racialised discourse, despite the

reluctance of white cultures to acknowledge and critique whiteness as a race (Hook, 2012).

With the rejection of "natural differentiation" in the crucial discussions on race, other means of critically analysing race and racism have been proposed (Lopez, 2013, p. 243). Figueroa (2012) argues that all racial or ethnic identities must be socially contextualised. Therefore, the role of culture (rather than biological race) is more relevant in distinguishing issues of race. However, the caution in this is that it removes the embodied aspect of a person experiences that may be connected to their culture. It is understood that many in society continue to draw upon eugenic beliefs that construct a biological racial paradigm. Therefore, it is important to acknowledge the role that false beliefs about constructs of race continues to play in the racial, and now cultural deficit discourse (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002).

The process of racialisation (which affects both white Australians and Indigenous Australians) is intrinsically linked to colonial practices (Harris, Nakata, & Carlson, 2013). Phillips (2011) concludes that this construction has occurred in "specific ways in order to justify colonisation" (p. 147). Moreover, Indigeneity, as constructed in the not too distant past, continues to be understood through biological categorisation. Biologicalism in relation to race has long been disproven yet remains entrenched in Australian discourse in constructions of Indigeneity (Brough et al., 2006).

Further, biological constructs of race lead to black-white binary edifice (Chong-Soon Lee, 1995). The problematic with binary thinking is that one culture (in this case, white culture) is always viewed or categorised as being more superior than the other (Crenshaw et al., 1995). In reference to the white Australia and Indigenous Australian binary, historical evidence demonstrates with certainty that white Australians are posited as being superior. This binary has major implications in school settings where the majority of the teacher workforce are white, middle-class Australians (Santoro & Allard, 2005).

Defining race and constructs of race in an Australian context is critical. It is important for all Australians to understand the implications of how the racialised identities of Australians have been formed to uphold white dominance and maintain the subordination of Indigenous peoples. It is crucial to note here that white constructs of Indigeneity and Indigenous constructs of Indigeneity differ considerably (C. Sarra,

2011). These constructs permeate discursively throughout all aspects of society, including schools. Defining Indigeneity and constructs of Indigeneity, provides deeper context to the literature review in this chapter as well as this research. This notion is elaborated on in Chapter 3 under Indigenous Standpoint Theory.

Racism

The issue of racism is uncomfortable for many so is still largely avoided (Blackmore, 2010; López, 2003). The term 'racism' was adopted around the 1930s as a way of making sense of the atrocities occurring in Nazi Germany (Rattansi, 2007). There isn't much evidence that the understanding of race as a false construct, as discussed above has impacted on current discourse of racism, which is still viewed as an individual attitudinal issue (López, 2003). Despite misunderstandings and confusion over the terms race and racism, there are acknowledgements by key authors that like constructs of race; racism too is socially constructed (Bonilla-Silva, 1997; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Memmi, 2014).

Memmi (2014) argues "racism has a function. It is both the emblem and the rationalization for a system of social oppression" (p. 92). The standard definition of racism, the belief that one group is superior to another, is common (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001) and often arises when nation states entrench racism politically and ideologically through fear that foreigners would contaminate the nation (Rattansi, 2007). White people are posited as the statesman, or the rightful owners, whereas other-than-white people are posited as being the foreigners (Rattansi, 2007). This phenomenon can be seen in many nations throughout the world, in particular colonised nations. There are many advantages to the culture in power that comes with this type of racism, including economic; social; political and psychological (Memmi, 2014). Despite the modern understanding that racism is enacted more broadly than individually, racism is still popularly perceived as defined by sinister individual acts perpetrated by ignorant or racist individuals (López, 2003; Parker & Lynn, 2002). The limited scope of traditional individualistic understandings of racism fails to critique adequately how individual, structural and collective acts of racism are constructed (Memmi, 2014). Further, if there is an emphasis only on individual acts of racism, subtle and covert racism is often overlooked (Bonilla-Silva, 1997).

Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) identify one form of covert racism as 'multiculturalism'. This very attractive concept that is used widely in education reforms

was designed to address issues of racial inequality. However, it is highly problematic in several ways (Blackmore, 2010; Dixson & Rousseau, 2005; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). For instance, popular ideas about multiculturalism are often essentialising and simplistic. A common feature of multiculturalism includes eating "ethnic or cultural foods, singing songs or dancing" (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006, p. 61). While the essence of multiculturalism is in the promotion of tolerance and oneness (Blackmore, 2010), simplified understandings can result in a view that all 'otherness' or difference is equal. Thus, creating a competitive environment for minority cultures to be included (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006).

In Australia, there is tension for Indigenous peoples in being categorised under the 'multiculturalism' umbrella (Curthoys, 1999). Indigenous Australians have fiercely resisted this categorisation and staunchly argue that our situation as First Nations people situates us differently from other other-than-white peoples in Australia. Our people have the unique experience of surviving a brutal colonisation and maintaining our cultural identity, despite being without a treaty (Behrendt, Cunneen, & Libesman, 2009). One of the most common questions, I am asked as a tutor on the compulsory Indigenous education course at my workplace, is 'Australia is *so* multicultural, why do Indigenous people get so much attention?'. The discourse for Indigenous peoples means that these questions are common. So much so, that I felt it pertinent to include this section within the literature review for any readers of my work who may be quietly asking similar questions. Furthermore, it is critical to distinguish ourselves distinctly through voicing our experiences of living within this colonised, multicultural context. Articulating the multicultural context of Australia and why it is important to centre the voices of Indigenous people is part of the defining the nature of this study.

Blackmore (2010) discusses the malleable nature of multiculturalism in addressing issues of equity. Particularly in education, multiculturalist approaches are unproductive because they effectively do not disrupt the white normative. In Australia, this lack of disruption is reflected through the disparity in social outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) argue that critiques of multiculturalism are not meant to dismiss notions linked to inclusive education. Such critical discussion is effectively ensuring these important and often ignored critiques become an important part of any analyses involving race, racism and educational inequality.

While overt racism is more easily recognisable, another example of covert racism is preference for 'colour-blindness'. Colour blindness is a common term (often used in education spaces) that has been proposed as a method of fixing the issue of racism (Crenshaw et al., 1995). Colour blindness refers to the belief that one should not 'see' colour, and that treating everyone the same, as though colour does not matter, is proof of an equal, non-racist world. Whilst "dominant discourse positions color-blindness as the ideal" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 14), there are concerns about how colour-blindness is supporting racial/cultural inequities (Crenshaw et al., 1995). There are two major flaws with the concept of colour-blindness. That is, the ever-popular idea that 'I don't see colour, I see people' or 'we are all the same, regardless of colour' that is often espoused in Australian schools.

First, colour-blindness overlooks structural subordination that remains entrenched and ultimately ensures that we are not all the same (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). An example of this in an education setting is giving all students the same assessment task regardless of their ability, culture, gender or age. It is widely accepted in education equity literature that not all students do have the same social, cultural and economic capital (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). However, when it comes to racial inequality discussions, colour-blindness is often the model of preference employed to address such issues. Second, colour-blindness is often intimately related with political nicety (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Colour-blindness has been closely tied to courteous whiteness in that it is seen to be positive if a white person does not notice another person's skin colour. What this notion delineates is that there is something wrong with, or inferior about, being other-than-white and therefore implies that it is normal to be white (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Further, it upholds the privilege of white normativity through discursively placing whiteness as a superior characteristic, thus promoting the concept of tolerance as discussed in relation to multiculturalism.

An example of a study in Australia that perhaps unwillingly supported colour-blindness as the ideal is by Harrison and Greenfield (2011). Their paper reports on research that was conducted with 12 schools in relation to the embedment of Indigenous perspectives and knowledge into curricula. Harrison and Greenfield (2011) report on the use of symbolic cultural gestures, such as presence of art work, displaying of flags, to indicate whether a school is engaged in their local Indigenous community. They report that a positive by-product was "the symbolic also appears to reduce the

divide in the minds of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children in these schools" (p. 72). They proceed to report that one school states "now kids at the school do not see Aboriginal kids for their colour" (p.72). The authors do not critically discuss this very worrying statement as being problematic. Rather, they continue the discussion about the importance of schools to value and understand Aboriginal identity and warn of the effects of symbolic cultural gestures in essentialising Aboriginal cultures. It is interpreted that the authors saw the statement from the school about children not seeing Aboriginal children's colour as being a positive outcome. This very clear example of colour-blindness in an Australian context supports the need for critical race analyses, particularly in education spaces. In the case of this study, the assumption that the 'race' of a teacher or researcher might not matter makes the lived experiences of Indigenous teachers and workers at flexi schools (and, in theory at mainstream schools as well) invisible.

The final point on racism in this literature review is the role of stereotyping. Stereotyping, like other forms of racism, persist in all aspects of our society. Racism is firmly tied to biological constructs of race, including biological differences such as skin colour; facial features and composition of blood (Memmi, 2014). Thus, an obvious repercussion of this is stereotyping. "Stereotypes originate from 1) material realities 2) genuine ignorance by the group doing the stereotyping and 3) rigid distorted views on the groups' physical, cultural or moral nature" (Bonilla-Silva, 1997, p. 476). The issue is, that racial stereotypes are usually negative (Chang & Kleiner, 2003). Moreover, stereotyping is then reaffirmed ideologically in social systems (Bonilla-Silva, 1997). In relation to education, schools are prime sites for stereotype re-production. If teachers themselves subscribe to racial stereotyping they are likely to model this to the young people, they teach through curriculum and pedagogy. They are also likely to make judgements about students based on their perceived understanding of that young person's culture or race including altering their expectations (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). Furthermore, though some stereotyping is unconscious, it is commonly understood to be "unprofessional" for educators to stereotype. This unprofessionalism can result in more covert assumptions based on stereotypes that manifest in ways that rationalise the underachievement of other-than-white students (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). With respect to this research, teachers at flexi schools may also engage in stereotyping, despite being more familiar with diverse

and marginalised groups of young people. Even more specifically, Indigenous staff at flexi schools may themselves be stereotyped. These are some reasons why an exploration of race and racism in flexi schools is important.

In summary, this section defines what race is and how race is constructed in an Australian context. This construction has had a particularly negative impact on Indigenous peoples. Racism was also defined, with discussions about overt and covert racism and how this impacts on Indigenous peoples, particularly in education contexts. This section provides deeper context for the remaining literature review whereby constructs of race and issues of racism are integral to the overview of the literature on Indigenous education.

2.1.3 CURRENT POLICY ENVIRONMENT

It is well acknowledged that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience disadvantage across a number of areas. The Australian Government has responded to address this disadvantage. 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 is often referred to as 'Clos[ing] the Gap'. The Close the Gap targets are presented as a collective, targeted approach to Indigenous policy across a number of key areas (Australian Government, 2013a, 2014a, 2015, 2016). This framework has several focuses for immediate action including life expectancy; infant mortality; education and employment.

There have been a number of specific targets set in relation to education. In 2008, COAG established objectives with respect to education, stating that the gap in educational outcomes would be halved in reading, writing and numeracy levels. All Indigenous 4-year-olds in remote communities would have access to early education and an aim was to halve the gap for Indigenous students attaining year 12 qualifications, all by specific dates, many of which have been moved back (Australian Government, 2013a). Other policy reform 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).

Since 2010, the Australian Government has espoused its commitment to accountability towards the progress of 'closing the gap'. The Australian Government announced that each year, the Prime Minister would release a report outlining the progress achieved towards all goals outlined by COAG in 2008. In the recently released report, Prime Minister Malcom Turnbull again reinforced the Government's ongoing commitment to remedying the social and economic disadvantage that Indigenous Australians face, emphasising that COAG "has identified Indigenous affairs as a key priority on its agenda" (Australian Government, 2016, p. 6).

The Prime Minister's Close the Gap Report (2016) reported that school attendance is viewed by the Government as a critical aspect of all education related targets. Despite this, there has been little progress made within this reporting period. The current data reported an attendance rate of 93.1% for non-Indigenous students, while Indigenous students have a 83.7% attendance rate (Australian Government, 2016). The attendance rates were based on data from Government funded schools and is not differentiated from flexi or alternative schools.

The target to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes is aimed at halving the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy by 2018. The Prime Minister's Report Close the Gap Report (2016) reported that the goals to halve the literacy and numeracy gaps are "still within reach" (P. 19), despite the gains that are still required. One aspect of this reporting that is underemphasised is the important detail that this goal is not currently aimed at closing the gap, it is expected to *halve* the gap. Literacy and numeracy improvements are tracked through the National Assessment Program - Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data, which is reported via national literacy and numeracy testing of all students in years three, five, seven and nine. The recent Prime Minister's report made note of not only the gap in outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, but the gender gap between literacy and numeracy levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous boys and girls. The gap is significant with Indigenous boys performing one and a third years below Indigenous girls (Australian Government, 2016).

The education target of halving the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20-14 with a year 12 or equivalent qualification by 2020 was also reported on in the Prime

Minister's 2016 report. The report outlined that while there was no new national data to report, it is still on track to 'halve' the gap (note: not close the gap - halve the gap). The most current data available to report on was from 2012. 58.5% of Indigenous young people aged 20-24 were reported to have a year 12 or equivalent qualification. In comparison, 86.5% of non-Indigenous young people aged 20-24 were reported to have a year 12 or equivalent qualification.

Holland (2016) authored a progress report, published by the Close the Gap Steering Committee. The report, entitled "Progress and Priorities Report 2016" focused on the health targets within the Close the Gap campaign. In this report, the Close the Gap Steering Committee, comprising of 45 Indigenous and non-Indigenous health bodies, advocate a human rights approach to closing the health gaps. As the intent of closing the gap began with the goal of closing health gap on alarming health outcomes, it is clear there are limited voices from within the field of education (Indigenous voices both in schools and education research) in the national steering committee influencing the specific educational targets set out in the campaign. Moreover, the Australian Government's attempts to remedy these large systemic issues appear to remain centred on what Townsend-Cross (2011) terms 'assimilationist' approaches. As outlined in the above, the focus persists in measuring Indigenous student success against western values, norms and practices. This entrenched ideology has maintained the superiority of white cultures and subordination of Indigenous peoples. Moreover, Townsend-Cross (2011) argues that assimilationist ideology ensures the sustainment of 'racism in Australian society' (p. 70).

Currently, there are two major education policy changes that now mandate that all educators 1) embed Indigenous perspectives as a cross-curriculum priority in all discipline areas (ACARA, 2014) and 2) understand and respect Indigenous cultures and histories and know how to effectively teach Indigenous students as per the mandated national teacher standards (AITSL, 2013). The inclusion of Indigenous Studies and Indigenous perspectives into curriculum has been noted as critical in influencing change for some time (G. Sarra, 2011). Furthermore, the mandate nationally is a significant milestone in affecting changes at broader, systemic level. However, there are concerns about the ability of the current teacher workforce to effectively embed Indigenous perspectives. Ma Rhea (2013) concludes that teachers and education systems in Australia are grossly underprepared for the implementation

of the national curriculum cross priority area and teacher standards 1.4 and 2.4. Nonetheless, the changes have been very effective in promoting much needed discussion amongst the education community about the pragmatics of such changes.

In summary, the current policy environment recognises the ongoing disadvantage Indigenous Australians face. Key initiatives adopted by COAG such as 'Close the Gap' put pressure on the Australian Government to be proactive in addressing this disadvantage. These recent positive policy changes such as the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives as a cross curriculum priority and national teacher standards that require teachers to know how to teach Indigenous students. It is widely acknowledged that teachers are exceedingly underprepared to embed Indigenous perspectives and teach Indigenous students (Luke et al., 2013), how will schools be supported to implement these policies? Furthermore, how are Indigenous peoples empowered to lead such change according to the needs identified by our own people? And finally, what roles are flexi schools playing in contributing to the educational goals outlined in the Close the Gap reports?

2.1.4 SYNTHESIS OF THE LITERATURE ON WHAT ENGAGES INDIGENOUS LEARNERS

This section provides a synthesis of the literature on 'Indigenous Education', specifically, what is reported to contribute to engaging Indigenous learners. Though Indigenous students are a minority in Australian schools, there is a plethora of literature on *how* to engage Indigenous learners (Plater, 2013; Purdie & Buckley, 2010; Rahman, 2010; Wilkinson, 2009). Much early scholarship was authored by non-Indigenous scholars (only recent work is included in this synthesis). However, more recently there is an emergence of Indigenous scholars contributing to this body of literature (Andersen, Gower, & O'Dowd, 2015; Buckskin, 2012; Price, 2012a; C. Sarra, 2011; G. Sarra, 2011). Whilst this research project is being undertaken in a flexi schooling context, and while much of the existing literature is centred on conventional schooling contexts, this section is a necessary inclusion. Many Indigenous peoples have engaged in conventional schooling at some time in their lives. It is important to draw comparison and contrast between conventional schools and flexi schooling contexts.

Purdie and Buckley (2010) reported the reasons for Indigenous disengagement as well documented through a broad range of literature. Some of the reasons include

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 face daily. As emphasised in the background to the research problem, the colonial history 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). A paradox exists between what is presented through the literature 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. Intriguingly, the discourse in Indigenous education policy and practice continues to focus on Indigenous young people in conventional settings, as opposed to flexi school settings where it appears many young people are engaging (Shay, 2015; Shay & Heck, 2015).

Multiple factors are known to cause disengagement and engagement of Indigenous young people with education, many related to the cultural identity, skills and knowledge of staff and teachers. An analysis of the literature identified **six key themes** that emerged as supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to remain engaged in conventional school settings. **Theme one**, schools nurturing the cultural identity of students, highlights the role of cultural identity and how it relates to school success. There are many scholars who state that it is essential for Indigenous young people to be in an environment that nurtures, strengthens and affirms their cultural identity as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Armstrong & Buckley, 2011; Herbert, Anderson, Price, & Stehbens, 1999; Kickett-Tucker, 2009; Purdie & Buckley, 2010; Russell, 1999; C. Sarra, 2011; Shay, 2015). **Theme two**, highlights the awareness and cultural competence of educators. Much is written about the need for educators, educational leaders and school staff to be ‘culturally competent’. Staff should have the cultural knowledge and skills to interact appropriately and support Indigenous students adequately. It is thought that if teachers were more culturally competent, they would be more likely to create environments supportive of Indigenous students. Further, they would have the ability to embed Indigenous perspectives into curriculum (Burton, 2012; Cedric, Cassidy, Barber, Page,

& Callinan, 2014; Goodwin, 2012; Herbert et al., 1999; Radich, 2012; Wanganeen & Sinclair, 2012).

Theme three highlights the importance of engagement with Indigenous families and communities. Engagement includes developing meaningful, authentic relationships and partnerships with Indigenous families and communities. Historically and politically Indigenous people have been subject to paternalistic policies in Australia and relationships are critical to supporting Indigenous involvement and decision making (Blackley, 2012; Buckskin, 2012; Burton, 2012; Dockett et al., 2006; Grace & Trudgett, 2012; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Sarra, 2007a). **Theme four** focuses on the presence of Indigenous cultures in schools. The presence of cultures includes spaces such as outdoor learning spaces or yarning circles, bush tucker gardens, visual Indigenous artwork and display of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags. This visibility of culture overlaps with the literature on Indigenous knowledges and perspectives embedded throughout the curriculum (Dockett et al., 2006; Goodwin, 2012; Helme & Lamb, 2011; Phillips & Lampert, 2012; Price, 2012a; G. Sarra, 2011).

Theme five, which is particularly pertinent to this study, addresses employment and the presence of Indigenous peoples in schools. This has been documented in the literature for some time. A recent 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 Indigenous people be included in employment opportunities across all positions available in schools so Indigenous students know that schools value employing Indigenous peoples as well as having Indigenous perspectives integrated via the presence of Indigenous people (Buckskin, 2012; Grace & Trudgett, 2012; Malin, 1994; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Rahman, 2010; C. Sarra, 2011; Winkler, 2012). On this point, Grace and Trudgett (2012) acknowledge on this point that caution must be applied if there is a reliance on this strategy alone. This caution is in recognition that Aboriginal people have sometimes reported difficulties in engaging with Aboriginal families despite their Aboriginality (Grace and Trudgett, 2012). Finally, **theme six** emphasises the role leadership plays in outcomes for Indigenous students. Whilst most of the literature is anecdotal, many scholars agree that leadership does impact on engagement of Indigenous young people in schools

(Blackley, 2012; Hughes, Khan, & Matthews, 2007; Jorgensen, Sullivan, & Grootenboer, 2013; Mason, 2009; Sarra, 2007b; Winkler, 2010, 2012).

Rahman (2010) discusses the notion that there is no one size fits all approach to engaging Indigenous students and this is due to two key factors. First, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not a homogenised group. Second, it has been argued that Indigenous education research and literature is often localised and small scale for a particular group of Indigenous students (Purdie & Buckley, 2010). The notion, that one size does not fit all, is significant as this is a point I emphasise throughout this thesis. However, understanding the literature on what engages Indigenous learners in mostly mainstream school setting provides deeper and contrasting context to this study.

It is essential to mention that some critical race theorists would consider a focus on finding 'what works' for the 'other' an implicit form of racism because it infers that there is a deficit with that cohort of students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). It also negates responsibility of systems and acknowledgement of whiteness. As this literature review developed, it was clear that much of the discourse in Indigenous education remains centred on finding ways to engage Indigenous learners and micro and macro strategies that support this. The broader policy, where assimilationist ideology remains entrenched, is a possible way of explaining this where the focus continues to centre on having Indigenous people achieve parity by using direct comparisons to data on non-Indigenous Australians.

In summary, this section has provided a synthesis of the literature on Indigenous education broadly; emphasising what is reported to be engaging Indigenous learners in conventional settings. The themes that emerged present an analysis of the large body of literature on Indigenous education. In chapter 2, section 2.2.3, these themes will be shown in a diagram. The diagram illustrates how the literature on Indigenous education and flexi schools are connected and predicts why there appear to be high numbers of Indigenous young people engaged in flexi schooling contexts.

2.1.5 INDIGENOUS TEACHERS AND WORKFORCE IN EDUCATION

This research project is exploring the role of Indigenous workers, both teacher qualified and Indigenous workers employed in other diverse roles in flexi school settings. This section will summarise the literature on the Indigenous workforce in mainstream schools in Australia. Theme five that emerged in section 2.1.4 (employment and presence of Indigenous peoples in schools), supports the emphasis in the literature about the important role that Indigenous peoples play in schools across Australia.

There are two distinct teaching-related positions that Indigenous people appear to have in relation to conventional education settings in Australia. First, Indigenous people are sometimes employed in a role that has numerous terms such as Aboriginal Education Worker; Aboriginal and Islander Education Program Officer; Community Education Counsellor; Aboriginal and Islander Education Worker and Indigenous Teacher Aides (Buckskin, Davis, & Hignett, 1994; Funnell, 2013; Gower et al., 2011). Second, others are employed as qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and principals (Australian Government, 2014a; MATSITI, 2012).

The program that initiated the creation of employment for Indigenous Workers in schools, began in the 1970s as a way of addressing education issues affecting Indigenous people (Funnell, 2013). The program had an emphasis on schools with very high Indigenous enrolments in remote areas (Gower et al., 2011). The push came from the Whitlam Government, who acted quickly to address the enormous educational inequality Indigenous Australians were facing. However, by the late seventies, the issues that emerged from the appointment of Indigenous Education Workers, began to surface (Gower et al., 2011). Buckskin et al. (1994) undertook a national review of the roles Indigenous peoples were undertaking in schools. The report revealed that Aboriginal Education Workers were at that time, the greatest number of staff in education who work consistently with Indigenous students. Though the report showed the important role Indigenous workers were playing in schools, it also exposed some concerns. Some of these concerns included that salaries were very low, permanent employment opportunities were inconsistent and turnover of staff was very high. Furthermore, experiences of racism (in particular institutional racism) were common and there were concerns about exploitation of Indigenous workers in the roles.

Buckskin et al. also reported that the roles at that time were quite diverse. Duties of workers included: family liaison work; counselling Indigenous students and families; providing in-services to teachers about culture; cultural activities; sitting on committees; in class support and general consultation work with principals, teachers and Government agencies. Further, the MCEETYA (2000) Taskforce on Indigenous Education reinforced the importance of employment of Indigenous peoples in equivalent permanent roles in schools. The Taskforce acknowledged the vital role Indigenous peoples play in supporting Indigenous young people in sometimes hostile and culturally maligned environments.

More recently, Gower et al. (2011) reviewed the roles of Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer (AIEO) in the State of Western Australia. The report comes almost two decades after Buckskin et al. (1994), though there are some similar themes that emerged in terms of concerns. Some of these issues include a lack of career pathways for AIEO's; that merit-based processes weren't commonly used to appoint Indigenous staff; there were no systemic efforts to record data about the effectiveness of the work undertaken by AIEOs and there were reports that AIEOs were concerned that often teachers were unaware of their skills (Gower et al., 2011). A combination of survey and interviews were used to collect data in undertaking the review (prepared for the Department of Education in Western Australia). The authors acknowledge language may be a barrier for some Indigenous participants. However, there didn't appear to be much discussion about the concerns from an Indigenous perspective about the accuracy of responses and issues of power and systemic racism. For example, although data was non-identifiable, principals would have been aware if their AIEO were participating in the research. Given the contract nature of the positions and some of the issues mentioned earlier, I question whether Indigenous staff would have felt safe to speak honestly and openly.

There also appeared to be equal or more weight in the review about what the principal and teacher felt about the effectiveness of the roles as opposed to Indigenous students, their families and communities. That is not to reduce the importance of understanding what (presumably) non-Indigenous principals and teachers think about the role. However, I question the exclusion of the perspectives of Indigenous (and non-Indigenous students), Indigenous parents and communities when the study was a review for a State Education Department. A more balanced analysis would require

those voices. Nonetheless, the study reported that approximately 60% of principals and 75% of teachers believe the employment of Aboriginal and Islander Education Officers is effective (Gower et al., 2011). These results clearly indicate that the AIEO program still requires significant consideration from a principal or teacher's perspective.

In a much smaller study on Indigenous Education Workers (IEW's), Funnell (2013) outlined that the "literature on IEWs is presently conceptually sketchy; it lacks both a worldview and accounts from occupants that describes how this world is for them and where they stand within it" (p. 45). Funnell asserts that the presence of Indigenous staff plays a critical role in identity affirming in relation to Indigenous students; however, it is not a well-defined role. Furthermore, Funnell argues that there is a level of hybridity as the role requires cultural knowledge in addition to the duties undertaken in a teacher aide position. The key issues that Funnell identified in relation to the roles of IEWs is the lack of professional worth that is then given to the cultural knowledge required for an IEW to undertake this role. Further, Funnell draw on British studies that outline that less qualified staff at schools sometimes end up working with students of the highest needs. Drawing these parallels was relevant to discussion about the roles of IEWs (and equivalent positions) given the political climate in Australia of emphasis on closing the educational gap.

In the "largest empirical" study on Indigenous education thus far, Luke et al. (2013) also reported findings consistent with previous studies. "Many Indigenous education workers and teachers report the experiences of marginalisation and disenfranchisement in schools with reactive job roles and insecure working conditions" (p. 3). This study was part of a large scale summative evaluation of the Stronger Smarter Learning Communities Project. What differentiates this study from Gower et al. (2011) is that the research team on this project, whilst predominantly non-Indigenous, specifically empowered the voices of Indigenous staff, students and families. This inclusion of Indigenous voices led to essential data on the actual experiences of Indigenous staff. Further, it also revealed more paradoxical findings on Indigenous and non-Indigenous perceptions. Persistently, the description that "deficit discourses are part of the status quo in Indigenous Education " (p. 90) was commonly reported. This further resulted in Indigenous Education Workers describing that they are "overworked" (p. 89) yet at the same time their knowledge and skills are not

adequately utilised by schools in many cases. Like previous studies, the issue of lack of permanent positions and insecurity regularly surfaced. An issue not so prominent in previous studies was the concern of Indigenous teachers and workers that funding allocated to Indigenous education is often non-recurrent (Luke et al., 2013). This large-scale report informs my research, and my decisions around focusing as much on non-teaching staff as teachers considering their impact on school practices and students, and the lack of recognition they receive from conventional schools.

A current study by Andersen et al. (2015) examined the Aboriginal Education Workers (AEW) in Tasmania and pathways to becoming a qualified teachers reported similar findings and issues outlined above. Although the study focused on identifying strategies to improve the numbers of Aboriginal Education Workers becoming qualified teachers, there were findings that have broader implications in relation to the AEW role. Some of the key findings include that when a AEW feels valued, this is a motivating factor for an AEW to enrol in a teaching degree. AEW's feel valued when principals and teachers are supportive and inclusive of Aboriginal people, further the authors conclude that this then makes principals a key factor in influencing the overall culture of the school in relation to Indigenous discourse. AEW's also reported that cultural identity is a key factor that impacts on Aboriginal student success; a connection that is also outlined previously in section 2.1.4. Whilst AEW's advocate that some non-Indigenous teachers need professional development around cultural protocols (particularly communicating), they also acknowledged that some non-Indigenous teachers who include and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in their classrooms were having a positive influence on Aboriginal student identity and success.

An issue with undervaluing Indigenous Education Workers (or equivalent roles) is that schools are inherently hierarchical structures. In the structure of a standard conventional school, a principal will hold the highest position, followed by deputy principal, heads of school, teachers and finally teacher aides and ancillary staff. In the hierarchy of the school equivalence to a teacher aide, there are issues if the only Indigenous persons on staff are in an Indigenous Education Worker position. Prominently, the issue is that this may serve to reinforce the position of Indigenous peoples in broader Australian society. Moreover, it posits Indigenous staff as a minimal priority in terms of the work they are undertaking. C. Sarra (2011) argues

from his Aboriginal standpoint as an educator and past principal that schools must listen to the Aboriginal staff. He further evaluates that when Aboriginal staff do have a "genuine say in strategic and operational matters", positive changes occur (p. 120). This sentiment is echoed by many Aboriginal scholars who agree that Aboriginal people must be involved in genuine, meaningful ways. Empowerment of Indigenous staff to be involved in decision making is crucial if there are to be any improvements made to the educational experiences of Indigenous young people (Buckskin, 2012). However, given the hierarchical nature of conventional schools, it would be highly dependent on individual school leaders as to the value of Indigenous education workers hence the issues that arise from the literature discussed above. The study by Andersen, Gower & McDowd (2015) concluded that Principals play a key role in the school climate in relation to Indigenous discourse and this affects the variance in how the value of workers is played out through the perceptions of individual principals. While no other equivalent research exists with respect to flexi school settings, the same concerns may or may not be held by Indigenous teachers and Indigenous Education Workers.

A strategy to counter these concerns that has been acknowledged for some time now, is to increase the number of qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers (Australian Government, 2014a; Lampert & Burnett, 2012; Lane, 1991; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Reid, Santoro, Crawford, & Simpson, 2009; Santoro et al., 2011). While there are early records of unqualified Aboriginal teachers on "mission schools and on stations" (Patton, Lee Hong, Lampert, Burnett, & Anderson, 2012, p. 13), systemic efforts to develop a significant cohort of Indigenous teachers did not emerge until the 1980s. At this time, Paul Hughes eminently called for 1000 teachers by 1990 (Lane, 1991). This target was not achieved. However, the agenda was reborn when the "More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative" was funded for four years by the Australian Government to increase the numbers of Indigenous teachers in classrooms (MATSITI, 2012). This multifaceted project is explored the reasons behind the low numbers and developing strategies to overcome these concerns.

The value of having more qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and principals, such as providing positive role models (Malin, 1994; Shay & Heck, 2013) and support for Indigenous students (Patton et al., 2012) is well established. However, the general body of literature on Indigenous participation

suggests that like the data on school completion rates, Indigenous people are significantly under-represented compared to their non-Indigenous peers (Shay & Heck, 2013). This means that there are considerable barriers to overcome in increasing the numbers of Indigenous teachers.

A workforce analysis commissioned by MATSITI of Indigenous teachers in Australia (Australian Government, 2014a) revealed that the total Indigenous teacher workforce in Australian schools in 2014 was 1.2%. In the same period, Indigenous students comprised of 4.9% of the total student population. This data convincingly supports the need for more Indigenous teacher based on numbers alone. However, just as underrepresented are Indigenous principals, with only 78 in total at the time of the analysis. The synthesis of the literature on what supports Indigenous learners (section 2.1.4) produced a theme (six) on leadership and its importance in improving outcomes for Indigenous learners. This emphasis suggests that there would be significant benefit in not only having more qualified Indigenous teachers, but more Indigenous educational leaders as well. Interestingly, the report also revealed that Indigenous teachers are more likely to be teaching in low SES schools than other teachers' (p. 8). Why this is the case was not explored.

However, once employed, Indigenous teachers experiences are not always easy. Santoro et al. (2011) reported results from a study aimed at understanding the reasons behind low Indigenous teacher numbers, including why Indigenous teachers might leave the teaching profession. The findings outline that Indigenous teachers described feeling that there were high expectations placed upon them. An example of this is some Indigenous teachers feeling like they were being held responsible for all things Indigenous. This unreasonable level of responsibility included the expectation of being the conduit between community and school (Santoro et al., 2011). Additionally, there is a large body of "literature and evidence to suggest that non-Indigenous teachers in Australia simply do not know enough about how to teach Indigenous children" (Santoro et al., 2011, p. 65) which may partially explain some of the unreasonable expectations that are placed on Indigenous teachers.

Indigenous staff in flexi schools

In the flexi schooling context, there was little known about the Indigenous workforce. This is because of two reasons. First, reports on flexi schools are relatively new to the education literature in Australia, therefore there is still a great deal that is unknown. Second, flexi schools do not necessarily collect data in the same way that conventional schools do. My Masters research (Shay, 2013) was a study of how principals of flexi schools reported they were supporting Indigenous learners in their schools. Because of the limited knowledge of Indigenous interactions with flexi schooling contexts, there was a section of my survey that required specific demographic data. A total of eight flexi schools in Queensland participated, and whilst the data is not generalisable or sizable in comparison to the results of the workforce analysis above, it does provide some valuable insights. The results from my Masters study showed that there were significant numbers of Indigenous people employed at the flexi schools surveyed, with the average numbers of Indigenous staff to non-Indigenous staff 29.6%. There were four qualified Indigenous teachers employed in total, indicating that like conventional schools, trained Indigenous teachers are significantly underrepresented. Nevertheless, they are better represented than in mainstream schools, which provides some additional rationale for the importance of this new research.

The data also established that while staffing numbers are high, 61.3% of all Indigenous staff did not hold any formal qualifications. The literature on Indigenous Education Workers suggests that considerably more investigation is required as to how the workers are employed, supported and are given opportunities to grow. Given the finding that 61.3% of all Indigenous staff did not hold any formal qualifications, there is a clear need for urgent and further research to explore these conditions in flexi schooling contexts.

Indigenous Education Workers assume similar roles around the nation in schools that consist of what Buckskin et al. (1994) described: family liaison work, classroom support and organising cultural activities. My research determined that the schools I surveyed reported Indigenous staff were employed in a variety of roles including chaplain, arts workers and youth workers. From the literature discussed earlier in this section, it is known that most Indigenous staff are employed in conventional schools as Indigenous Education Workers. It is unknown whether

Indigenous staff are actually undertaking duties that are consistent with these job titles or if they are called upon because they are Indigenous to perform duties that are outside of their roles. This reveals an enormous gap in the literature about the roles Indigenous peoples are undertaking in flexi schools and it could be further argued that there is still patchy knowledge about roles within conventional schools.

In summary, this chapter has provided the historical context of this research by discussing how the colonial legacies of race and racism continue to impact on Indigenous Australians and indeed all Australians. A summary of the current Indigenous education policy environment was provided to demonstrate that current policy is both limited and limiting; demonstrating the need for new ideas and approaches to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous young people. A synthesis of the literature demonstrated that there is a breadth of research broadly on Indigenous education. However, much of the literature continues to explore why Indigenous young people disengage from conventional settings and what strategies can be implemented to overcome these barriers. Six themes emerged revealing that there are well documented ways of improving engagement and outcomes though it is unclear how many schools are engaged in those practices. Finally, a discussion on the professional roles Indigenous staff are undertaking in both conventional and flexi schools illustrates that there is a gap in the literature about what is known about the contribution Indigenous staff are making in flexi school settings.

2.2 FLEXI SCHOOLING IN AUSTRALIA

2.2.1 DEFINING FLEXI SCHOOLS IN AUSTRALIA

This research focuses on the specific Australian schooling site termed ‘flexi schools’ or ‘alternative schools’. Due to the deficit stereotypes of young people often associated with the term ‘alternative schools’, ‘flexi schools’ is the preferred term used throughout this thesis (Morgan et al., 2014). The term flexi school describes a model of schooling outside conventional education addressing the needs of disenfranchised young people. There are an array of flexible schooling programs operating in Australia sharing the distinct aim of re-engagement of young people in education (te Riele, 2007). It is known that there are high numbers of Indigenous young people disengaging from conventional schooling and the disparity in educational outcomes between Indigenous

and non-Indigenous young people (Australian Government, 2016). Thus, it is not surprising that there are high numbers of Indigenous young people engaged in flexi schools (Shay, 2015).

te Riele (2007) discusses the problematic nature of defining ‘alternative schools’. This is due to the sudden emergence of alternative schools in Australia and the diversity of programs on offer to young people (p.54). 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 Forum, 2014). 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 Forum, 2014).

Improving retention rates of young people in education has become a national priority in Australia (McKeown, 2011). 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 (Wilson, Stemp, & McGinty, 2011). Disconnection from school results in lessening the likelihood of young people to participate in further education and training, thus, increasing the chances of reliance on government assistance and the chances of them earning significantly less than those who complete year 12 or equivalent qualifications (Cain, 2012; Wilson et al., 2011).

The Australian Government identified the statistics on educational attainment of young people as a critical issue. 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. This included mandating full time education, training or employment until the age of 17 years (COAG, 2009). The COAG Education Reform explicitly supports outcomes for disadvantaged young people including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. 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 are

supporting retention of young people and specifically Indigenous young people; all highlight the urgency of improving retention rates of young people in education. Government focus over the past decade on the educational attainment of young people has resulted in an increase in flexible learning programs that support young people to remain engaged in education (te Riele, 2007).

An overview of the literature on flexi schooling will provide an example of two typologies used to describe characteristics of alternative schools. The two models 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 defining schools within this research project. Distinguishing the type of flexi schools that participated in this study is important as it assist in fully understanding how flexi schools are contributing to the broader Indigenous education agenda, which is where this study is located. Additionally, emerging themes from previous research establishing what is known about alternative schools in Australia and internationally, based on the defined model of alternative schools that is the focus of this study will also be reviewed.

Model 1, developed by Raywid (1994) defines alternative schools using 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 typically forced into the programs because they have exhausted their opportunities at conventional schooling options programs. Remedial focus schools often concentrate on supporting students to re-engage with conventional schooling choices. Some alternative schools are acknowledged as encompassing more than one of these ‘types’ of alternative school characteristics (p. 27). Also emphasised by Raywid's model is “the departure from bureaucratic rules and procedures” (p. 26). This is described as an essential feature of alternative schools, the focus in alternative schools being the individual needs of the young person.

Model 2 was developed by te Riele (2007) who describes the mass of programs as leading to “confusion and inefficiency”, providing a considered framework in New South Wales to map “the alternative education landscape” (p. 54) in this State. The

mapping produces a two-dimensional model. The first dimension is labelled 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 presents four sections with further characteristics to describe the alternative school in order to place the type of program within this archetype. See figure 1:

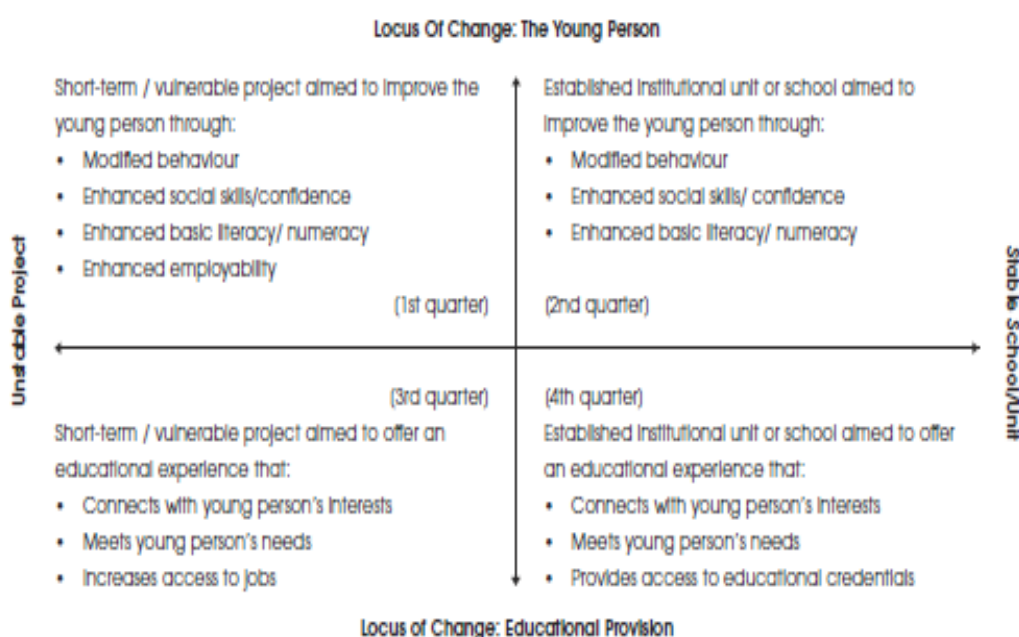


Figure 1 map of educational pathways for marginalised young people (te Riele, 2007, p. 59)

Model 1, Raywid (1994) does provide a simplistic approach to the categorisation of alternative schools, incorporating a broad range of literature internationally on alternative school settings. The challenge with the 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, the largest system of flexi schools operating in Australia is the Edmund Rice Education Australia, Youth + Flexi Schools. Youth + 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 Youth + schools respond to communities by invitation, with the aim of

providing disenfranchised young people 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. This is one example of a network of alternative schools operating in Australia that would not be 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 provided 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, she has developed a typology to acknowledge diversity amongst alternative education programs by being able to place schools within the spectrum of the dimensions named. 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 is particularly significant in providing researchers with the ability to contextualise their 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 and flexi schools through research in Australia and internationally.

2.2.2 FLEXI SCHOOL ENVIRONMENTS

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, p. 6). The close the gap data suggests that Indigenous young people are still significantly behind their non-Indigenous peers in relation to a range of educational outcomes, including school attendance and

engagement (Australian Government, 2016). Consistently, the data from the national scan indicates that alternative schools recognise this through including Indigenous young people as a target group within their programs. This is an important yet largely unexplored link.

This literature review will not include models such as 'Steiner' and Waldorf', that are often included under the alternative education umbrella. The reason for this is this research project is explicitly concerned with schools or education programs that are supporting disenfranchised young people to remain engaged in education. 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, te Riele, & Hayes, 2014; McKeown, 2011; Mills & McGregor, 2010; te Riele, 2007). National and international literature provides thematic patterns used to describe central features of alternative school environments. Three themes emerged from this synthesis. Theme one, identifies the centrality of relationships (Lohmann, 2009; McGregor & Mills, 2012; McKeown, 2011; Mills & McGregor, 2010, 2016; Morgan et al., 2014; Morgan, Pendergast, Brown, & Heck, 2015; K. Wilson et al., 2011). Theme two, distinguishing the feeling of community and belonging to the school community as a core element to flexi schools (Lohmann, 2009; McKeown, 2011; Mills & McGregor, 2010; K. Wilson et al., 2011). Theme three discerns the distinction of student voice and inclusion in decision making, thus empowerment of young people (Baroutsis, Mills, McGregor, Riele, & Hayes, 2016; McGregor & Mills, 2012; Mills & McGregor, 2010, 2016; Richardson & Griffin, 1994; K. Wilson et al., 2011).

It is evident through the literature that relationships are a core feature of flexi schools. The research is sporadic in nature and the flexi schools featured in the studies diverse. Despite this, many deliver the key finding that relationships is a crucial 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, 2016; Morgan et al., 2014). Further, K. Wilson 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 flexi schooling contexts. Theme two, the feeling of community and belonging to the

alternative school, supports the significance of relationships. This is demonstrated 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 [strongly with the young people in this study]” (p. 74). The concept of relationships and community are diverse in its meaning for young people between studies, possibly due to the diversity in young people geographically and culturally in the cohorts. However, the concept of community and belonging is a prominent theme in the literature available.

The third 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 flexi school settings. Furthermore, the rich description from young people about empowerment and young people being involved in 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 grave consequences for young people that disengage from education who are already marginalised in society; a well-known reality for many Indigenous young people. This section summarised the literature on how flexi schooling environments are characterised in the literature, presenting three key themes that emerged from the analysis. The following section will discuss what literature is available about Indigenous people and flexi schooling contexts.

2.2.3 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE AND FLEXI SCHOOL SETTINGS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are mentioned in much of the broad literature on flexi schools, see: (Holdsworth, 2011; McGregor & Mills, 2012; te Riele, 2012b). Conversely, literature that specifically explores Indigenous links with flexi schools is very limited. As mentioned previously, given the large body of literature on Indigenous disengagement from conventional schools, it should come as no surprise

that Indigenous young people are overrepresented in flexi schools (Shay, 2015). However, this focus on what is happening in conventional schools has resulted in a clear gap in the literature on this aspect of Indigenous education. This section will discuss this gap in the literature and aims to ascertain some knowledge to build upon. An analysis of other available literature will also be discussed.

In chapter 2, section 2.1.4 a synthesis of the literature on what engages Indigenous learners in conventional settings resulted in six key themes. The themes are: theme one, nurturing and strengthening cultural identity of young people; theme two, awareness and cultural competence of educators; theme three, engagement with Indigenous families and communities; theme four, presence of Indigenous cultures in schools; theme five, employment and presence of Indigenous peoples in schools and theme six is the role of leadership and how this implicated in outcomes for Indigenous students. In this chapter, section 2.2.2 summarised how flexi or alternative schools are described in the literature, resulting in three key themes: theme one, emphasis on relationships; theme two, community and sense of belonging and theme three empowerment of young people.

My synthesis of the literature, is presented in the following diagrammatical depiction of the link between what is known to engage Indigenous learners and how flexi school environments are described in the literature. Figure 2 and Figure 3 both represent my analysis and demonstrate that there is a clear connection between how flexi schools are described and what is known to engage Indigenous learners. Relationships are central to these representations for three reasons. First, without relationships, it is unlikely any of the practices known to engage Indigenous learners would be possible. Second, relationships are central in Aboriginal cultures (Martin, 2012). Finally, relationships are a central feature in flexi schooling contexts with both staff and young people reporting a strong emphasis on relationships (McGregor & Mills, 2012). The diagrams also represent how the remaining themes interplay to propose a potential reason for why Indigenous engagement in flexi schooling contexts appears to be high. Figure 2 is a graphic representation. Figure 3 is my Aboriginal representation using Aboriginal symbols through artwork. The three circles that in place of the key features of alternative school are symbols that are representative of meeting places, which is underpinned by relationality and relationships identified through the literature. Further, the symbols of people around the central circle highlights the role of people within the creation of this context. The six symbols in

place of the six factors known to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the literature are stars, existing in the background but playing a role nonetheless. And finally, the blue dots are journey tracks to symbolise the interconnectivity of all the aspects:

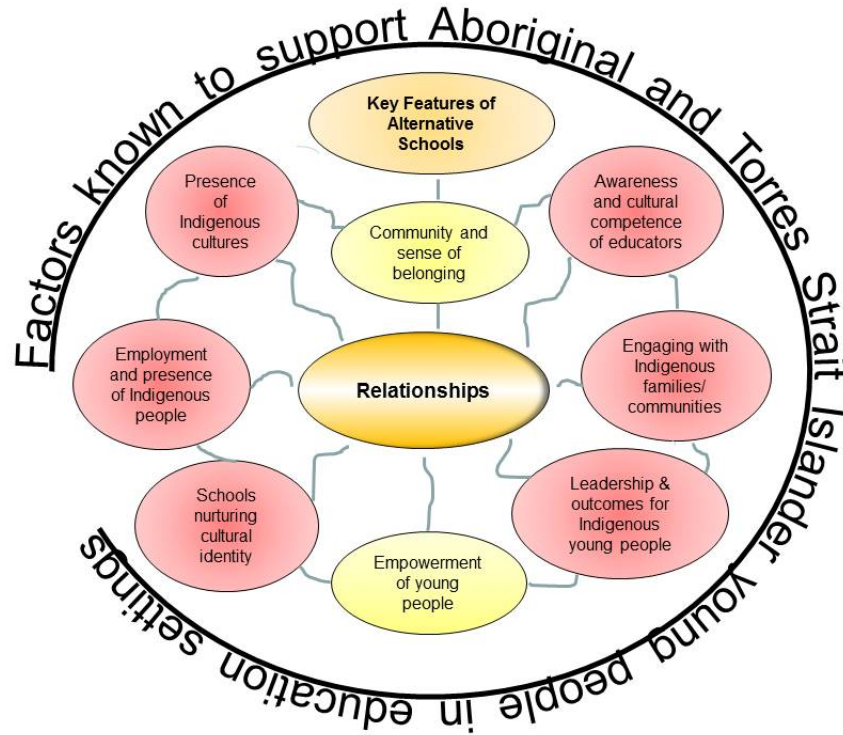


Figure 2 synthesis of the literature on Indigenous education and flexi schools (Shay, 2013)

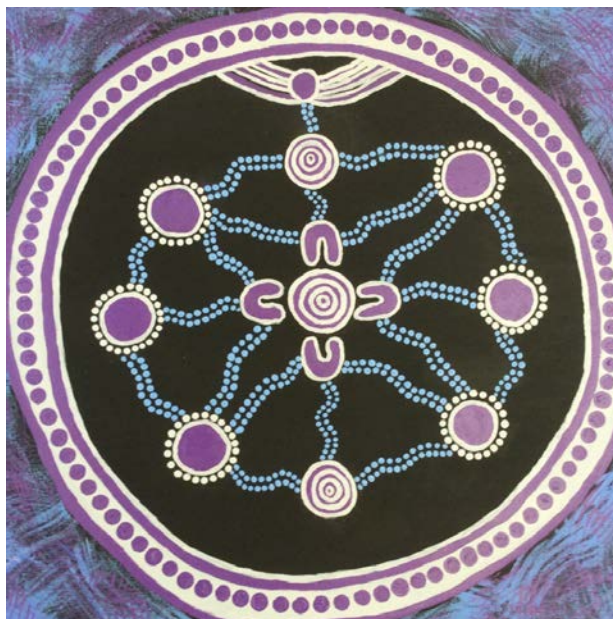


Figure 3 Synthesis of the literature on Indigenous education and flexi schools using Aboriginal symbols (Shay, 2013)

My previous Masters research did not have the capacity to explore all aspects of what I proposed through Figure 2 and 3. However, the survey data included valuable demographic data from the schools who participated. This data included enrolment figures of Indigenous young people, information about locations of schools and Indigenous staff data. Some literature had mentioned that flexi schools in Australia see Indigenous young people as a 'target group' (Holdsworth, 2011). However, there was no actual data that evidenced that there are high numbers of Indigenous young people enrolled in flexi schooling contexts. The data from my Masters research demonstrated that the average number of Indigenous young people enrolled in the flexi school sample in Queensland was 31.3% (Shay & Heck, 2015). The average Indigenous population statistics in Queensland suggest the population is currently at 4.2% (ABS, 2011). The size of my sample means this data is not generalisable. However, this data provides some evidence that there does appear to be high numbers of Indigenous young people enrolled in flexi schooling contexts. Finally, it motivated me to continue exploring what role flexi schools are having to support large cohorts of our young people to remain engaged in education. Further to data on Indigenous student enrolments, information was also collected on how many Indigenous staff appeared to be working in flexi schools (see section 2.1.5). As mentioned in section 2.1.5, in the average number of Indigenous to non-Indigenous staff is 29.6%.

In summary, this section provided an overview of the demographic data accumulated through my previous research. This data provides information that supports that there appear to be high numbers of Indigenous young people and Indigenous staff engaged in flexi schooling contexts. There is very limited literature on this phenomenon, further demonstrating the need for further investigation into this topic.

2.3 IMPLICATIONS

It was demonstrated in the literature review that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience disenfranchisement in education. This is directly implicated with ongoing effects of colonisation. Moreover, the implications of constructs of race and racism are connected to the advantage white Australians experience and the disadvantage Indigenous Australians experience (defined and

discussed in section 2.1.2). The data that best supports this notion is the disparity in educational outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (and indeed all areas of well-being) (Australian Government, 2015, 2016). Additionally, the over-representation of Indigenous people in flexi schools is also evidence of the upholding of white privilege to access and be advantaged by conventional schooling. However, on this point I must be clear that flexi schools are not conceived in this research as being inferior to traditional schools nor is it viewed as a deficit that Indigenous peoples are over-represented. Rather, it is proposed that flexi schooling contexts are still emerging in Australia and therefore there is an opportunity to explore the relevance and potential for Indigenous people (students and staff).

There is very limited literature that explicitly explores the connection between Indigenous people and flexi schools. However, key findings from my earlier research provided evidence that there are disproportionately high numbers of Indigenous young people enrolled in flexi schools (average 31.1%). Furthermore, there are disproportionately greater numbers of Indigenous staff (29.5%) (Shay, 2013). This previous exploratory research is useful in conceding that there are large numbers of Indigenous people interacting with flexi schooling contexts and supporting the need for research on this phenomenon. However, I am aware that this data provides no opportunity to empower the voices of Indigenous students or staff in giving meaning to what these numbers indicate. The revelation about lack of Indigenous voice also demonstrates an apparent gap in the literature in understanding high Indigenous engagement and flexi schools; as well as the distinct lack of Indigenous scholarship, which supports the need for this research. Moreover, it presents an opportunity to consider epistemically and ontologically what role I might have as an Aboriginal researcher in producing knowledge about my own people.

A critical section of this literature review is section 2.1.5 'Indigenous teachers and workforce in education'. The research on the Indigenous workforce in conventional settings delineates that Indigenous peoples are undertaking crucial, diverse and complex roles. Yet, these roles are often undefined, unstable and unsupported (Buckskin et al., 1994). Further, Indigenous workers who aren't qualified teachers are often employed in a role commonly known as an 'Indigenous Education Worker' (Luke et al., 2013), where there is often only one Indigenous worker per school. It was also determined that Indigenous teachers are vital, yet only make up less

than 1% of the total teacher workforce (Lampert & Burnett, 2012). However, there are marked differences in the Indigenous workforce through the diverse roles Indigenous staff are undertaking in flexi schooling contexts. These roles included chaplain, arts worker, youth worker and qualified teachers (Shay, 2013). Further, though the literature suggests Indigenous staff are highly under-represented in conventional schools, they appear to be over-represented in flexi schools (Shay, 2013).

There are three implications that emerged from this section. First, there are several studies that have been undertaken to explore the Indigenous workforce in conventional schools. However, no such studies have been conducted in flexi schools where there are disproportionately high numbers of Indigenous students and staff (Shay, 2013). This reveals a broad gap in the literature that this study will attempt to address. Second, the larger discourse in Indigenous education literature and policy has a narrow focus on conventional schooling contexts. Pennacchia, Thomson, Mills, and McGregor (2016) are clear that what occurs in flexi schooling practices are highly implicated with conventional school practices. Therefore, by omitting the high levels of Indigenous engagement in flexi schools, there is a missed opportunity to contribute new knowledge to the broader Indigenous education agenda. Third, the limited studies to draw from by Indigenous researchers suggests that knowledge production is still overwhelmingly representative of how non-Indigenous people conceptualise, analyse and investigate Indigenous education. The implication of this is then that I must consider what opportunities there are to capture my experiences in undertaking this study as an Aboriginal researcher.

In section 2.1.4, a synthesis of the literature on what engages Indigenous learners resulted in six themes. It is known through the research that the elements from the six themes have led to some success in conventional schooling contexts. What is unknown, is if the same practices and approaches lead to improved engagement of Indigenous learners in flexi schooling contexts. In section 2.2.3, the two figures provided an illustrated predication based on the literature on Indigenous education and the three themes that emerged from the flexi schooling research. Though, the figures also demonstrate that there is clearly a gap in the literature, where most aspects of the connections remain relatively unexplored. This research project does not have the capacity to explore all facets of the figures. However, it does provide a framework for areas of investigation.

The summary of the implications above has culminated into the development of the research previously discussed research sub-question that will be explored in this study:

Three research sub-questions that were explored in this study include:

1. How do Indigenous staff describe their roles and experiences working in flexi schooling contexts?
2. How do Indigenous staff believe constructions of race and issues of racism impact upon their roles and experiences in flexi schools with respect to pedagogy, curriculum and policy?
3. What new knowledge can originate by analysing my experiences as an Aboriginal researcher for future Indigenous education researchers?

The constructions of race and issues of racism in relation to Indigenous Australian education discourse has led to the selection of Critical Race Theory (CRT) as the theoretical frame for this study. Moreover, elements of Indigenous Standpoint Theory will also be utilised to recognise my cultural standpoint and bias as an Aboriginal researcher. Use of Indigenous Standpoint Theory will also support my commitment to ensuring cultural integrity of any research including Indigenous peoples and make clear my responsibilities as an Aboriginal person through this process. Critical Race theory and Indigenous Standpoint Theory will be discussed further in chapter 3, research design.

3. Indigenist Theory and Method: Theoretical Framework and Study Design

3.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework for this study is Indigenous Research Theory and aspects of Critical Race Theory. The use of Indigenous Research Theory delineates my standpoint as an Aboriginal researcher. The additional use of Critical Race Theory serves to acknowledge the role constructions of race and issues of racism that impact on Indigenous peoples in education contexts. A framework is outlined diagrammatically (Figure 4, P. 70) to illustrate how both theoretical underpinnings will frame the research design of this study. This theoretical design is intended to answer the research sub-questions:

1. How do Indigenous staff describe their roles and experiences working in flexi schooling contexts?
2. How do Indigenous staff believe constructions of race and issues of racism impact upon their roles and experiences in flexi schools with respect to pedagogy, curriculum and policy?
3. What new knowledge can originate by analysing my experiences as an Aboriginal researcher for future Indigenous education researchers?

3.1.1 INDIGENOUS RESEARCH THEORIES

Indigenous Standpoint Theory has emerged as a direct consequence of the confluence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander exclusion from scholarship about ourselves and the pervasive dominance of Western scientific knowledge systems (Foley, 2003; Nakata, 2007a; Rigney, 2001). The origins of Indigenous Standpoint Theory are firmly grounded in feminist epistemologies and ontologies (Foley, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Feminist scholarship is an ongoing critical analysis of the dominant discourses that perpetuates patriarchal western constructs of knowledge (Harding, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2013). Moreton-Robinson (2013) argues that feminist standpoint theories have "challenged dominant patriarchal paradigms, which

discursively privilege men as knowing subjects, by exposing partiality of the universal male standpoint" (p. 332). The premise of feminist theories is to acknowledge and critically analyse how knowledge is constructed to fulfil the desires of dominant groups. Thus, the correlation between feminist standpoint and Indigenous standpoint theories is visible in the rejection of western scientific norms of objectivity and neutrality.

Harding (2004) evaluates the historical origins of Standpoint Theory and provides a critique of the scepticism often raised by scholars questioning the legitimacy of Standpoint as a research methodology or framework. Much Standpoint Theory research is undertaken to explore the role of "race, class, sexuality and studies in postcolonial research" (p. 193). Hence, the scepticism faced is usually grounded in deep-rooted Western epistemological and ontological notions of scientific thought and investigation (Rigney, 2001). Scientific knowledge production can be traced back to early Greek philosophers, with its positivist ideology seeded from early European traditions (Rigney, 2001). Positivism is articulated through "scientific law", that is, if "A happens; B follows" (Riley, 2007, p. 115). From an epistemic perspective, positivist research is an unbiased activity whereby the purpose is to discover the objective truth (Crotty, 1998). Ontologically, positivist researchers believe this can be done through observation of the object (Riley, 2007). Harding (2004) argues that Standpoint Theory demarcates how sciences have evolved to intentionally meet the needs of dominant groups, that are often "sexist and androcentric" (p.26). From a feminist perspective, earlier research in the positivist era positioned women as objects of study thus sustaining the positionality of women as inferior to their male counterparts (Harding, 2004). Without Standpoint theory, the question of "whose experience is to count in formulating ideals of objectivity, rationality and good method" (Harding, 2009, p. 193), is rarely raised, particularly as it fulfils the needs of the dominant beneficiaries of such questions.

3.1.2 AOTEAROA AND INDIGENOUS STANDPOINT THEORY

One of the most influential scholars in the international indigenous community is Maori scholar, Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith. Note, the term 'indigenous' used to refer to refer to First Nations people both within Australia and colonised countries around the world. In Australian scholarship, Indigenous is capitalised to mark

reference to Indigenous Australians. Non-capitalised use of the term indigenous signifies that there is reference to indigenous peoples outside of an Australian context. Tuhiwai Smith distinguished the need for the development of theoretical frameworks and methodologies that posit indigenous peoples to speak for ourselves and challenge dominant discourse about us (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, 2005, 2012). Tuhiwai Smith (2012) discerns that "the word 'research' itself, is probably one of the dirtiest words in the indigenous world's vocabulary" (p. 1). She further concludes that the term 'research' is "inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism" (p.1). The problematic that this inextricable link causes is not dissimilar to the problem identified in the work of feminist scholars. Moreover, the intersection of gender *and* race, in addition to colonialism, has resulted in constructed knowledge *about* us as 'others' that still denies rights to indigenous self-determination (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, 2012).

Tuhiwai Smith's work is grounded in her Maori epistemology. Nevertheless, the relevance and shared experiences of being colonised, indigenous nations around the world explain how we continue to resist western dominance and pervasiveness and aspire to cultural sovereignty (Tuhiwai Smith, 1999, 2012). Politically, Maori and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experiences differ in that Maori have the Treaty of Waitangi (1840) in place, a formal agreement signed by representatives of Queen Victoria that acknowledged Maori as already occupying the land (Walker, Eketone, & Gibbs, 2006). However, having a treaty has not meant that Maori people achieved sovereignty and able to keep their lores, language and customs in place. The expectations and understanding of the Treaty differed, resulting in paternalism and Maori "colonisation, exploitation and oppression" (Walker et al., 2006, p. 332). Even with a Treaty in place, Maori people have fought for their culture and right to self-determination, which has resulted in the development 'Kaupapa Maori Research'. Kuapapa Research is what Tuhiwai Smith (2012) concludes as both challenging Western research that has 'dehumanised' Maori and "privileged Western ways of knowing" and taking up the position of the researcher; for Maori and by Maori (p. 185).

Walker et al. (2006) summarise primary features of Kaupapa research as: giving full recognition to Maori culture and values; challenges dominant Pahkea constructions of research; Maori determine assumptions, values, key ideas and priorities for research; that Maori maintain conceptual, methodological and

interpretive control over research and that Maori protocol be upheld through the research process (p. 333). Tuhiwai Smith (2012) evaluates that Kaupapa research needs to be undertaken by Maori researchers. She also concludes that simply being Maori, does not mean that the Maori researcher is undertaking Kaupapa research, however. The researcher needs to be Maori, and their work or research be grounded in their Maori epistemology. Such important and critical debate on this notion of exactly who is an Indigenous researcher has activated in Australia, and selective Australian scholars propose their considerations for an Australian Indigenous Standpoint theory.

3.1.3 INDIGENOUS RESEARCH THEORIES AND AUSTRALIAN SCHOLARS

In an Australian context, the objects of a large amount of research have been Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Foley, 2003; Martin, 2003; Rigney, 2001). The dominant beneficiaries are usually white colonisers, who have used knowledge production about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to reap the rewards of dispossession of our lands and knowledges (Martin, 2003). Foley (2003) explains that "scientific discourse" in an Australian context since invasion in 1788 has been based on "racial superiority" and ultimately being in control of shaping conclusions about "whose knowledge is and what was legitimate" (p.44). Martin (2003) concludes that until recently, research conducted about Aboriginal peoples has been "done without the permission, consultation, or involvement of Aboriginal people" (p.1). Labelling this type of research as "*terra nullius* research", this term cleverly describes the intentions behind knowledge construction about Indigenous Australians as being aligned with the fabrication that Australia was uninhabited (Martin, 2003, p. 1). '*Terra Nullius* research', coupled with scientific creations of race, has resulted in what Rigney (2001) identifies as "half truths about Indigenous peoples that has contributed to hegemonic colonial construction of Indigenous identities" (p.3).

The emergence of Indigenous research in an Australian context is a recent development, with Indigenous people in Australia excluded from accessing higher education in the not too distant past (Rigney, 2006). The increase of Indigenous scholars has supported the development of methodologies and theoretical scholarship to counter what has been in the past the dominant perspective of who Indigenous Australians are and our sovereign rights as First Nations people in a colonised country (Rigney, 2006). Indigenous research theories have developed from several key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars in Australia, each contributing valuable

concepts from their own experiences as Indigenous peoples. Whilst all scholars vary in the essence of their proposed theoretical framework or methodological approach for Indigenous researchers, all are clear that the foundational principle of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research must encompass our ways of knowing, being and doing in order to produce knowledge that is of high integrity and that benefits our communities (Foley, 2003; Martin, 2003, 2012; Moreton-Robinson, 2003; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; Nakata, 2007a, 2007b; Rigney, 2001, 2006). Some of the key characteristics of Indigenous Research Theories will be overviewed and critically discussed in relation to this research project. The methodology chapter will revisit some of these key ideas and how they relate axiologically in conceptualising the research and analysing the data.

Indigenous Australians are amongst the most researched groups in the world (Martin, 2003; Rigney, 2001). Much of the discourse within Indigenous Research Theories characterises any Indigenous research methodologies or theories as requiring both empowerment of Indigenous peoples to speak for ourselves and counter our researched position as 'other' to being the researcher (Foley, 2003; Martin, 2012; Moreton-Robinson, 2003; Nakata, 2007a; Rigney, 2001). However, each scholar provides their own framework or theoretical construct in terms of the key principles they believe are foundational in articulating Indigenous research based on their own perspectives and experiences.

Nakata (2007b) introduces the notion of the "cultural interface" as an "entry point" for investigation (p.215). The cultural interface is characterised by Nakata as explaining the challenging space Indigenous researchers face in the activity of knowledge production. Nakata seeks to articulate this through explaining that we as Indigenous researchers are constantly being asked to "be both continuous with one position [Indigenous ways of understanding] at the same time being discontinuous with another [non-Indigenous ways of understanding]" also using a "push-pull" analogy (p.216). Finally, Nakata also proposes that we need to acknowledge these tensions to allow us a more "sophisticated view" (p.216).

Whilst Nakata's work is important in bringing diverse theoretical constructs in relation to Indigenous research, some of these concepts aren't translatable in terms of this project and from my Aboriginal Standpoint. The idea that our Indigeniety is undoubtedly important and relevant in knowledge production is one that is relevant to

this research. However, I don't necessarily see the 'cultural interface' as being a place of tension, where I will to be continuous with one part of my identity and be discontinuous with another. To me that is moving towards dichotomous thinking that we are trying to contest.

It appears that the concern of tension in Nakata's Standpoint Theory is an assumption that an Indigenous researcher is either black or white; Indigenous or non-Indigenous; male or female (though gender is not mentioned in this theory) or abled or disabled, for example. The concept of having to be continuous with one position while being discontinuous with another appears to imply that an Indigenous research must relinquish their Indigenous Standpoint at some point if they are to engage with non-Indigenous (or Western) research methods. Moreover it negates to acknowledge the intersectionalities of our multifaceted identities. Western knowledge production is unquestionably a Western cultural construct. Are we then discontinuing our Indigenous Standpoints in order to continue with knowledge production in the Western academy? The questions also arises, who critiques this knowledge? How many Indigenous people in the academy are part of this knowledge production and who or what determines what is Indigenous research? Is there then an issue of Indigenous dominance in terms of an Indigenous scholar holding authority over a discipline because they are more able to produce knowledge that their Western peers see is of more value therefore are published more widely? Some of these concepts raise more questions than provide theoretical frameworks for Indigenous researchers.

Nakata (2007a) further states that the space at the 'cultural interface' is actually not clearly "black or white, Indigenous or Western" (p. 9). He argues that Indigenous knowledges are already re-presented, even by Indigenous peoples as they have been translated to English and disciplined in some way, depending on the knowers background. I accept this notion if in fact there is some consensus that Indigenous Standpoint Theory means only Indigenous peoples who have direct cultural knowledge from our ancestors prior to invasion, who live on country and hunt kangaroo for dinner as opposed to buying it from Woolworths, can truly have an Indigenous Standpoint. There is much assumption in Nakata's work that is useful in conceding that there is in fact struggle for Indigenous researchers in contested knowledge places of production such as western universities. Nakata does state that this results in many of us "viewing, being and acting in the world, often in quite

contradictory, ambiguous or ambivalent ways" (p.10). However, he still describes the process of negotiating knowledge spaces for Indigenous people as "melding or keeping separate; discarding or taking up and continuing and discontinuing"" (p. 10). I will argue in the methodology section that this contestation is in fact there for me as a researcher, however, there are no elements of my standpoint that will need to discontinue in or order to continue to meet another agenda.

Nakata's Standpoint Theory scholarship is critiqued by Moreton-Robinson (2013) who proposes an 'Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory'. Moreton-Robinson (2013) concludes that all knowledge and experience is embodied therefore Indigenous Standpoint Theory is not gender neutral. Hence, there is a need for an Indigenous Standpoint Theory that acknowledges the "inter-subjective social relations" (p.338) where "intersecting oppressions marked by race, class, colonisation, culture, abledness and sexuality" (p.339) are named and critically analysed. Nakata's work neglects to acknowledge gender (Moreton-Robinson, 2013); however, there are also other aspects to a person's cultural identity that are not mentioned. The concept of "intersectionality" is relevant to this research. Though participants will be Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander, there will be other aspects to their identities and experiences that intersect, as there are with my own identity. Differences such as gender; class; sexuality; age; disability and religion exist and to intersect in relation ones racialised or cultural identity (Bhopal & Preston, 2012). Furthermore, identities are not bound; they have multiplicities; they shift, they are contradictory and at times, they discursively move across boundaries that define them (Bhopal & Preston, 2012).

In the modern context of evolving constructs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural identities, there are many differing Indigenous Standpoints. However, Moreton-Robinson (2013) identifies that a potential criticism of Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory would be the postmodern argument that there are no fixed identities; therefore, how could there be a universal Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory. However, Moreton-Robinson points out that there is little similar debate about the oft-discussed Western standpoint, which is generally illustrated as though it represents all Western thought. Moreton-Robinson outlines her theoretical framework as being from the standpoint that Indigenous women's lives are "shaped by the omnipresence of patriarchal white sovereignty and its continual denial of our sovereignty" (p.340). Her framework is from an ontological; epistemological and

axiological lens distinguished by Indigenous Women's ways of being; knowing and doing. Whilst this research project isn't critically examining the role of gender in relation to Indigenous Standpoint, Moreton-Robinson's theoretical framework is significant because as the researcher I am always aware of the role of gender in both the production of knowledge and the pragmatics of navigating the everyday. I am aware of this because I am a woman. This perspective can't be separated from my theoretical positioning of Indigenous Standpoint Theory.

The work of Quandamooopah scholar, Associate Professor Karen Martin, has been significant in the development of theoretical frameworks that privilege Aboriginal knowledges (Martin, 2003, 2012). Martin (2003) proposes her framework "for this ongoing quest to re-search and re-present our worldviews as the basis from which we live, learn and survive' (p.4)." To that end, Martin distinguishes her position as an Aboriginal researcher and explains "that I actively use the strength of my Aboriginal heritage and do not position myself in a reactive stance of resisting or opposing western research frameworks or ideologies" (Martin, 2003, p. 206). Rather, Martin's work is grounded in her Quandamooopah ways of 'being, knowing and doing' but is deeply relevant for Indigenous researchers in articulating a theoretical framework that is centred on relationality at every phase of the research process (Martin, 2003, 2012). Martin developed a unique methodology called "Quampie Methodology" that embodies the essence of her cultural and theoretical grounding (Martin, 2012).

Foley (2003) and Rigney (2001; 2006) both conclude that Indigenist research paradigms must be emancipatory and reflect our actual experiences as Indigenous peoples. They question scientific discourse that constructed knowledge about us and argue for a theoretical framework that re-presents multiple Indigenous knowledges and experiences. Foley (2003) proposes an Indigenous Standpoint Theory with four criteria as its guiding framework: that the researcher be Indigenous (as well as Indigenous supervisors); the researcher must be grounded in social theory, critical sociology and post-structuralism to ensure Indigenous research is not classified as Western research; the research must directly benefit the Indigenous community, with participants being the owners of the knowledge and where possible traditional language should be the first form of recording (p.50). Foley's work is valuable in having more Indigenous scholars' theory building with the express purpose of challenging dominant research

paradigms that re-produce Indigenous knowledge. However, there are some practical limitations that are significant to this research.

Foley (2003) states that Indigenous Standpoint research needs to follow the four criteria to determine its legitimacy as Indigenous research. Foley's point that the researcher needs to be Indigenous is categorical. What is more challenging pragmatically is the need for supervisor/s to be Indigenous. Indigenous academics are critically under-represented in the academy (Australian Government, 2012). Therefore, it may not always be possible for Indigenous researchers to have an Indigenous supervisor. It leaves the person to select a supervisor, based only on the fact that they are an Indigenous academic. Issues such as disciplinary skills or other compatibility considerations that may be important for some researchers such as age, gender, personality and so on are not considered. In my case, there was only one Indigenous academic, Associate Professor Grace Sarra, who was employed in my discipline area at the time of commencing my PhD. I was told at that time that Associate Professor Sarra was only able to be an 'associate supervisor' because of the supervisory system that QUT has in place. This left me to select an appropriate non-Indigenous supervisor as my principal supervisor for my project. If I was to be guided by Foley's theoretical framework, there would be serious questions about the validity of my research from an Indigenous standpoint. Nevertheless, the practical reality of the scarcity of Indigenous academics who are appropriate and compatible supervisors for my research is unable to be considered.

Rigney (2001) discerns an Indigenist theoretical framework as having three underpinning principles: "involvement in resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research; political integrity of Indigenist research and giving privilege to Indigenous voices to Indigenist research" (p. 42). Martin (2003) differentiates her theoretical framework as using the strength of her Aboriginal knowledge systems (thus Aboriginal knowledges are situated unto themselves) as opposed to "the central role of critical theory and the position of resistance espoused by Lester" within Western paradigms (p. 206). Depending on the interpretation of the reader, there is more in common with both Rigney's and Martin's work than differences. It could be argued that in the dominant discourse of western knowledge production, Martin, by distinguishing herself as an Aboriginal researcher with ways of being, knowing and doing outside of western epistemology, axiology and ontology, is demonstrating

resistance in the theoretical frameworks that have been created through her work within the Western academy. Nonetheless, whether it is termed resistance or otherwise, there remains a reasonable consensus that Indigenous knowledge production within the western academy has been a struggle to find our rightful place to produce knowledge about ourselves (Foley, 2003; Rigney, 2006).

Rigney's framework is relevant and significant to this project and is broad enough to be able to be applied across multiple disciplines and contexts. Resistance, is clear in my choice to shift away from pathologising Indigenous young people or focusing this study on objectifying our people. Political integrity has multiple meanings for individuals. For myself as the researcher, political integrity means having the interests of my people as first-priority and ensuring this is the case through continuous and on-going consultation with my Elders and community Elders. The privileging of Indigenous voices will be central to this study. How Rigney's work is bound with the conceptualising and analysis of this research project will be discussed further in the methodology chapter. By identifying characteristics of each scholar's framework, it enables integration of key theories to be synthesised in a way that also highlights that there is still much work to be done in relation to Indigenous research theories. However, significant theoretical work has been undertaken by our lead Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars in asserting our rightful place to produce knowledge that truly reflects Indigenous experiences, challenges, stories, cultures and knowledges.

3.2 CRITICAL RACE THEORY

3.2.1 ORIGINS OF CRITICAL RACE THEORY

Critical Race Theory (CRT) has its origins firmly grounded in the legal field, with much of the critical social thinking emerging from African American, Latino/Latina and Native American scholars (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Crenshaw (1988) concludes forthrightly that "racism is a central ideological underpinning of American society" (p. 1336). CRT scholars propose that based on this premise, racism must not be viewed as individual acts; rather deeply permeated in the ideological underpinnings of American (or in this case by implication, Australian) society (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1989). CRT was originally an extension of Critical Legal Theory/Studies, where

scholars critique of the legal system led to an analysis that depicted ways in "which legal ideology has helped create, support, and legitimate America's present class structure" (Crenshaw, 1988, p. 1350). CLS then is heavily concerned with an analysis of legal discourses in order to expose inconsistencies that continue to create class oppression in the US (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

CRT began with evaluation that the Critical Legal Studies (CLS) faction, whilst providing considerable attempts to reveal various elements of American jurisprudence, failed to provide adequate critical discussion about the role of race and racism in the legal system (Crenshaw, 1988; Parker & Lynn, 2002). Hence, the argument that racism viewed as individual acts and not worthy of critical legal analysis provides deep concern that the systemic failures of legal system are somewhat omitted (Bell, 1987; Delgado, 1989). Further, CRT challenges dominant discourse and the exposition of 'values and norms that have been disguised and subordinated by the law' (Calmore, 1995, pp. 318-319). Like Indigenous Standpoint Theory, CRT critiques the neutralist, objectivist, observer researcher stance and requires scholars to be cognisant of and name their stance in relation to social and cultural positioning (Calmore, 1995).

Delgado, Stefancic, and Liendo (2012) articulate Critical Race Theory as being distinguishable according to four key elements. First, that racism is a consistent characteristic of society. It is not repugnant acts that happen to individuals, rather ordinary in the experiences of all in persons living in a society both individually and structurally. Second, the dominance of white-over-colour attends to the needs of dominant groups. Third, races are categories that societies invent. Race is not a biological construct. Fourth, there is uniqueness and importance in hearing the experiences and narratives from those 'of colour', which cohabits with anti-essentialist ideologies. These are also articulated by López (2003) as 'counter-stories'. The following section of this chapter will elaborate further on Critical Race Theory and its emergence in the field of education.

3.2.2 CRITICAL RACE THEORY IN EDUCATION

The transformation of Critical Race Theory from the legal discipline to education occurred when Ladson-Billings and Tate published an article in 1995 'Toward a critical race theory of education' (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005). Their proposition was that Critical Race Theory could be used in similar ways to the legal field, to analyse "the role of race and racism in education" (Dixson & Rousseau, 2005, p. 8). A paper

published in 1998 by Gloria Ladson-Billings explains the caution that was applied in her discussions with colleagues about the possibilities of using a CRT framework in education settings (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Nonetheless, some fifteen years later, CRT has gained traction for scholars who are seeking transformative and anti-racist theoretical framing for their work, to bring about social change in education. This section will synthesise the literature on CRT in education, with interwoven analyses on how CRT is highly relevant for Indigenous Australian scholars and how CRT will frame this research project.

In education, though this is less the case in recent years, issues of race and racism are largely avoided (López, 2003). Despite this, school failure is often attributed to racial groups (Blackmore, 2010). Paradoxically, school success is rarely attributed to racial groups or is often a taken-for-granted assumption. There is a dire need for education institutions to critically examine the persistence of racism in advantaging some groups and disadvantaging others. Critical Race Theory has the potential to "define, expose and address educational problems" (Parker & Lynn, 2002, p. 7). Because issues of race and racism are largely avoided, CRT requires researchers to "defend positions that are marginal, challenging and sometimes plain unpopular" (Hylton, 2012, p. 36). To that end, the caution that Ladson-Billings (1998) discusses includes questions surrounding the abandonment of foci on issues such as gender, class and multicultural perspectives and such an intense inquiry in the role of race and racism. There were also concerns that due to the unpopularity within the dominant culture of such inquiries, at the time Ladson-Billings (1998) and her colleague were not tenured and the suggestion that race was a major problem in educational inequity was a risky proposition. They were also concerned about how this might impact on their future employment prospects as scholars. Ladson Billings and other key CRT scholars such as Tate and Delgado have weathered the controversy and the field of CRT in Education is still proving to be a field worthy of continual investigations and critical discussions for a diverse group of scholars internationally.

The omnipresence of racism in education requires robust discussion and investigation into how the role of racism continues to oppress minority students and those 'of colour' (Hylton, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings 2005; López, 2003; Parker & Lynn, 2002; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Stefancic & Delgado, 2013). The use of the terms 'colour'; 'black' and 'white' will be used throughout this section as

this is the language used by lead theorists that publish on CRT. The United States of America, where most of the literature on CRT in education has emerged, has a significantly different colonised history than Australia. Additionally, there is less emphasis on culture and more weight placed on categorisation of blackness and how this is implicated in ongoing structural inequality and dominance of white hegemony. This certainly holds a level of relevance in relation to Indigenous Australians, however, this will be contextualised throughout this chapter.

3.2.3 GLORIA LADSON-BILLINGS

Lead CRT scholar, Ladson-Billings (1998) argues that the educational disadvantage that African-American students experience requires something more robust than the 'equal opportunity' rhetoric that is pervasive in policy and practice. Ladson-Billings (1998) proposes that a CRT framework in education would require critical investigation across four areas: curriculum; instruction; assessment and school funding. This framework is significant to this project as the four focus areas will provide a framework for the discussions with the research participants.

The first investigation views the curriculum as a "culturally specific artefact to maintain a White supremacist master script" (p. 18). This powerful statement concedes that curriculum is designed, controlled and delivered by the dominant culture, which ultimately results in "distortions, omissions and stereotypes" (p. 18) of other-than-white cultures and histories. In an Australian context, the upholding of white narrative, particularly where history and ideology is concerned, has been the source of much frustration in the progress of having a curriculum that accurately represents the experiences and interests of anyone outside of the dominant culture. In relation to Indigenous Australians, Ma Rhea (2013) critiques educational policy approaches that have continued to marginalise Indigenous students and knowledge. Further, Ma Rhea discusses the changes nationally to curriculum whereby Indigenous perspectives have become a cross-curriculum priority in response to previous practices that have essentialised and excluded Indigenous perspectives. Additionally, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership have implemented teacher standards that outlines specific requirements of teachers in their ability to know and respect Indigenous cultures and histories, as well as effectively teach Indigenous children (AITSL, 2013). Whilst many educators welcome the new changes to both the

curriculum and teacher standards, the lack of knowledge of teacher and resistance to the implementation of such priorities has been noted as a significant barrier (Ma Rhea, 2013; Phillips, 2011). In the largest empirical study on Indigenous education to date, Luke et al. (2013) concluded that that a "significant portion of teachers surveyed expressed deficit views of Indigenous students, families, communities and cultures" (p. 3). This startling finding demonstrates that if teachers are expressing deficit views of Indigenous peoples and cultures, there should be serious concerns for how this is translating into the curriculum they are teaching. In the Indigenous education context, there is evidence for the need to critically explore the role of race and racism that has contributed to the current discourse in relation to curriculum. CRT is used in this study to analyse educators' voice in a way that makes race visible and central to the discussion.

An emphasis on the second investigation area; instruction, or pedagogy, Ladson-Billings (1998) proposes that CRT requires scholars to view that instructional strategies are presumed on cultural deficit discourses. Though Ladson-Billings is referring specifically to African-American students in her paper, her conclusion in relation to cultural deficit correlated with the incessant pursuit of teachers and researchers to find "the right strategy or technique to deal with (read: control) "at-risk" (read: African American) students" (p. 19). There are clear parallels with this phenomenon in the US and that of the discourse in Indigenous Education in Australia, with much of the literature and focus on finding 'what works' for Indigenous students (there is even a whole program called 'What Works', see: <http://www.whatworks.edu.au/dbAction.do?cmd=homePage>). What is troubling about this notion is that it takes the responsibility and interrogation away from systems and professionalism of teachers, to further gaze upon the 'other' to alleviate perceived cultural deficit (Blackmore, 2010). Furthermore, it negates discussion of racism in a whole sense as to why 'other-than-white' students may not be responding to the teaching instruction they are subjected to.

The third investigation area, assessment, is concerned with the intelligence testing that has espoused the notion that intelligence is linked to biological constructions of race and ability assumptions attached to this (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Moreover, Ladson Billings (1998) argues that intelligence testing has culminated in the "subordination of blacks", resulting in stereotypes that serve to maintain

hegemonic superiority (p. 19). The unease with assessing students based on what they know or do not know on that specific test means that there is little space to recognise what students (or in the case of this research, teachers) do know - both within the classroom and outside of the classroom. This point is particularly relevant to this project two ways: First, in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, there is considerable discussion about literacy and numeracy levels. In Australia currently, the high stakes testing environment through the administration of NAPLAN (National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy) has highlighted that Indigenous students results signify much poorer literacy and numeracy levels than their non-Indigenous peers (Australian Government, 2013b; Klenowski, 2009; Schwab, 2012). Hence, the focus on 'Closing the Gap' policy where every effort on behalf of the Australian Government is working towards improving literacy and numeracy outcomes of Indigenous students (see section 2.1.3).

It has been well established through peer reviewed research that high stakes testing is not linked with improved academic outcomes (Schwab, 2012). Moreover, Schwab (2012) argues that high stakes testing in Australia is more aligned with conservative, economically driven political discourse. This discourse has ignored the research yet continues to refer to the rigid practices of high stakes testing that continues to disadvantage already marginalised students. The question must then be asked, why subject Indigenous students to more deficit labelling through the practice of NAPLAN testing? Klenowski (2009) proposes an explanation using discussions about social and cultural capital in addition to the application of Western values and attributes of what constitutes learning. Though there is proposition that the dominant culture continues to maintain authority over what is being taught and how it is being assessed, there is an absence of the explicit identification of who the dominant group are and the historical and social and racial positioning the supports the maintenance of such hegemonic power. A CRT exploration of such notions may uncover the role of racial dominance and subordination in such discussions. Indigenous teachers and staff in flexi schools may have important insights into the impact of the current obsession with high stakes testing in relation both to their own standpoint and to the effects of these practices on their already marginalised students.

Second, in the context of flexi schools, there are discussions and debates over the measurement of academic outcomes in this schooling context at a practitioner

level. Flexi schools work with significant numbers of young people who experience disenfranchisement including cultural minority groups; young people from low socio-economic background, young people with disabilities and young people who experience family difficulties (McGregor & Mills, 2012). Therefore, the discussions are centred around dominant education discourses imposing ideology that are very much centred on equality notions, providing a need for identification for how outcomes could be suitably measured for young people who attend flexi schools; how these discourses work in practice is something CRT can help uncover.

The fourth investigation area is funding. Ladson-Billings (1998) evaluates that "no area of schooling underscores inequity and racism better than school funding" (p. 20). The distribution of inequality through school funding perpetuates the need for critical race investigations into how funding distribution is attached to institutional and structural racism (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Books (1999) critiques school funding distribution in the US as being fundamentally problematic in that schools in wealthier areas spend considerably more per pupil than schools in poorer communities and many of these communities have high populations of other-than-white students.

More locally, how funding served marginalised students in an Australian context became a national conversation when the 'Gonski Report' evaluated that the school funding system in Australia required a massive overhaul (Gonski, 2011). Further, Gonski (2011) concluded that funding allocations were attributed to educational inequality requiring radical change for more equitable distribution of school funding and resources. Despite overwhelming evidence that the current funding model as it existed was a major contributor to educational inequality in Australia, the elected Abbott Government (2013) did not follow the advice by this comprehensive review (Australian Education Union, 2014). Rather, the Abbott Government (currently Turnbull Government) stated unequivocally that they will not support a funding model based on the individual needs of the student (Australian Education Union, 2014). This issue is particularly pertinent to Indigenous Education, where there is a clear paradox at play. The current policy environment asserts the need to 'close the gap' yet one aspect of the ability to do this, such as funding, has been clearly ignored by the current Government. A CRT analysis of the issues at play would be concerned with the systemic racism that is underlying such decisions that affect so many other-than-white

students. Furthermore, empowering the voices of Indigenous staff in flexi schools regarding their experiences of funding allocations in a context that is relatively unknown will be highly valuable.

In summary, Gloria Ladson-Billings' scholarship is pivotal in the theoretical framing of any critical race research in educational contexts. Ladson-Billings' theoretical framework was outlined and some key issues related to Indigenous Australians were integrated into the discussion. Ladson-Billings focus on four areas: curriculum; instruction; assessment and funding will be used to provide the framing of questions that will be asked during the interview component of data collection. An outline of how these questions are linked to the literature is provided in *Section 3.5 Instruments*. The remainder of this section will outline further key scholars and how their work will influence the theoretical framework of this study.

3.2.4 DANIEL SOLORANZO AND TARA YOSSO

Solorzano and Yosso (2001); Solórzano and Yosso (2002) illustrate their framework for CRT in education, based on five themes. These themes will be overviewed and discussed. The first theme is the 'Centrality and Intersectionality of Race and Racism'. This theme includes the examination of other forms of subordination such as gender, class and ableism in recognising and exposing the core role racism has in school structures and practices, and thus matches well with Moreton-Robinson's Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory. Solorzano and Yosso's inclusion of intersectionality in their framework is significant to this project because the notion of intersectionality was discussed in the Indigenous Standpoint Theory section of this chapter in relation to binaries and notions of other aspects of one's standpoint. Though intersectionality will be discussed further in this chapter, intersectionality in relation to Critical Race Theory in education is a crucial consideration for both my research investigation and construction of questions, as well as naming my standpoint as the researcher.

The second theme, is to "challenge the dominant ideology" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 2). This includes recognition that the education system is part of societal inequity thus requiring specific critical investigation of the role it is playing in the subordination and oppression of particular groups (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). This theme proposes that CRT researchers and educators need to "challenge dominant social and cultural assumptions regarding culture and intelligence, language and capability through research, pedagogy and praxis" (p.2). The theme correlates well

with Ladson-Billings (1998) across all four of her focus areas. The underlying ideology that sits within Ladson-Billings four focus areas is critical analyses of overt and covert racism, therefore Solórzano and Yosso's theme underpins how that analysis takes place. In essence, what Solórzano and Yosso (2001) outline, in this theme is an overarching desire to critically analyse the role of race and racism in all aspects of education. While flexi schools are themselves alternatives to conventional schools, they may still largely represent dominant cultures in many ways. This has been previously largely unexamined; that is, do flexi schools represent Indigenous staff 'better' than conventional schools? Are there, even in these flexi school settings, ways in which dominant ideologies still need to be questioned?

The third theme is "the commitment to social justice" (Solórzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 2). Social justice is an importation notion in relation to the theoretical framing of this project, particularly with the use of Rigney (2001) scholarship on Indigenous Standpoint Framework. Rigney's (2001) work is based on tenets of social justice; discursively placing resistance and emancipation as embedded, which ultimately implies there are concerns with social justice, particularly for Indigenous peoples. Rigney identifies that emancipation and self-determination are a precursor in the quest for Indigenous intellectual sovereignty. The theoretical choices that I make in relation to this research project are deliberately concerned with issues of social justice.

The fourth theme is the "centrality of experiential knowledge", where Solórzano and Yosso (2001) evaluate that the experiential knowledge of 'otherness' is not only valuable but critical in "understanding, analysing, practicing and teaching about racial subordination" (p.3). The importance of counter-narratives will be reinforced with key literature discussed in a separate section of this chapter. Furthermore, as well as ensuring the narratives and experiences of participants are central through the research design, it also supports my experiential knowledge as an Aboriginal person and an experienced educator in flexi schools (Foley, 2003; Rigney, 2006). The need for Indigenous researchers to be undertaking research focused on Indigenous peoples is central to both Indigenous Standpoint Theory and a Critical Race Theoretical framing. It is central because it challenges dominant Western research paradigms that have historically, and continue to re-present Indigenous voices, culture, knowledges and interests, whilst simultaneously silencing the voices of the objects of their studies (Smith, 2005; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012).

The fifth and final theme is the "interdisciplinary perspective" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 3). Solorzano and Yosso (2001) explain that Critical Race researchers and practitioners look beyond studies that overlook the importance of history in the construction and analyses of race and racism. They propose that looking at frameworks such as "Chicano, African American, Asian American, Native American and Women's Studies" can more thoroughly examine the experiences of "students of color" (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001, p. 3). In this study, the use of Indigenous Standpoint Theory is selected as this study is specifically concerned with examining the experiences of Indigenous educators and workers in flexi schools in an Australian context. Moreover, it also assists in locating my bias, interests and experiential knowledge as the researcher.

In summary, Solórzano and Yosso's scholarship on CRT in Education provides a framework of inquiry for this study. They illustrated five themes that provide a rounded framework for inquiry using CRT in education contexts. These five themes will be used in this research. How these five themes will be applied will be explained further in section 3.2.5.

3.2.5 THEORETICAL FRAMING USING CRT, INDIGENOUS RESEARCH THEORY AND MY STANDPOINT

The previous sections outlined narrative on who I am as an Aboriginal person to articulate what my standpoint is, at this time in my life. Further, key authors on Indigenous Standpoint Theory and Critical Race Theory in education were also outlined. To provide a clear depiction of what aspects of these theories I will be using and from whom I am drawing these theoretical ideas from, I created a diagram. Figure 4 depicts how CRT and Indigenous Standpoint Theory work together.

Figure 4 begins with explaining in short my Aboriginal standpoint. I acknowledge this primarily because I draw on this standpoint in every choice that I make throughout the research process. I then use the three principles' that Rigney (2001) proposes: resistance as emancipatory imperative; privileging of Indigenous voices and political integrity. I also acknowledge lead Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith in her distinguishing that Indigenous voices are paramount (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). The diagram then demonstrates how Indigenous Research Theory and CRT correlate. Solorzano and Yosso (2001) propose a CRT framework in education that

consists of five themes (section 3.2.4). The three themes that are interrelated to Indigenous Standpoint are: challenging the dominant ideology; centrality of experiential knowledge/counter stories and commitment to social justice. Still included in this framework is the final two themes, interdisciplinary perspectives and intersectionality (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). These are not clearly linked with Indigenous Standpoint Theory in its use as a theoretical frame for this study. However, its inclusion supports the need for both CRT and Indigenous Research Theory because both are relevant to critical research in Indigenous contexts. All of these ideological underpinnings provide the grounding for how these principles will influence the methodology. The final section of the diagram is employing the work of Ladson-Billings (1998) to frame the focus of this research. The over-arching questions will be guided by these four areas within education that continue to oppress other-than-white students. These areas are: curriculum; instruction (or pedagogy in an Australian context); assessment and funding (Ladson-Billings, 1998).

My Indigenous Standpoint Indigenous Standpoint Theory Critical Race Theory Critical Race Theory in Education

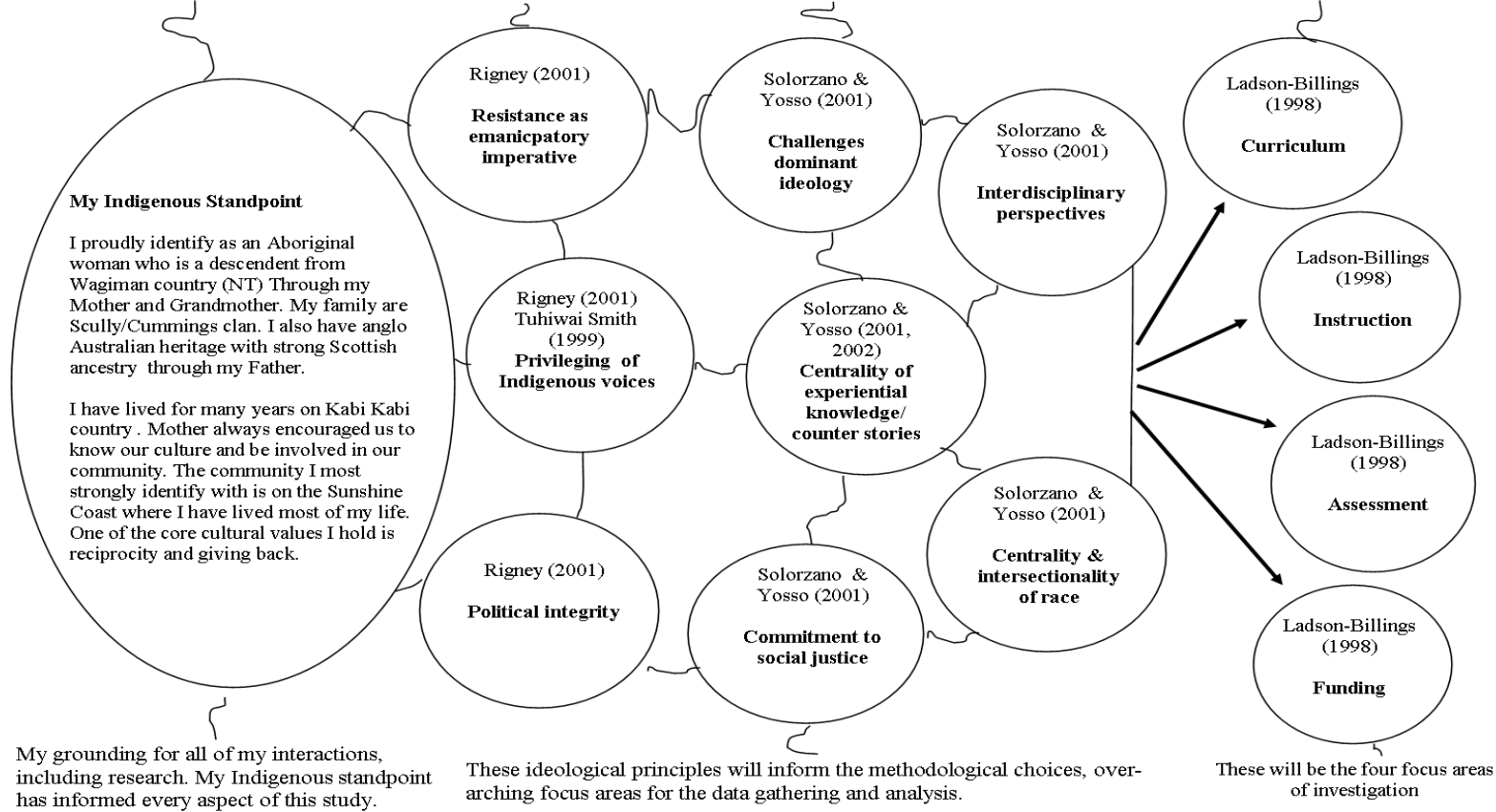


Figure 4: theoretical framing

3.3 METHODOLOGY

The role research has historically played for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is oppressive and has attributed to the positionality of Indigenous people as being the objects and subjects of inquiry (Rigney, 2001). Martin (2003) aptly discerns that the sheer quantity of research that has been undertaken *about* Aboriginal peoples makes us "the most researched group of people on earth" (p. 203). The epistemic paradigm shift from positivism to post-positivism saw the beginning of a long-awaited critique of Western research domains that posits researchers as the knower, and the researched the objects.

As discussed throughout this thesis, historical assumptions and constructions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are implicated in how knowledge *about us* has been produced. *Terra Nullius* is the term used when the British first landed to construct Aboriginal peoples as not human thus declaring Australia as an 'empty land,' unoccupied (Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2000). The idea that the continent of Australia was uninhabited was of course not true. However, the discourse of *Terra Nullius* permeates discursively in all interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia, and the academy is certainly no exception. Martin (2003) articulates the connection of history to knowledge production as '*Terra Nullius*' research (p. 203).

With the above considered, it is with great trepidation that I approached the design of this study. Being Aboriginal does not exclude me from reproducing knowledge that continues to objectify Indigenous peoples. It is essential that the research design reflects the strong cultural and ideological underpinnings that I bring as the researcher. Therefore, my selection of methodologies is a unique combination that reflects the theoretical lens with which I approach this study while also fitting with the context of my study. This study draws on two emerging methodologies, yarning methodology (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010) and narrative methodology which incorporates narrative and activity theories (Stuart, 2012). Using Stuart's (2012) narrative methodology was necessary due to the limited methodological literature available on yarning that considers using alternative to audio recording when using yarning as an overarching methodology.

Yarning is a method of knowledge exchange that embodies the oral traditions of Indigenous cultures (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010). Dean (2010) defines yarning as "a holistic approach that allows Aboriginal research to take into account the past, present and

future implications for all involved" (p. 7). Yarning is much more than conversation; yarning can be formal or informal discussions that honour and recognise the importance of story in knowledge exchange. Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) propose that there are four different types of yarning. First is "social yarning", which is (usually) informal discussion that takes place before the research takes place and assists in developing a relationship with participants. Second is "research topic yarning" which they define as "conversation with a purpose" and occurs during the process of research. Third is "collaborative yarning" that "takes place between two or more people where they are actively engaged in sharing information about the research project". Collaborative yarning may take place during (sharing ideas) or in the dissemination of findings. Fourth is "therapeutic yarning", when participants are yarning at anytime and the conversation moves to personal disclosure that may include recalling trauma or emotional events (p.40).

Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) are two Indigenous scholars (one from Australia, one from Botswana) who argue that yarning is a rigorous method that Indigenous researchers can employ in multiple ways in undertaking research. Further scholars who have written about the use of yarning in research contexts advocate its legitimacy not only in collecting data but developing relationships with Indigenous peoples or communities where the research is taking place (Dean, 2010; Fredericks et al., 2011). Yarning is an important aspect of Indigenous research as it provides multiple opportunities to ensure several important aspects of Indigenous research are honoured. Examples of these include respect, reciprocity, and relationality.

Being an Aboriginal person, I instinctively knew that yarning would take place as part of this research. I know this from being around my family, mob in the community and Indigenous peoples that I have interacted with in my various workplaces. However, there were two concerns that I had initially in including yarning in my research design. The first concern was that I would not have the time to honour what using a yarning methodology should entail. Though my research participants are all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, this research took place in a professional education setting. I knew that there would be considerable time restrictions in how long I could have with participants. Therefore, to authentically use yarning methodology, I initially felt that I could not legitimately honour aspects of yarning that I know are important (such as not interrupting Elders). My second concern was around how data would be collected if yarning was to be used as the sole method of data collection. Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) raise two issues on this point; the messiness that yarning data

can produce (yarns are not always linear or focused discussions) and the potential problem that recording yarns could mean lots of data.

As I made decisions about how to analyse 'messy data' and what to do with 'too much' data from recorded yarns, it became apparent that my research was not only about what my participants said about working in flexi schools. However, also about how it came to be said, i.e. about the yarning itself as a significant part of the process of finding this out. In other words, it became as much a thesis about the possibilities of Indigenous methodologies as about flexi schools. Due to the emerging nature of Indigenous methodologies, I know it is important to document and write specifically not only about the results but of the process for future Indigenous researchers coming through. Thus, my reflections will formulate answers to one of my research questions “What Indigenist methodologies are necessary in undertaking ethical Indigenous education research with Indigenous participants?”

While yarning is a crucial element methodologically to the design of this research, it became evident that I would need to search for another methodology that would work alongside yarning. Yarning methodology is therefore used in the beginning process of undertaking the research and during data collection. However, Stuart's (2012) version of narrative methodology provided an opportunity to utilise Western methods that honour narrative and participant centred processes but do not rely on recording discussions or yarns as data from the study.

Stuart (2012) extends on existing narrative methodology literature through proposing methods centred on activity theory that can be utilised as reflective tools. This unique development of narrative methodology by Stuart offers a research design that is participant-centered and not reliant on traditional forms of qualitative data such as interviews and focus groups. The approach provides multiple opportunities for co-research and for participants to be genuine partners in the research process. The specific aspect of Stuart's methodological approach that are used in this study is the use of storyboards. This distinctive data collection framework is suitable for the multidisciplinary, practitioner orientated context of flexi schools where this research took place. As Stuart (2012) utilises narrative theory and in practice through her methodology, I felt it pertinent to distinguish why yarning has been an important aspect of the design of this research project rather than using Western narrative theory. I acknowledge that narrative research bears at times strong resemblance to yarning research. However, the core of differences sits within the epistemic and ontological realms that I will explain in the following section.

Clandinin (2007) explains how narrative research extends our understanding by listening to the stories expressed by those we are researching. There are diverse definitions of narrative research (Bresler, 2006), although it is commonly proposed that narrative researchers are "not interested in prediction and control, but in understanding" (Clandinin, 2007, p. 4). Narrative researchers see story as a social construction, which allows participants to narrate their experiences through the various expressions of story. Narratives can be broad and can include stories, scripts, photographs, poetry, play and observation (Bold, 2012).

Stuart (2012) discerns that "narratives that we listen to, create and tell can create change" (p.442). Narrative researchers firmly posit themselves within a post-positivist paradigm. It is the belief that experience, through story, provides the most accurate data that differentiates narrative research from other methodological approaches. In the post-colonial context in which Australia is situated, the inclusion of voices that have been historically excluded in narrative research can "create new meanings from our history" (Fox, 2008, p. 336). However, this also raises questions about the right to speak and whose voices are then heard (Fox, 2008).

The distinctness between yarning and narrative research methodologies is clear when articulating the epistemic and ontological realms within which both methodologies exist. Like yarning methodology, narrative researchers tend to situate themselves within their research (Clandinin, Pushor, & Orr, 2007). Narrative researchers argue that this is necessary due to the relational aspect between researcher and participants (D. J. Clandinin, 2007; Fox, 2008). Bold (2012) explains that narrative research relies heavily on the interpretation of the data; thus, who the researcher is matters and should be made clear. However, there is a gap in the literature about the post-colonial context that Indigenous peoples find themselves and how this fits within the space of knowledge production. Fox (2008) raises some important dilemmas and issues in how narrative research is conducted within a post-colonial context. The "right to speak" and "ethics of representation" have long been acknowledged as critical issues regarding Indigenous research (p. 338). However, in the broader narrative methodological literature, it is still widely accepted that if researchers situate themselves, and conduct the research ethically, this is still an innovative and more thorough way of understanding the experiences and phenomena of groups in our societies.

The strong theoretical foundations within this study of Indigenist theory (discussed earlier in section 3.1.2) and the emerging literature on yarning as a methodology assist in distinguishing why standpoint matters and how yarning is a distinct cultural way of connecting,

sharing communicating and problem-solving (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010). While narrative research is unlike many Western methodologies that continue to see knowledge production as observable and measurable ways of understanding the world; narrative research is still markedly different from yarning research. The title of this thesis "counter-stories" was a very deliberate choice to lay claim to what the entire thesis embodies. That is, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples speaking back to dominant narratives that continue to pervade, even when the agenda is regarding us. Although there is much diversity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities, one collective experience is that of exclusion. Indigenous Research Theory brings forth the importance of our presence and ability to speak for ourselves as well as speak back to our knowledges, lives and experiences (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Moreover, it discerns that while narrative research also emphasises the ability of groups to speak for themselves through narrative; Indigenous Research Theory assesses the complexities within which two epistemic realms find themselves and the crucial role of the researcher.

Indigenist theoretical and methodological scholarship frames Indigenous research as a form of resistance and research which honours, acknowledges, respects and privileges Indigenous knowledges (Rigney, 2006). Further, it also recognises the diversity and breadth of Indigenous ontological approaches within all realms. In the research context, yarning is different from Western narrative in that the researchers own relationality (to country, culture, kin) to the research and participants enables authentic yarning to take place. As outlined in more depth in section 3.1.2, the core of Aboriginal epistemic and ontological realms is relationships and how one is connected spiritually, physically and metaphysically with country. The term country refers to our traditional homelands and the place in which our ancestors have been living for millennia. When Aboriginal people meet or move about to different areas within Australia, we know whose country we stand on and identify ourselves through our connection to country. Although it is not the same for all Aboriginal peoples (because of Government policies that deliberately sought to destroy this knowledge) we also connect through our kin or family lines. When non-Indigenous people meet, one of the first questions that is asked is "where do you live" or "what do you do for a job". Many Aboriginal people will first ask "where are you from" and "who is your mob". What participants shared via yarning (even though this research took place in a Western institutionalised context) was dependent upon my ability to connect with participants culturally – in the past, present, and future.

Narrative researchers will commonly record participants story. Stories may be audio recorded or sections of participants written story may be used for analysis (J. Clandinin et al., 2007). The existing yarning literature is yet to explore fully the methods attached to the collection of data outside of these conventional methods. I looked within narrative research because it was a much larger body of literature to draw upon to explore alternative methods of data collection when working with participant stories. Stuart's (2012) methodological paper proposed storyboards as a method of data collection, which also took into consideration the professional context within which this research is situated. The use of yarning methodology and storyboards will be discussed in more depth in the results chapter where I use my autobiographical reflections in chapter 5, section 5.1 to extend on this discussion.

3.4 PARTICIPATING SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

Purposive sampling was used to determine the participants of this study. Purposive sampling is defined as being a sample that possesses specific characteristics of a group (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). However, Silverman (2013) argues that purposive sampling also "demands we think critically about the parameters of the population we are studying" (p. 414). Before the participants are identified, a critical discussion of the process undertaken in defining participants will be presented.

The selection of participants was determined by the type of flexi school described in section 2.2.1. This project is only concerned with schools who are changing the provision of education and not "changing the young person" (te Riele, 2007, p. 60). The Dusseldorp Forum provides a database of all flexible learning programs in Australia (Dusseldorp Forum, 2014). This filter enables a search to be undertaken on flexi schools using a number of criteria. Some of these criteria include: "state, age group, duration, credentials offered and program target group" (Dusseldorp Forum, 2014).

The search undertaken used the filters 'program of one year or more' and 'Queensland'. A decision was made earlier in the project only to include schools from Queensland as there was very limited funding I had access to in order to collect data. Other search criteria were undertaken manually going through individual results. The search returned 86 identified schools under that criterion. The manual search resulted in excluding programs such as 'Beacon' as they only operate one day per week while young people are still enrolled in mainstream contexts. Hence, the aim of the programs is to change the young person, with the vision for them to re-integrate back into mainstream schools. Additionally, the Department of Education,

Training Queensland (DET) alternative education sites were part of the sample from the Dusseldorp database. The following will discuss why DET sites will be excluded from being part of the sample.

Many of the listings in Queensland identified as being "a program of one year or more" were programs facilitated by the Department of Education and Training (DET), Queensland. Further investigation of how DET describe their "alternative educational programs for students at risk", revealed that DET's programs do not match the criteria for participants for this study. For example, DET's alternative programs are not described on their web page as wanting to change the provision of education to a young person-centred approach (Queensland Government, 2014). Rather, it appears that they are described in a more interventionist paradigm. This description does not match how I have defined the schools that I am focusing on for this project. For example, under the "behaviour management" section, is a summary of how DET characterises their "support" for "at risk students":

- ***Positive Learning Centres***
Positive Learning Centres (PLCs) are one provision in an array of regional services that aim to provide an alternative program for some students who at a given point in time require intervention beyond the capacity of a mainstream classroom. The overall aim of the PLCs is to reintegrate students into mainstream schooling or into more appropriate learning or vocational pathways.
- ***District-based Centres (including Alternative Programs for six to 20-day suspensions)*** *A number of district-based services, programs and centres have been established throughout Queensland to also provide alternative programs for students at risk.*
- ***Flexible Learning Services***
Flexible learning services focus on programs to re-engage disengaged 15 to 17-year-old youth. The program has been successful in re-engaging previously disengaged young people, retaining students who were at risk of disengaging from learning, and assisting young people to attain qualifications (achievement).

(Queensland Government, 2014)

The language that is used to describe these programs posit young people as being the issue; 'at risk', 'disengaged', 'intervention'. In addition, the only description that vaguely

characterises the schools defined for this study is the third, "flexible learning services". However, it appears this option is only for "disengaged young people" aged 15-17 years meaning that those young people may have been disenfranchised for many years prior (Queensland Government, 2014). On this basis, it was deemed that DET "alternative schools" do match the schools that have defined for participation in this study.

Excluding 'Beacon' programs and DET 'alternative programs', a list of 21 potential participants emerged from the database search in Queensland. All schools were contacted via email or telephone. There was a lot of interest and support of my study by several school leaders. Due to the small nature of the 'flexi school' space, I was approached by schools located in Western Australia and Victoria to include Indigenous staff from their flexi school in my study and told there would be a space provided in Queensland for data collection to occur. Staff from these schools were included but no further schools in the States of Western Australia and Victoria were included in the sampling method due to the lack of funding to support data collection.

A total of eight schools from three States: Queensland (predominantly), Western Australia and Victoria participated in this study. All schools will be non-identifiable in reporting the results of this study. Any staff who are Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander undertaking any paid role in the flexi school were invited to participate in the study. The invitation to Indigenous staff to participate was mediated through school leaders. Of the eight schools who participated, a total of nineteen Indigenous staff undertaking any paid role participated in the study.

3.5 INSTRUMENTS

The tools to collect data include yarning (outlined in section 3.3) and 'storyboards' developed by Stuart (2012). Like this study, her framework was employed in a complex context of practitioners where issues of intersectionality (such as related to race, gender and social class) were at play. The study researched a group of professionals (police, teachers, social workers) who had been mandated to work collaboratively to assist children, young people and families. The research team were interested in finding a research tool that was centred on narratives to then be used as "rich, narrative tools" (Stuart, 2012, p. 440). In this study, I utilised yarning as a research tool. However, for ethical reasons the yarns were not recorded. Given the

complexities of the flexi schooling environment and the nature of yarning, it was a very considered decision that other instruments be used to collect data.

The context for Stuart's study used the theoretical roots of participatory action research (PAR). Though I am not using the theoretical framework of PAR, there are elements of PAR that align closely with the theoretical, ideological underpinnings of Critical Race Theory and Indigenist Research Theory. For example, the notion of attributing equal power to participants and valuing their "expertise and experience base" (Stuart, 2012, p. 440), are core elements for CRT and IRT. Further, there is also explicit consideration named in relation to the historical and cultural perspectives that participants bring to the research that other methods do not adequately allow for capturing.

Stuart (2012) proposes that her method be undertaken in stages to ensure empowerment of participants; engagement and appreciation. Further, the research is conducted in a group setting. When conceptualising this research, I had concerns about cultural appropriateness of doing one-on-one interviews. One of the concerns I had were that I felt it might be inappropriate for me to conduct a one-on-one interview with a male Aboriginal participant. I acknowledge that gender is an important consideration, particularly in Aboriginal contexts. I also recognise that in many Aboriginal cultures and communities, doing things as a group and not in isolation is also an important consideration. Undertaking the data collection in a group context addresses some of the concerns I have.

The four stages of collecting data that Stuart (2012) provides is through a workshop, with all stages offering different ways for participants to provide data. The first stage is an introduction. Uniquely, this stage offers the space for participants to not only be introduced to me as the researcher, but for participants to introduce themselves. This includes who they are (who their mob is) and what their roles are. This stage was underpinned by yarning methodology, specifically "social yarning" where conversation takes place prior to the research to develop a relationship with participants; make any family or social connections (Aboriginal way) and develop trust with participants (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). In the first stage, participants also had lots of time to ask questions about the research, of me and what the research would involve. After participants asked questions, they completed the consent form and were given a # number so that when their responses could be uniquely identified by me, the researcher. The second stage involved a story board (on large butcher's paper), where guided yarns occurred that were connected to the research questions (all participants had a copy of these as we worked through them). As the yarns occurred, participants would indicate to me

what responses they wanted recorded on the story board and whether it was a whole group, small group or individual response (indicated by # identifier) on the story board. Participants could see what was being written, correct any errors and had input in what was being recorded the whole time.

The third stage was a 'check in' with the group, where the whole group discussed the responses generated from the yarns. This stage was a critical opportunity for participants to add to their responses. Finally, the fourth stage provided an opportunity for participants to undertake an analysis of their own data. This stage is particularly significant in Indigenous research contexts to ensure participants are comfortable with how their yarns have been represented. In the field, the third and fourth stages melded together as an organic process that happened naturally either after each research question yarn or at other times when participants would say "what have we got so far"?

Table 1 below outlines procedurally and in detail how Stuart's method was utilised and applied to this research project and explains its points of intersection with Indigenous Research Methodologies, specifically yarning:

Research activity	Stuart (2012)	Application to data collection for this study
Introduction	Stuart describes this stage as "establishing ground rules and clarifying] any ethical issues" (p. 445). Start unpacks any terms used and does "warm up activities".	At this stage, I introduced myself, who I am and where I am from. This process is vital to ensure cultural integrity and transparency for the participants. Further, given the mistrust many Indigenous peoples have in relation to research (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012), it was crucial to allow participants as much time as they needed to understand what the research involves and what the intended outcomes are. I recorded details (though names are non-identifiable) about the school sites participants are employed at and what roles they are employed in. This phase of yarning is what Bessarab and N'Gandu describe as "social yarning".
Story-boards	Stuart (2012) opens discussion to participants by partnering participants. Each person is able to share their	Participants were provided with a flip chart to scribe their partner's responses to the research yarns. These were not framed as questions, rather guided topics

	narrative whilst the other person scribes. The roles are reversed for each participant to tell their story and record their partners.	for discussion that will be constructed to assist in answering the research question (see table three). Research yarning forms the basis of this phase whereby yarning will be framed by the research questions. During this phase, written data emerged via storyboards where yarns were captured through note taking by the myself as the researcher or participants.
Check in with whole group	Stuart (2012) describes this process as giving participants the opportunity to "question, clarify and challenge" each other's responses (p. 445). This is also part of an initial analysis with participants whereby "issues, patterns and trends" are captured and verified in an open setting (p. 445).	This group check in happened at regular intervals throughout data collection. At times the checking in was initiated by participants or by myself as the researcher. Yarning was still occurring during this process and the yarning would often result in additions and edits being made to the written data collected on the storyboards.
Guided analysis	Stuart (2012) introduced 'activity theory' to his participants. From there, the participants were given pre developed questions to guide their analysis. This was then mapped onto an "activity theoretical framework diagram". That map became another artefact containing data.	I modified this final phase to suit the nature of this research project from Stuart's method. Rather than an 'activity theoretical framework diagram', participants at this phase of data collection were asked to propose any ideas they have in relation to the issues that were raised. These ideas were generated through further research yarning. The activity was modified because it is essential to specifically include opportunities for participants to propose solutions and ideals as well as identifying issues. Particularly in Indigenous contexts, it is important to frame the research in a way that is empowering and promotes self-determination. Inclusion of this opportunity to map and offer ideas and ideals to improve issues, this session is a vital inclusion.

Table 1: Instruments

The data collection activities outlined in table 3 will result in data that included: sheets of information that participants provide about themselves (school location, what role they are employed in); flip chart notes that participants record about their guided discussions; notes of key themes that emerge from the group sharing and discussions about the guided conversations and an 'ideas, ideals and solutions' map that participants propose through the final analysis.

Guided discussions

The 'storyboards' section of data collection required participants to respond to specific topics. These topics were developed specifically to support answering the two of the research sub-questions: 1) How do Indigenous staff describe their experiences and roles working in flexi schooling contexts? 2) How do Indigenous staff believe constructions of race and issues of racism impact upon their roles in flexi schools with respect to pedagogy, curriculum and policy?

Table 3 provides an overview of what guided discussions took place to answer research sub-questions and how this is linked to the literature and theoretical framework. The guided discussions were developed to respond to the research sub-questions and are also closely connected to the literature and theoretical framework of CRT and IST. Further, the underpinning method of developing the storyboards is through various types of yarning (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Table 2 (below) maps the research sub-questions to the corresponding literature that links to the theoretical framework of this research.

Research sub-question	Guided discussion questions	Connection to theoretical framework
<p>How do Indigenous staff describe their roles and experiences in flexi schooling contexts?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -name the role you are employed as -describe your role in the flexi school (what activities do you undertake as part of this role) -how do you work with Indigenous young people? (instruction, pedagogy) - how do you see your approach as different from non-Indigenous staff? (instruction, pedagogy) -why have you chosen to work in flexi schools? - how do you feel valued at your school site and listened to by your school leader and colleagues? -what changes could be made at a school level or systemically that could improve outcomes for Indigenous students in flexi schools? 	<p>Privileging Indigenous voices (Rigney, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) - Centrality of experiential knowledge/counter stories (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001)</p> <p>Instruction/pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1998)</p>
<p>How do Indigenous staff believe constructions of race and issues of racism impact upon their roles in flexi schools with respect to pedagogy, curriculum and policy?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -how do you feel Indigenous people are perceived at your flexi school site? - how have you experienced racism at your flexi school site and can you describe these experiences? - how does the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff in flexi schools differ from your experience in broader society or previous workplaces? - how do you believe racism impacts on Indigenous young people at your flexi school site? - how are Indigenous perspectives represented in the curriculum at your school? Do Indigenous students report that the curriculum is relevant to them? - how does the way assessment is approached impact on Indigenous students? - what policies at your flexi school that specifically impact on Indigenous staff or students? -what are the practices at your school in relation to distribution of funding for Indigenous students or programs? - how do you feel the workload in relation to supporting Indigenous students is distributed amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff? 	<p>Resistance as emancipatory imperative (Rigney, 2001) - challenges the dominant ideology (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001)</p> <p>Privileging Indigenous voices (Rigney, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012) - Centrality of experiential knowledge/counter stories (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001)</p> <p>Political integrity (Rigney, 2001) - commitment to social justice (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001)</p> <p>Interdisciplinary perspectives (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001)</p> <p>Centrality and intersectionality of race (Solorzano & Yosso, 2001)</p> <p>Curriculum; assessment; instruction/pedagogy; funding (Ladson-Billings, 1998)</p>

Table 2: guided discussion questions

Once the questions were developed, these were then placed into four themes to help guide the yarns in the workshops with participants. The four themes include: Us mob, race and racism, practice and ideas and aspirations. The four workshop themes were intentionally re-worded from the guided discussion questions linked to the theoretical framework to ensure inclusivity of all participants. Participants included any Indigenous staff in any paid role therefore participants and therefore had differing literacy skills. The questions overlapped in some places deliberately because of the non-linear nature of yarning provides opportunity to re-visit topics in different phases of the yarn. The visual representation of the discussion questions also provided opportunity for participants to approach each discussion topic as it arose or when they felt comfortable to. This was again another purposeful design choice to reflect the use of yarning as a methodology. Three workshops took place in three different locations. One of the workshops had participants from multiple sites who were in the same location for a conference and spent one day of their conference participating this study. The further two workshops took place at two different school sites.

The four workshop theme questions are outlined in table 3 below:

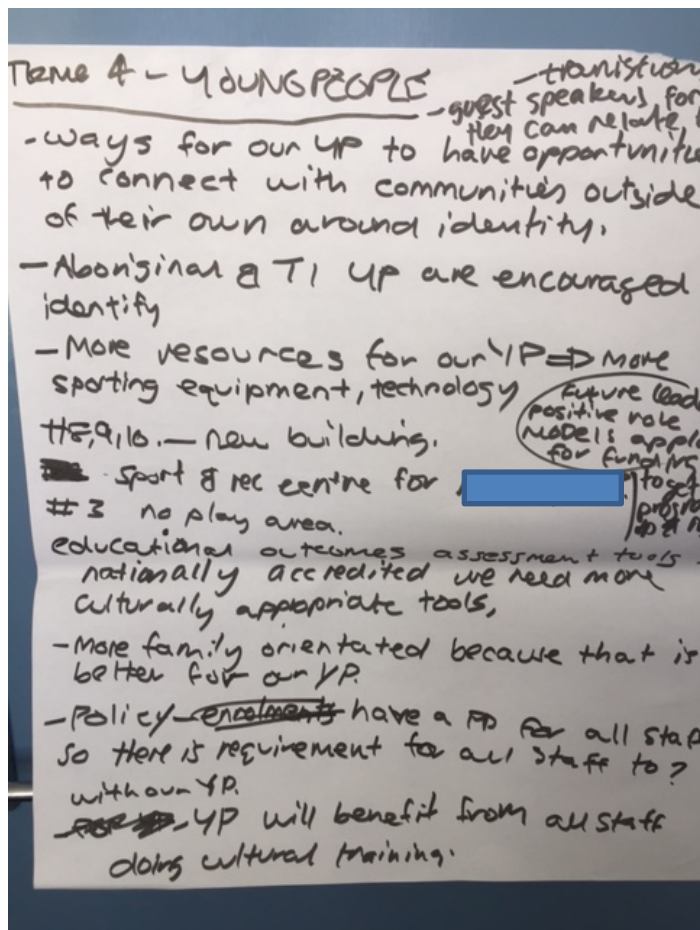
Workshop theme 1 Us Mob	Why did you choose to work in the flexi's? Describe what you do How do you work with our young people? Is your way of working with our young people different to non-Indigenous workers?
Workshop theme 2 Race and racism	Have you experienced direct or indirect racism at your school? How do you describe relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff at your school? Do you believe racism is an issue for Indigenous young people at your school?
Workshop theme 3 Practice	In your opinion - do our students have enough exposure to Indigenous knowledges in their classrooms at your school? Does the style of assessment of student learning impact on our students? Are there transparent practices in how funds for Indigenous programs or students are distributed? Do you feel that workload in relation to supporting our young people is distributed fairly between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff?
Workshop theme 4 Ideas and aspirations	Do you feel listened to by your school leader and non-Indigenous colleagues? What changes could be made at a school level to improve outcomes for our young people? What changes could be made at a system level to improve outcomes for our young people?

	What might enable or block these ideas from happening?
--	--

Table 3: workshop theme questions

The four workshop themes provided a framework for reporting the results and the analysis and discussion sections. The nature of yarning and utilising yarning methodology meant that the data was in some ways "messy" (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Utilising the four themes enabled coding and discussion to be aligned in the discussion under one of the four headings. The four themes encapsulate all elements of the research design (theoretical and methodological) that allowed for presentation of the data in an understandable and structured way.

The data was produced on large A3 sized paper, that had adhesive on the back to enable me to stick these on the walls when I was working with participants. The data produced was essentially many pages of this; some written by participants, some by myself under the direction of participants whilst they were yarning in the workshops. Although participants had the option of including symbols and other visual representations, only text on the story-boards was produced in this study. Below is a photograph of a story-board collected during the yarning workshops:



3.6 ANALYSIS

Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data for this research. Thematic analysis is a common choice for qualitative researchers. In utilising the methods of data collection developed by Stuart (2012), this process allows for an initial co-analysis with participants. During this process, participants themselves identify key themes or patterns that emerge from questions or discussion, in a collaborative manner that is consistent with Indigenous ways of being and knowing (Martin, 2012). This process also serves to ensure rigour; whereby participants themselves can ensure their responses are translated the way that they intended.

Following this initial collaborative thematic analysis, I will use the model for thematic data analysis developed by (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The common definition of thematic analysis is that it 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) provide a six-phase model for thematic analysis of qualitative data. This model will be used to analyse the data for this project.

Below is a summary of Braun and Clarke's analytic phases:

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)

3.7 ETHICS AND LIMITATIONS

Ethical considerations are the utmost priority in undertaking this study. In developing the research design, the theoretical and design choices made, reflect my deep commitment to undertaking research in Indigenous contexts in ways that are respectful, based on reciprocity and empowerment of Indigenous peoples (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). I have an intimate knowledge of the harmful practices that have

objectified, harmed and subjugated my people. However, I am also cognisant of not assuming I am being ethical because I am Aboriginal. The six core values set out by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) for researchers undertaking National Ethics Applications (National Health & Medical Research Council, 2003), will guide the following discussion in relation to ethics of this study.

Reciprocity and respect are the first core values set out by the NHMRC. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) guidelines for ethical research outline that "at every stage, research with and about Indigenous peoples must be founded on a process of meaningful engagement and reciprocity between the research and Indigenous peoples" (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012, p. 1). Further, respect features frequently in the AIATSIS ethical guidelines; respect for Indigenous knowledges, rights, practices and innovations. I have consulted with my own Elders at all phases of this research project. Aunty Denise Proud agreed to be an Elder advisor on my PhD project to ensure a balance of Aboriginal perspectives are considered in issues such as ethical considerations. Additionally, I have an Indigenous associate supervisor, Associate Professor Grace Sarra. Through my ongoing connections with one national network of flexi schools, I have also had discussions with Indigenous staff at various school sites who have expressed support for my research project.

To ensure reciprocity, the nature of my research design reflects participants being empowered to analyse their own data (Stuart, 2012) as well as provide ideas, ideas and solutions for issues based on their experiences and knowledge. The benefit to participants will be providing a vehicle for their voices to be heard in relation to the work they undertake in flexi schools; as well as how they think flexi schools can best support the large cohort of Indigenous young people engaged in them. Additionally, the research process is designed to create space and adequate time for the process not to be giving information for the sake of the study but also as a reflective, supportive process about the work they are undertaking. The research design is also reflective of respect for participants in the acknowledgement of their knowledge, practices and innovation.

Equality and responsibility are the next core values outlined by the NHMRC. Equality and notions of power in relation to the researched/researcher relationship were considerations in the choices made in the research design. For example, the group context in which data collection will take place. Additionally, the co-analysis

process provides opportunity for participants to be part of the process and determining how their knowledge and reflections are (re)presented. The concept of "Insider/Outsider" research in Indigenous contexts was an important consideration in relation to ethical research practices (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p. 138). Tuhiwai Smith (2012) articulates that though Indigenous researchers are indeed 'insiders', becoming the researcher shifts the dynamic and posits Indigenous researchers as becoming 'outsiders' within. In the dynamic shift, issue of power and equality must be considered. The procedural framework and methods that will be used in this project are an attempt to balance this disequilibrium. Furthermore, Tuhiwai Smith (2012) also outlines the sense of responsibility that Indigenous researchers uphold when researching in our own communities or with our own people. The stakes are much higher for Indigenous researchers as "insiders have to live with the consequences of their processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more, and so do their families and communities" (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012, p. 138). In relation to accountability and responsibility, I have at all phases consulted with my Elders; Indigenous staff with whom I still have connections with working in flexi schools and requested Indigenous supervisor/s at all phases throughout this project.

Survival, protection, spirit and integrity are the final remaining values set out by the NHMRC. Survival, protection and spirit are respected and the essence of these principles reflected in my theoretical and research design choices. The centrality of Indigenous voice and story is committed to capturing the survival, spirit and cultural knowledge that participants bring to the research. This project is deliberately framed to provide participants opportunities to talk about topics of importance to them and their context; acknowledging that contexts are differing for many Indigenous peoples. The choice to co-analyse initially with participants was a deliberate choice to enhance the integrity of the data and ensure participants have the opportunity to review their responses.

The safety of participants is another key concern in relation to ethical considerations. One concern I identified early through the process of developing the research design was safety for participants in speaking honestly about issues of racism, or any other concerns they have. The sample of flexi schools is relatively small. Though only flexi schools who have the support from school leaders will participate, there still may be concern by participants to be honest and talk about issues of sensitivity. Section 2.1.5 *'Indigenous Teachers and Workforce in Education'*

outlined that previous studies undertaken that examine the roles and experiences of Indigenous workers in mainstream schools expressed concerns about issues of racism, job security and overwhelming expectations from the schools (Buckskin et al., 1994; Gower et al., 2011). Similar knowledge does not exist about the experiences of Indigenous staff in flexi schools. Thus, the significance of this study supports developing some understanding of this phenomena. However, from an ethics perspective it must not be assumed that the issues emerging from the research on Indigenous education workers in mainstream schools won't be an issue in flexi schooling contexts.

A strategy to address concerns about participants safety is to assure anonymity of participants in reporting the results (Cohen et al., 2007). The fundamental nature of anonymity is assurance that any information given by participants is non-identifiable (Cohen et al., 2007). The research design means that as the researcher, I will know information about participants. However, by ensuring that the sample of participants are from at least four schools, when reporting the results the schools themselves will not be named. Furthermore, the results will be reported in such a way that care will be taken in relation to how the context is described. For example, if I was to say, 'one school was in far north Queensland in a regional location', this would be easy to identify for anyone familiar with flexi school networks. Therefore the context will be described, not the location to ensure anonymity of participants.

Finally, all participants had the opportunity to ask any questions about the research before they agreed and gave informed consent to participate. The potential risks and benefits were outlined in clear language (Silverman, 2009). It was also clear to participants that they may withdraw from participating at any phase throughout the study.

Limitations

The sampling method used for this project is purposeful sample and therefore the results will not be generalisable (O'Leary, 2010). However, the nature of this qualitative study at no point promises generalisable results that would fit within a positivist paradigm. This distinction is of particular importance to name explicitly as the broader context of this study sits within Indigenous education. An ongoing source

of frustration for many Indigenous peoples is the persistence of researchers finding a 'magic solution' for all Indigenous peoples. Despite the commonality of participants working in a flexi schooling context, there was much cultural diversity (Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, regional, urban, etc) within the group. The diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is another observable reason the results from this study (and others) must not be generalised.

The spectrum of flexi school contexts is broad (te Riele, 2014). As a result, the experiences of Indigenous staff in flexi schools is only representative of flexi schools that are defined earlier in this chapter in section 3.5. The flexi schools included in this sample are schools that are focused on changing the provision of education to suit the needs of young people and are longer term opportunities for engagement (te Riele, 2007). Consequently, a limitation of this study is that the sample is not representative of all 'alternative education' models operating in Australia.

The use of yarning as a methodology presents some specific limitations about the data set. First, the choice I made of not recording yarns means that the whole stories of Indigenous staff were not captured. Storyboards give a lot more authority to participants in what is recorded. Although by not audio recording, many background yarns and broader context will not be recorded in the data set. I deemed it more important for ethical reasons to exclude audio recordings but I also recognise that this may be considered a limitation of the study.

A final limitation of this study is the sample of participants not including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people (or their families) or non-Indigenous staff or young people. It is acknowledged that there are indirect questions of Indigenous staff about how they perceive issues such as racism impact upon Indigenous young people. Thus, the data that emerged from discussions in relation to Indigenous young people were through Indigenous staff. Ideally, the experiences of Indigenous staff and Indigenous young people were to be included. However, in keeping this project do-able and not accumulating too many data for a project this size, the focus is on the ethical process of the sample of participants who do participate. Furthermore, Silverman (2007) proposes that key to high-quality research is in ensuring more time is spent on analysis than any other aspect of the study, which is the intent on this project. The qualitative data analysis framework developed

by Braun and Clarke (2006) will be used to ensure adequate time is spent on data analysis.

4. Results

This section will outline the results from the data. The data collected includes 'storyboards' that incorporated textual responses recorded by myself, the researcher, from the guided yarns undertaken in a workshop-style forum. Using yarning methodology to collect data meant that discussion around the research questions was not necessarily linear and often included contextual yarns that accompanied the response. The results recorded in this chapter do not include the contextual yarn (which often includes a personal narrative that participants frequently stated they would not have wanted to be recorded). However, the recorded data does include considered responses that participants asked to be recorded to capture key points from the yarns.

The storyboards consisting of workshop responses and ideas from participants was cross-checked by participants during data collection. The analysis undertaken by myself involved utilising Braun and Clarke (2006) thematic analysis framework. The themes that emerged from the thematic analysis will be reported under the four research question workshop themes outlined in the research design chapter: us mob, race and racism, practice and ideas and aspirations. These four workshop themes correspond directly to the two research questions:

1. How do Indigenous staff describe their roles and experiences working in flexi schooling contexts?

2. How do Indigenous staff believe constructions of race and issues of racism impact upon their roles and experiences in flexi schools with respect to pedagogy, curriculum and policy?

Data is non-identifiable to ensure anonymity of participants. All participants were given a numeric code. This number will only be used when reporting on quotes and excerpts from the data and only when there is no risk of identifying participants. Data that refers to participant roles will refer to their role title only to ensure the anonymity of participants.

The data was analysed following Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. In using this framework, phase one required me to spend a long time reading and re-reading the data. Phase two is a stage where codes are developed; these codes emerge from my knowledge of the questions and what initially appear to be interesting or significant. In phase three, themes from the codes begin to develop. In this phase, themes and sub-themes provide detailed analysis of how the codes were identified in phase two. Phases four and five consisted of refining and mapping of the themes that emerged in context with the research questions. The themes that developed through undertaking this process will be reported on in this chapter.

The following chapter will commence with an outline of contextual information about the participants. This data will outline the work roles of the participants and contextual information about the types of schools that participants are working in. As there is limited information in the literature about Indigenous participation in flexi schools, the contextual information provided will include de-identified open access data from the 'My School' website (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016). The My School website is described as a "resource for parents, educators and the community to give readily accessible information". Data includes enrolment and attendance figures (including specific Indigenous enrolment and attendance figures), school location categorisation, NAPLAN (National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy) data and staff size. As this research is situated in the broader field of Indigenous education, I used

the opportunity to utilise available data to include information that may provide important data about flexi schools within the broader field Indigenous education.

4.1 PARTICIPANT ROLES AND PARTICIPATING SCHOOL DATA

Participants were identified for this study through their Principals' or Heads of Campus. Participating schools were identified through the characteristic of being a longer-term education opportunity that is characterised by being an education re-engagement pathway for young people who change educational provision to meet the needs of young people (te Riele, 2007). The call for participants went out to all Indigenous staff. It emerged through this process that Indigenous teachers were going to be less available to participate in the study. Therefore, only one participant employed as a teacher participated in the study. The research yarns were therefore adjusted accordingly.

Workshop participants contributing to the data included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff undertaking the following roles: administration officer; canteen coordinator; family support officer; Indigenous youth worker; principal; student support worker; teacher, teacher aide and youth worker. The data includes staff from eight schools across three states: Queensland (predominantly), Western Australia and Victoria. A total of nineteen staff participated in the study. Table 4 provides a summary of numbers of staff from each location:

Role	Number of participants
Administration Officer	2
Canteen Coordinator	2
Family Support Officer	1
Indigenous Liaison/ Youth Worker	1
Principal	1
Student Support Worker	1

Teacher	1
Teacher's Aide	1
Youth Worker	9
TOTAL	19

Table 4: Participant roles

The participants in this study were employed in eight different flexi schools, from three States in Australia. Including de-identified school data provides important contextual information about the participant's schools, which will assist in the analysis of the roles and experiences of Indigenous staff in a schooling context which has not previously been studied. The 'My School' website is "a resource for parents, educators and the community to give readily accessible information about each of Australia's just over 10,000 schools and campuses" (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016). The website now has eight years of data on a range of school profile data including NAPLAN (National literacy and numeracy testing) 'performance', funding levels, school staffing and student attendance and engagement data.

In table 5 below, a summary of the school's geographic location (as categorised by the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Reporting Authority), school size, NAPLAN performance results and school attendance data. School geographic data is explained in the glossary on the My School website as: "On *My School*, the four possible locations are metropolitan, provincial, remote and very remote. The locations on *My School* are determined according to the Schools Geographic Location Classification Scheme of the former Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEECDYA), now the Education Council" (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016).

The school attendance data is reported based on the National Standards for Student Attendance Data Reporting. Student attendance data is then categorised into Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (presumably based on self-identifying status during school enrolment). There are two categories then described. Student attendance "is defined as the number of actual full-time equivalent student-days attended by full-

time students in Years 1 to 10 as a percentage of the total number of possible student-days attended over the period” (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016). Student attendance level is then defined as “as the proportion of full-time students in Years 1–10, whose attendance rate is greater than, or equal to, 90 per cent over the (reporting) period” (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016).

Inclusion of this data only includes 2016 data to provide a snapshot of the context based on the timeframes when this study was conducted. The intent of including this data is to further contextualise the education context within which this study is situated. As there has been very limited studies on this topic to date, including data that is readily available assisted in the analysis of the results of this study. Moreover, including this data further assists in critical analysis of how flexi schools are situated in the broader Indigenous education discourse.

School	Geographic Category	School size	NAPLAN performance results	School attendance data
1	Metropolitan	Total enrolments: 122.2 Indigenous enrolments: 28% Teaching staff: 14 Non-teaching staff: 18	No data student testing below threshold	<u>Student attendance rate</u> All students: 59% Indigenous students: 61% Non-indigenous students: 58% <u>Student attendance level</u> All students: 9% Indigenous students: 5% Non-indigenous students: 10%
2	Metropolitan	Total enrolments: 126 Indigenous enrolments: 56% Teaching staff: 13 Non-teaching staff: 18	NAPLAN data unavailable	<u>Student attendance rate</u> All students: 47% Indigenous students: 48% Non-indigenous students: 47% <u>Student attendance level</u> All students: 3% Indigenous students: 2% Non-indigenous students: 2%
3	Provincial	Total enrolments: 79 Indigenous enrolments: 82% Teaching staff: 6 Non-teaching staff: 14	NAPLAN data unavailable	<u>Student attendance rate</u> All students: 89% Indigenous students: 90% Non-indigenous students: 88% <u>Student attendance level</u> All students: 45% Indigenous students: 42% Non-indigenous students: 57%
4	Provincial	Total enrolments: 87.4 Indigenous enrolments: 13% Teaching staff: 6 Non-teaching staff: 14	NAPLAN data unavailable	<u>Student attendance rate</u> All students: 75% <u>Student attendance level</u> All students: 11% No Indigenous data available
5	Metropolitan	Total enrolments: 318 Indigenous enrolments: 5% Teaching staff: 28 Non-teaching staff: 37	NAPLAN data unavailable	School attendance data unavailable

School	Geographic Category	School size	NAPLAN results	School attendance data
6	Metropolitan	Total enrolments: 100.6 Indigenous enrolments: 28% Teaching staff: 12 Non-teaching staff: 13	NAPLAN data unavailable	<u>Student attendance rate</u> All students: 52% Indigenous students: 40% Non-indigenous students: 56% <u>Student attendance level</u> All students: 9% Indigenous students: 8% Non-indigenous students: 9%
7	Remote	Total enrolments: 81.5 Indigenous: 96% Teaching staff: 11 Non-teaching staff: 18	Student population below reporting threshold	<u>Student attendance rate</u> All students: 53% Indigenous students: - Non-indigenous students: - <u>Student attendance level</u> All students: 19% Indigenous students: - Non-indigenous students: -
8	Metropolitan	Total enrolments: 75 Indigenous: 40% Teaching staff: 9 Non-teaching staff: 16	NAPLAN data unavailable	<u>Student attendance rate</u> All students: 36% Indigenous students: 36% Non-indigenous students: 37% <u>Student attendance level</u> All students: - Indigenous students: - Non-indigenous students: -

Table 5: My School information

4.2 WORKSHOP THEME ONE: US MOB

Workshop theme one, us mob, is connected to the research question one: How do Indigenous staff describe their experiences and roles working in flexi schooling contexts? In seeking to answer this question, it was essential to include information about participants themselves. This workshop theme includes open-ended questions such as:

- why did you choose to work in flexi schools?
- describe your role and what you do
- how is your way of working with our young people different to non-Indigenous workers?
- how do you work with our young people at your school?

This section will outline the themes that emerged through the coding of data and subsequent thematic analysis. The data will then be analysed in more depth, supporting the emergence of themes with direct quotes from the data.

4.2.1 WHY INDIGENOUS STAFF ARE CHOOSING TO WORK IN FLEXI SCHOOLS

Responses to this research question varied amongst participants. Only two of the nineteen participants (#4, 13) reported explicitly that they had not heard of flexi schools prior to undertaking their positions in the schools. Five participants (#2, 9, 11, 13,14) identified that they had been previously employed in education support roles mainstream schools. Of these five participants, all five reported diverse experiences in their transitions to flexi schooling contexts:

#2 I was based in a remote community setting in mainstream prior. First few days were confronting. Now I'm working with great people, building rapport with young people. There are good days and they are rewarding but there are bad days. I have grown in the flexis, working with diversity

#9 I found it hard to be there for young people [in mainstream schools]. There were lots of Aboriginal kids [at flexi schools] and it felt right

#11 My main role [in mainstream] was about truancy. I felt like there was a lot more I could do but there was only so much I could flex the school - 3 chances and they were out. We lost too many. I wanted to go to a school I felt supported students

#13 I had always worked in mainstream. I was shocked the first day [of flexi school]. Kids were throwing chairs and swearing. Now working with principles, feels like a safe environment

#14 [I] was working as Indigenous support worker at mainstream high school (acting CEC) ... I was always in trouble at mainstream because I prioritised young people over the needs of the system. First thing I saw [at flexi school] was young people. I liked the look of the school. Was wondering if I was stepping down as I was offered job as the [protected for anonymity]. I thought it's more hands on with young people and I could be with young people

It was reported by participants who had not heard of flexi schools that they were finding out about them through job advertisements; informally (through networks) and through having young people in their families who were attending a flexi school. Participants who had heard of flexi schools previously provided a number of reasons for choosing to work in this context including: personal (low socioeconomic) background of participants, having young people who are family at the school, personal growth opportunities, being valued by school leaders and being attracted to the environment of the school (catering to individual needs, high Indigenous student numbers). Some examples of these reasons:

#3 I had wanted to be involved in flexis for a few years so when a position came up I jumped at it. I was involved in mainstream for many years but I felt like I had so much to offer the flexis. I raised [protected for anonymity] kids on my own lots of flexi young people don't have a lot either

#11 In flexis they are flexible to the individual. I get a lot closer to the students and learn about them as humans. They' re numbers at mainstream but they are people at ours

#12 I knew about flexis cos I had family go to one

#14 [I] wanted to work in flexis since the time I heard about them... First thing I saw was young people. I liked the look of the school

#18 I came from a disadvantaged background, low socioeconomic

19 Low socioeconomic background, disadvantaged, drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse in my family. I thought it would be good working with young people having that background. Wanted to get reconnected back to community and my people, I had been disconnected.

4.2.2 INDIGENOUS STAFF ROLES IN FLEXI SCHOOLS

The roles that participants are employed in include administration officer; canteen coordinator; family support officer; Indigenous youth worker; principal; student support worker; teacher and teacher aide. The key theme to emerge from more in depth enquiry into participant's roles beyond their job title was relationships. The emphasis of relationships as a key priority in the work roles of participants transcended across their job titles. This phenomenon that emerged from the data rendered job titles as somewhat insignificant about how participants articulate their roles and duties in flexi schooling contexts.

Theme one: Relationships

Building relationships, prioritising relationships and caring were described as core aspects of the roles Indigenous staff are playing in flexi schools, irrespective of their job titles. When asked to describe what duties their roles entail, building relationships was reported by many participants (# 2, 4, 5, 6,10, 12, 14, 16, 18, 19). There were many examples of how relationships were operationalised in participants work roles:

#4 Building [relationships] is important - for myself, I have a big family so I've got those connections. Having those connections means trust. Kids can pick you out whether you are true blue or if you are there for the money

#5 know the kids and their wants to know what young people are up to.

Creating relationships - not pushy. Will wait for them to come to me

#6 I wait to have breakie at school we talk about family and their skin groups and connect that way... Before you work with a child you must build that trust and respect you sit and talk with them about yourself and they tell you about them – it is a two way street... Our kids are respectful because we have spent time building relationships

10 Just be there for them, treat them like family

#12 Indigenous kids call me aunty – I have got that relationship

#14 Support = young people listening, taking on board what they are saying, advocate if I need (not often) sounding board. Someone to have a yarn to. They always know I will listen. YP[young people] are our most important thing. Every morning YP come in just for a hug. I have had YP say they've never had a hug before

Relationships featured in many responses, directly and indirectly. The data includes the unique responses that are often contextualised to the participant's environment. In all discussion topics, relationships (and words such as connections, trust, family) were featured in most responses. Under the theme of relationships, several sub-themes emerged that articulated how relationships featured in the forefront of participant responses in describing how relationships are deeply implicated in the work that they undertake. The sub-themes that emerged under the code of relationships were: food, family and community.

Relationships sub-theme: food

Seven participants described food in connection to their articulation of their roles. Although described in connection to slightly different issues, most participants expressed the importance of food in relation to their roles and in building relationships with young people. Food featured in responses from participants undertaking a broad range of roles. Some examples include:

Administration Officer: My role: providing support, food wise, lunches, slowly adopting respect and rapport. Cos I'm in the kitchen they tell me what they like and what they don't like

Administration Officer: Eating together is important. Eating from the same bowl helps connect us.

Teacher: I do home visits, food drop offs, support with clothing, housing, court support create an environment that's personalised to young people - honest- but not giving too much personal away but so young people can see you're authentic. I am [protected for anonymity] - most important thing is I am always there and I always bring food

Youth Worker: Now working as a youth worker though built relationships through food

Youth Worker: Food is important, you can't learn on an empty stomach

Relationships sub-theme: family

Family and community also featured heavily throughout the data on participants describing their roles, again, regardless of their position titles. Nine participants (#4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 16, 18, 19) discussed family when describing their role. Some participants made reference to their own families in association to their roles, while other participants referred to families as integral to their roles. Example of reference to their own families in association to their roles:

#4 Took a while to build relationships. Building is important – for myself I have a big family so I've got those connections.

#6 Young people come from different skin groups they sit in their groups but I share my time with all of them. Some of my family are there.

#16 When job came up [at the flexi school] I jumped at it because it was in my community, my family are here.

#19... Low socioeconomic background, disadvantaged, drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse in my family. I thought it would be good working with young people having that background. Wanted to get reconnected back to community and my people, I had been disconnected.

Participants who referred to family in connection to their work roles:

#5 I am a bit like a mum - they are like my kids

#8 Our young people come to you for culture, family trees. Finding out where kids are from so they know. I show kids their family and their cultural connection

#12[I was] offered a position working with families... I took an experienced staff member with me who was also Indigenous and knew local families. I was surprised how open people were to meet me. Some of our mob get shame but we took them out for coffee after 6 months I started working with young people...Indigenous kids call me aunty. I have got that relationship.

#16 [I am] family, brother, uncle to young people

#18 working longer hours, phone calls to family way before day starts for the health and well being of young people I do home visits, food drop offs, support with clothing, housing, court support

Relationships sub-theme: community

Community was also referred to by most participants when asked to describe their roles, with eleven participants (#3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 19) describing community as an aspect of their roles. Again, this reference to community was irrespective of job titles. Some examples of participants referring to community when describing their roles include:

#3 Sometimes they don't appreciate the connection we have to community.

That connection helps the school and the communities understanding

#5 We are all equal and creating a community... for young people regardless of policy

#9 Cultural program young people doing a camp out bush we make some kids attend community events to expose them to community and see our leaders to give them inspiration

#14 I get asked in community about the school. The community Elder is upset with us because we can't attend the meetings. I need to put it forward to be able to attend that's my own doing

#16[I] guide young people - how to survive, I listen to them, shoulder for the to cry on. On weekend, night time, arvo, my role in continuous cos I live in the community. - I come up with lots of ideas how to better run community, community engagement, community face

Theme two: Cultural being

Many participants referred to their Indigeneity or being Aboriginal when asked to describe their roles. Only one participant was employed in a role that had 'Indigenous' in their job title. However, most participants, directly and indirectly, referred to culture and being Aboriginal as inherently something they bring to their job roles. The research yarn, 'how is your way of working with our young people

different to non-Indigenous people' is tied into the data that emerged from this theme. Eleven participants identified unique ways of working that are tied to their Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing. Of those eleven participants, five participants explicitly stated that their way of working is different to non-Indigenous people. Consistent with the previous theme, reference to cultural knowledge, difference in ways of working and being Aboriginal about their roles was across the broad spectrum of job titles:

Administration Officer: You don't have to seek Aboriginal kids out they will seek you. I believe Indigenous workers in flexi's are underrated

Administration Officer: definitely our way of working with our young people is different. Sensitive to their needs, understanding, able to reflect with young people, I have that culture instilled in me. I've always been the only Indigenous person in my job. I've never worked where there's been a concentrated group for me it's a path and journey of growth. Learning with young people about their journey, grow with them, walk beside them

Canteen Coordinator: My way of working is different = I was always in trouble at mainstream because I prioritised young people over the needs of the system. Non-Indigenous staff tell young people what to do rather than show them importance of certain celebrations or events - disappointing. It seemed like it wasn't a priority or important to be remembered. It hits me on days such as sorry day... I give love to my mob

Family Support Officer: Indigenous young people will come to me because they trust me. We (Indigenous staff) bounce general ideas around With cultural activities we have network of Elders that work with staff (Indigenous and non-Indigenous). Set up so if there's an issue then can help direct us to support the young person

Indigenous Liaison/ Youth Worker: Koori students needed support. Just because I am Indigenous doesn't mean I am the best person to support them

Teacher: My way of working with our young people is different - kinship, the continuous incorporation of Aboriginal perspectives in everything and in all that I teach because I am Aboriginal. I can pass down stories to our young people and the young people trust me because I am Aboriginal

Youth worker: Being Aboriginal, you've got that connection with the kids... I have about 20% of my grandkids there and about 30% Indigenous kids in total. Our young people come to you for culture, family trees. Finding out where kids are from so they know I show kids their family and their cultural connection. At school I try and help them make more positive choices and help them see there's more important things than facebook and technology. We go bush, make boomerangs and spears and they're willing to do it. They've got respect for us Aboriginal workers. If we weren't there they'd be disrespectful to non- Indigenous people. It is recognised because they'll get one of us

Youth Worker: Our school leaders value our opinions and advice about working with our young people. There's a non-Indigenous worker who always ask if she's working with an Indigenous young person, I think that is respectful

Youth Worker: I wait to have breakie at school we talk about family and their skin groups and connect that way

Youth Worker: I do cooking/take them bush. Bush medicine. Good skills for them if they're stuck in the bush it is the best tucker out. They feel connected there – no fighting and no squabbling

Youth Worker: Before you work with a child you must build that trust and respect you sit and talk with them about yourself and they tell you about them – it is a two way street. We are going to do a bush food and medicine book with young people it will give them a sense of achievement and belonging. It is a good way of bringing out their identity... As murri workers we relay messages. They need that to teach our young people

Youth Worker: I try and treat people equally but understand difference as well. I see non-verbals instead of getting excited about a murri young person's work, to not shame them out I give them a little 'deadly' instead

Youth Worker: the way I work is different to everyone else no two workers regardless of Indigenous /non-Indigenous are the same all different and it creates different relationships. You bring your life story to this work

Youth Worker: my way of working with our young people is different - more open, they know [my] history and family in community. Whitefullas say you can't tell young people your history... we joke around, we can take it, give it, way of thinking... think outside the box. Whitefullas follow the book too much. Non-judgemental/more understanding[is needed]

Only some participants provided in depth detail of specific duties they undertake as an everyday part of their job roles. Those that did provide information about specific duties revealed important data in understanding the consistencies and contrasts between job title and duties undertaken. Table 6 below provides detailed data from those participants who provided information about their duties in their roles:

Role title	Described duties
Administration Officer	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • providing lunches • administration duties • teach • educate • mentor • counsel • console • listening to students • moral compass • learning with young people

Participant job title	Described duties
Canteen Coordinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prepare meals for young people • support young people (listening and advocacy) • mentoring • organising cultural events such as camps • facilitating community engagement
Teacher	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • family liaison (including home visits) • clothing support • housing support • court support • creating a student-centred environment • embedding Indigenous knowledges • teacher and student
Youth worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support young people with health wellbeing; • homelessness; • court; • lack of confidence. • building relationships
Youth worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • support young people • take young people to appointments • relationships • mentoring/guidance
Youth worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "jack of all trades" • classroom support • canteen • maintenance • drive school bus • photography • roam (catch young people not on task) • facilitate programs such as rock and water and men's shed
Youth Worker	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • bus driver • teacher • counsellor • rugby coach • referee • mentor • guide young people - how to survive • listen to young people, shoulder for the to cry on • community engagement • family, brother, uncle • providing cultural and local community advice to non-Indigenous staff • anthropologist - who students are related to, their country

Table 6: Participant roles and describe duties

Workshop theme one summary

In summary, the 'Us Mob' workshop theme explored why Indigenous staff are choosing to work in flexi schools and what roles they are undertaking. There were a variety of reasons given for participants choosing to work in flexi schools including: personal (low socioeconomic) background of participants; having young people who are family at the school; personal growth opportunities; being valued by school leaders and being attracted to the environment of the school (catering to individual needs, high Indigenous student numbers). Five of the participants identified that they came from working in mainstream schools and described varying experiences of the transition from mainstream schools to flexi schools.

Indigenous staff participants were employed in a diverse range of roles including an administration officer; canteen coordinator; family support officer; Indigenous youth worker; principal; student support worker; teacher and teacher aide. The most common role was as a youth worker (*n*9). Two key themes emerged in how Indigenous staff described the focus of their roles. Key theme one was relationships. Sub-themes under relationships were outlined as food, family and community. Key theme two was cultural being. Cultural being was a strong theme that highlighted how participants described the centrality of their Indigeneity in undertaking their roles. Further, that data revealed that most participants describe their ways of working as different to non-Indigenous people. Finally, some examples were provided by participants in how they described micro aspects of their roles. Examples included duties described by an administration officer, canteen coordinator, youth workers and teacher.

4.3 WORKSHOP THEME TWO: RACE AND RACISM

This section will outline the results from the data that explored issues of race and racism as defined and described by participants. Workshop theme two, race and racism is directly connected to research question two: How do Indigenous staff believe constructions of race and issues of racism impact upon their roles with respect to pedagogy, curriculum and policy? In collecting data to explore this question, this workshop theme provided three topics to participants for yarning including: How have

you experienced direct/indirect racism at your school? Describe relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff at your school and how do you believe racism is an issue for Indigenous young people at your school?

Care will be taken when reporting the results of this section to respect the anonymity of participants. During data collection, participants expressed some hesitation about recording aspects of their experiences regarding issues of race and racism. However, there were very clear responses that emerged on particularities specific to the individual and some collective experiences of participants. Although the textual data may not appear to be in abundance, in the workshops, participants spent significant time yarnning about this topic. Participants chose to discuss their experiences (yarning, non-recorded) and asked me to record on the story board the theme that best articulated their experiences. This meant that some of the rich stories and experiences aren't necessarily reflected in the data that will be reported, particularly about issues of race and racism.

4.3.1 INDIGENOUS STAFF EXPERIENCES OF DIRECT AND INDIRECT RACISM AT THEIR SCHOOLS

The thematic analysis resulted in three themes that emerged from Indigenous staff describing their experiences of direct and indirect racism at their schools. The three themes to emerge from the thematic analysis are, theme one: feelings and vibes; theme two: values and theme three: behaviours. The following section will present an analysis of the data to support the three themes.

Theme one: feeling and vibes

Eight participants reported having a feeling or sensing 'vibes' in response to discussing whether they had experienced direct or indirect racism at their school. Although there was a broad spectrum of experiences reported based on feeling or vibes, a pattern emerged about the types of covert subtleties that led participants to reporting this within the realm of the research yarn on race and racism.

Of the nineteen participants, only two participants (#11, 14) responded no to experiencing direct or indirect racism at their school. However, one of the same participants later reported that racism is also "*hard to sometimes pick*" (#11). The other participant (#14) also stated that while "*I haven't experienced racism at this school I don't think*", the same participant later gave very clear examples of their

experiences as the yarn progressed. This may be indicative of an underpinning limitation of the time allocated for workshops to be able to not just yarn through the research questions, but also explore the meanings of the questions. As mentioned in the introduction to this section, many participants were hesitant to have the background yarns and context about their responses recorded on the story-boards. Furthermore, much of the discussion about experiences were recorded where more than one person agreed on a similar issue.

Three participants (#1, 4, 6) explicitly wanted to capture the nuances in their schools about the disconnect between what they observe of their colleague's verbal statements and accompanying body language. *"Sometimes they're [non-Indigenous staff] looking at you saying one thing but their body is saying something else. Aboriginal people feel and sense these vibes"* (#1, 4, 6). A further experience was recorded on the story-board by participants (#8, 9, 10) *"Non-verbal, sensing vibes"* in articulating their experiences of direct and indirect racism. One participant (#16) also reported that *"racism is here - not direct"*. Participant (#17) responded *"you know when you can say things and when you can't"*, also describing intuitive feelings about issues of race and racism at their school. Another participant who at first recorded that they had not experienced racism reflected later in the yarn that *"Sometimes teachers need to make more effort it is hard sometimes to pick when it is racism"* (#11). This statement recorded on the story-board indicated that through observing behaviours from teachers (presumably non-Indigenous), this prompted some reflection about whether this was or wasn't attached to issues of racism.

Theme two: values

Theme two, values, emerged when analysing the data as it was evidenced through many examples provided by participants in response to whether they had experienced direct or indirect racism at their school. The values that were reported in this workshop yarn can be described as both reflections of individual values and systemic values. Examples of where individual values came through in the data are:

" Teaching staff will leave pick-ups and drop offs to support staff" (#8, 9 ,10)

" When it comes to events they (non-Indigenous staff) don't put their hand up to help" (#8, 9, 10)

"There are still some ignorant non-Indigenous staff who are disrespectful and don't want to learn" (#1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13)

"sensitivity around [racial] conversations" (#2)

" When I tried to get the cultural program up and running it was blocked. It doesn't seem to be important or prioritised " (#14)

" I have experienced racism - I have tried to get advisory groups but it gets blocked. I have tried to organise proper cultural support for young women - blocked " (#16)

"with staff its[racism] not as open, it's calculating - pity, feel sorry for" (#16, 18, 19)

Systemic values emerged clearly through the data reported by participants in describing their experiences of race and racism. Systemic values were not just described within the school communities but the wider community as well. The most prominent example to emerge in relation to systemic values was that *"all staff should have to do cultural awareness/competence training ... why doesn't cultural training have the same importance as child protection" (#1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13)*. The statement by more than half of the participants indicates that cultural training isn't something that all staff at their school sites are currently undertaking mandatorily. Within the participant group that responded, seven different flexi school sites are represented.

Additional systemic values that were reflected in the data include participants reporting that *"there's still a lot of misunderstanding about our culture, many of our stories and beliefs are still there but they need to be cherished again. Those stories have morals and codes of behaviour embedded. There are things to know about places – there are places you can get pregnant or places where you can be healed" (#1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13)*. This is another clear example from the data of how values and prioritisation of agendas systemically based on values are thus connected to the presence of racism for participants.

Examples about the persistence of broader community racism was also reflected in the story-board data. *"There has been times when our young people have been racist but our staff have put a stop to it straight away. Our town is an old mining town and has been redneck in the past and these views have carried across from young people's families etc... Racism will always be an issue in society and that reflects in school also"* (#13). Another example, *"There are incidents of racism but it is mostly outside of the school sometimes the issues get back into the school... Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience racism it is there but it washes over you. The resilience of our people means you don't take every knock"* (#3).

The conduit of broader community values and its transference to school via non-Indigenous young people was also articulated by participants. *"A lot of non-Indigenous people (students) are part of cultural learning but they don't want to learn"* (#1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13). This observation by many participants was also reinforced by a further participant *"racism at school - indirect, sometimes it happens - it is small. May not be intentional but raising negative stereotypes. What kids listen to from their parents. They haven't got a clue what they are saying"* (#15). Although somewhat normalised in the statements recorded via the story-boards, participants clearly articulated that systemic values (school and broad community) are a real lived experience of Indigenous staff participants of this study.

Theme three: behaviours

Theme three emerged as participants described a number of behaviours they observed that they connected with experiencing indirect or direct racism. Although there are some examples that overlap values, the data outlined specific behaviours in connection to participants experience. Examples of behaviours include:

"Some indirect racism – one particular non-Indigenous staff member always has something on when cultural events are happening. Every time." (#12)

"Indirect – non-Indigenous teachers constantly relying on Aboriginal staff for cultural resources (embedding Indigenous perspectives) Our role is to support but the resources are easily accessible" (#1, 4, 6)

*"Teaching staff will leave pick ups and drop offs to support staff
... When it comes to events they don't put their hand up to help" (#8, 9, 10)*

*"Barter and joking can lead to racial comments. Sometimes they're not well
informed but this isn't so much in the flexi's" (#2)*

" Sometimes racist comments come from other First Nations People" (#3)

*" yes, I have experiences racism at my school it was an incident involving
another Indigenous worker" (#5)*

" they [Non-Indigenous staff] keep referring to mainstream services" (#16)

*" outsource support from external service but they're not on the ground in the
community" (#18)*

*"whitefulla nepotism - they bring in their mates... non-Indigenous staff
anxious and behave accordingly. Awkward, fakeness, gammon "we don't
have the relationship with young people like you do" I'll just leave it up to
you" (#18)*

*"I experience racism every day. My boss is white and head of well being is
white - they team up. That's direct and indirect. They never team up in a
positive sense - I have lots of examples...*

*Another Aboriginal staff member has been harrassed. She stands up to
management - 2 on one, isolation, divide and conquer, exclusion and
division... indirect racism - being excluded around issues to do with all of our
young people" (#19)*

4.3.2 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN INDIGENOUS AND NON-INDIGENOUS STAFF

The data from the story-boards that explored this issue did not result in any clear themes that emerged. However, through analysing the data some clear conclusions can be made about how this participant group of Indigenous staff

described their relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. The first conclusion is that a sizeable number of participants described many positive aspects of relationships with non-Indigenous staff at their school. The second conclusion is that despite many positive responses reflected in the data that explored the topic of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, there were a myriad of issues that were also raised. Although issues were raised, as well as opportunities for improving relationships, participants who described relationships as overwrought and misinformed were only a small portion of the participant group.

Some participants were clearly positive about aspects of their relationships with non-Indigenous staff. For example, participant #13 stated *"Generally, relationships are extremely well and there is great value of Aboriginal culture from staff. Something that I haven't experienced in mainstream schools as much. We have a great team and I feel culturally safe to be who I am without judgement. Staff also get family and cultural obligations and have been very supportive"*. A further three participants (#8, 9, 10) explained that *"Between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff – we are family, we ask after each other, got each other's back. We come together because we are all there for the same purpose – for the young people. There is recognition of our cultural knowledge"*. Participant #15 described that *"relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff - all pretty cool here. Not too bad. Good boss - lots of opportunities and there's a lot of support"* A final example of positive descriptions include a statement from participant #14 who stated that *"relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous are good. We can ask openly about cultural matters and events."*

As well as examples of positive aspects of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, participants provided examples of tensions that exists within those relationships. Many diverse narratives were captured via the storyboard. Within those tensions, many participants identified 'ignorance' or lack of understanding as the site of strained relationships. Some examples include:

"There are still some ignorant non-Indigenous staff who are disrespectful and don't want to learn. There's still a lot of misunderstanding about our culture many of our stories and beliefs are still there but they need to be cherished again. Those stories have morals and codes of behaviour embedded. There

things to know about places – there are places you can get pregnant or places where you can be healed" (#1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12)

"When I was talking to non-Indigenous staff about this research they said we don't need cultural awareness we have worked with Indigenous kids for [many] years" (#15)

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience racism it is there but it washes over you. The resilience of our people means you don't take every knock" (#3)

"Still history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff but being new you can see the issues" (#12)

Of the participants, only one described forthrightly that there were serious issues in relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous at their school site. Participant #18 stated *"relationships (between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff) estranged at the best of times"*. The same participant further described that *"non-Indigenous staff are anxious and behave accordingly"*. Although there was only one participant who articulated and recorded this issue via the story-board, there were many more stories of sites of tension discussed throughout the data collection workshops. As mentioned previously, there was some hesitation to record some issues on the topic of race and racism and of relationships where race is implicated.

4.3.3 RACISM AND INDIGENOUS YOUNG PEOPLE

The data from this section presents the perceptions of Indigenous staff about whether racism is an issue for Indigenous young people at their flexi school site. Only one participant believed that racism is not an issue for Indigenous young people at their school site: *"I don't believe racism is an issue for young people at school I haven't seen it anyway" (#5)*. Five participants (#8, 9, 10, 13, 15) reported that yes, racism is an issue for Indigenous young people at their school sites. However, they further discussed that while issues of racism do arise, issues are usually resolved quickly. One participant explained: *"There has been times when our young people have been*

racist but our staff have put a stop to it straight away" (#13). Further, participants #8, 9, 10 stated "Not common – racist incidents but when they happen we deal with it quickly".

There were various examples of the types of incidents of racism that Indigenous young people do experience that were described by participants. Examples of direct racism, including name calling were recorded on the story-boards:

" yes racism is an issue for young people at this school... racism can be an issue for our young people - example, language black cunts, niggas, name calling abos, coons... Our young people feel like people are looking at them at outings, white staff don't get that. We tell our young people that they are being looked at cos they're black and beautiful -white staff choose not to say that" (#16, 18, 19)

*" when young people [are] wound up they will say you black c**t it's their anger but they're just words... I do know one of our non-Indigenous boys was very disrespectful to the Elder at [a camp location - edited for anonymity]. A young man at [a camp location] was being very disrespectful to the Elder. Took it upon himself to talk from the group. All of a sudden, found himself alone. Next minute he felt the wind and the crow and certain birds that Aunty had told him about. They led him out on the right path. That young boy was shaken and was in a surreal state because he couldn't believe what he had experienced. He was a white as white can be. He said "I have a lot more respect for your culture and words now" (#14)*

The data on racism and Indigenous young people is based on Indigenous staff observations of this issue. However, the data did provide some initial insights that will be considered further in the analysis chapter of this thesis. It is clear from the data that Indigenous staff were able to provide examples of incidents of racism affecting Indigenous young people. Nonetheless, many participants were eager to ensure that in many examples, the incidents were acknowledged and worked through quickly.

Workshop theme two summary

In sum, workshop theme two, race and racism presented data that emerged from discussions about participants own experiences of race and racism and their observations of Indigenous young people's experiences within flexi schools. There was hesitation expressed by many participants initially to have their stories recorded on the story board. The data presented does not represent the amount of yarning that accompanied this topic. However, through yarning deeply and considering what participants did want recorded, this allowed for very specific and participant driven results in this section.

The data on Indigenous staff experiences in relation of direct and indirect racism resulted in three key themes that emerged. Theme one was feelings and vibes; theme two was values (systemic and individual) and theme three was behaviours. There were specific examples using excerpts from the story boards to analyse these themes.

Relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff were also reported on. Many participants detailed positive relationships and experiences with their non-Indigenous colleagues. Although, there were some participants who reported issues and strain in relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff at their school site.

Finally, participants shared their observations and opinions about whether they felt issues of race and racism was a concern for Indigenous young people at their school. Although many participants agreed that when issues do arise they are dealt with quickly, there were examples provided that support that racism is an issue for Indigenous young people in flexi schools.

4.4 WORKSHOP THEME THREE: PRACTICE

Workshop theme three, practice, explored aspects of practice connected to the theoretical framework of this study. The focus of practice was not limited to the practices of Indigenous staff (although practices of Indigenous staff were included). Rather, Indigenous staff experiences and observations of practices within the school that they believe may be having a positive or negative impact on Indigenous young people or Indigenous staff themselves are also included. The research yarns were framed around Ladson Billings (1998) CRT framework of enquiry, whereby the research questions deliberately included exploration of practices that can be tied to

racial inequalities in education. This framework includes Indigenous staff's responses in exploring assessment practices, funding, pedagogy (or instruction) and curriculum. Pedagogy, or instruction, was something that some participants commented on although it was difficult to explore this topic in depth because of the participant cohort.

Instead of exploring pedagogy in depth, the research yarn was replaced by whether Indigenous staff felt workload around Indigenous education within their school sites was distributed evenly between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. A common issue that is discussed in the literature is the reliance on Indigenous staff being expert on all things Indigenous (Santoro et al., 2011) thus placing a lot of pressure on Indigenous peoples undertaking such roles. In the context of this study, as Indigenous staff were undertaking a variety of professional roles, the discussion of workload distribution was centred on whether Indigenous focused tasks or roles were then only assigned to Indigenous staff. The majority of participants in this study ended up being staff undertaking non-teacher educative roles in Flexi Schools. Therefore, a decision was made at the time of data collection to change the focus from pedagogy to workload distribution to explore whether the issues discussed in the literature are similar within flexi schooling contexts.

In workshop theme three, practice, the research yarns were tied to two of the project's research questions: How do Indigenous staff describe their experiences and roles working in flexi schooling contexts? And how do Indigenous staff believe constructions of race and issues of racism impact upon their roles with respect to pedagogy, curriculum and policy? The research yarns were, then: "in your opinion, what is the level of exposure to Indigenous knowledges classrooms at your schools?"; "how does the style of assessment of student learning impact on our students?"; "what are the practices in how funds for Indigenous programs or students are distributed?" and "how do you feel about workload distribution in relation to supporting our young people is distributed fairly between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff?".

4.4.1 CURRICULUM - INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES IN FLEXI SCHOOL CLASSROOMS

The data that emerged in exploring how Indigenous knowledges are present within classrooms is limited. This could be because Indigenous staff who

participated in the study are not all in roles that require them to be in classrooms regularly. Further, the roles of participants may not be focused on this aspect of practice. Participants who did respond to this research yarn based their responses on their interactions with teachers and observations in classrooms.

Almost half of Indigenous staff participants reported that cultural events, programs, activities and celebrations were present within their schools (#2, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15). There were many diverse examples, including:

#2 They [teachers] attempt to embed Indigenous knowledge but sometimes it is hard to implement it in the day to day but during NAIDOC and Reconciliation weeks, it is there

#6 I do cooking/take them bush, Bush medicine... Good skills for them if they're stuck in the bush it is the best tucker out

#11 We do cultural activities but I don't see enough in classrooms

#13 To get ideas happening it needs to come from the top... school leader has the ability to mandate things... continue support of significant events for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

#15 We do cultural activities NAIDOC, painting. We do have a budget - sometimes we can pay for meals, sorry day, NAIDOC. Spent money on boomerangs

Cultural events are reported as being celebrated and present at many of the school sites that participants are employed at. Although, some participants further reported that culture did not necessarily transfer into curriculum or classroom learning.

Participant three responded that there's no Indigenous knowledge that they knew of: *"They wanted to put harmony day and reconciliation day together. No Indigenous knowledge that I know of is in the curriculum"* (#3). Participant fourteen reported *"no there's not enough cultural knowledge embedded in classrooms"* (#14).

Participant fifteen acknowledged that they are not employed as a teacher but made the observation *"we as far as classrooms go, I am not a teacher so not involved in planning (curriculum). I support students. Not too sure if there's any curriculum involving culture, there could definitely be more"* (#15). Participant eleven felt that whilst their school does cultural activities, there's limited translation into classrooms *"we do cultural activities but I don't see enough in classrooms. There have been excuses given but they are rubbish. Teachers have stopped Indigenous studies. I have*

been taken away from helping in classrooms with Indigenous studies to something else" (#11). Finally, participant five commented that "young people do not have enough exposure to Indigenous knowledges in their classrooms. Been trying to get mens and womens group going - higher up felt issues around gender specific... They don't do enough cultural trips - not a priority" (#5).

Other data that emerged from the topic of Indigenous knowledges in classrooms was the notion that Aboriginal staff inherently bring Aboriginal culture to classrooms. Reported earlier in the results, the Teacher participant outlined: *"My way of working with our young people is different - kinship, the continuous incorporation of Aboriginal perspectives in everything and in all that I teach because I am Aboriginal. I can pass down stories to our young people and the young people trust me because I am Aboriginal."* Another participant stated emphatically *"Having a number of staff who identify on the team we bring a lot of cultural knowledge to classes. And our input is VALUED by teaching staff" (#13).*

Further to what Aboriginal staff bring to the classroom in relation to Indigenous knowledges is what non-Indigenous teachers bring. Some observations from participants emerged from the data in how participants perceive non-Indigenous teachers and their practices in embedding Indigenous knowledges into the curriculum. One participant provided a specific example *"We have a cultural centre but teachers don't really use it. Teachers want to leave it up to the experts. Teachers may feel like they don't know enough but they have the opportunities - we have Elders come in daily, it is a community approach" (#6).* Another participant provided a further example of teacher practice *"organised Aboriginal worker from outside to run Indigenous games" (#3).* Another example from the data although reported earlier in workshop theme two is where a participant outlined *"non-Indigenous teachers constantly relying on Aboriginal staff for cultural resources (embedding Indigenous perspectives) Our role is to support but the resources are easily accessible" (#1, 4, 6).*

There were two examples provided where participants highlighted teacher non-Indigenous teacher practices that are embedding Indigenous knowledges. Although little context was given about how this was led, one participant stated *"Started an Indigenous elective that we are trying to build back up" (#2).* Another participant outlined *"One of the teachers has a word bank one side English one side [Aboriginal language - protected for anonymity]" (#9).*

4.4.2 ASSESSMENT PRACTICES AND INDIGENOUS LEARNERS

This section will outline the data from the research yarn "Does the style of assessment of student learning impact on our students?". The same statement as above must preface this section, that the data reflects observations of predominantly non-teaching Indigenous staff. However, many participants are involved in classroom planning, activities and student support. Therefore, their observations will provide some insights about assessment practices and Indigenous learners in flexi schools.

Literacy and numeracy testing practices

Participants provided limited data in this section. In this section I will not speculate why, only provide a summary of the data collected. Only two participants indicated that literacy testing does happen at their school sites. The two participants are from two different flexi school sites, one in Queensland and one in Western Australia. One of the two participants outlined that "*Testing helps identify areas they need support for*". Although another participant did not indicate whether their school site did provide literacy and numeracy testing for students, the participant stated that "*There are some families that want testing for their young people*" (#4).

General assessment practices

Three participants (#2, 3, 19) from three different flexi school sites indicated competency based assessment or VET (vocational education and training) are used as assessment tools for student learning at their school sites. On what appears to work well for Indigenous students in relation to assessment practices, a different participant stated that "*Our school has implemented more project based assessment and that works well for our students*" (#13). Further, another participant outlined that "*Style of assessment doesn't impact on Indigenous young people - broad way of assessing*" (#5).

Some negative aspects of assessment practices did emerge. Although a very limited number of participants commented on assessment, one participant did report that "*a lot of our young people are more hands on and find it hard to do some of the assessments. A lot of them get themselves in a state about how they will hand it in -*

they get there eventually" (#14). Another participant stated "Educational outcomes assessment tools nationally accredited we need more culturally appropriate tools" (#3).

4.4.3 FUNDING DISTRIBUTION

The data on whether participants felt there were transparent practices in use of funds provided for Indigenous education emerged clearly. More than half of the participants (#1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 13, 14) were not aware of how Indigenous funds were used. Most of this participant cohort expressed that it would be good to know. Some examples of direct excerpts from the data:

#2 It would be nice to know how much there is to plan and budget.

I don't know how much funds there are for Indigenous students

#3 no I have no idea

#5 I haven't heard about any funding for Indigenous students

#8, #9, #10 We don't have that information but it would be good to know.

We do usually get what we put in for

#11 I did know that Indigenous monies come in. I don't know where the funds go and I don't ask. To access funds for Indigenous young people would be good.

#13 I personally am unaware of funding practices at our school. We have a lot of community run programs being delivered at our school.

#14 I don't know much about funding they don't tell me that

4.4.4 INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND WORKLOADS

As in previous sections of workshop theme three, there is limited data that represents exploration of workload distribution in relation to Indigenous education. Further, there is not enough data for themes to emerge. Some participants reported

disparity in expectations and workloads. Participant thirteen responded *"I have found that non-Aboriginal staff expect a lot from Aboriginal colleagues. Jobs like maintenance and little "run around" jobs are regularly off loaded to our murri workers. There has been a sense of burnout because of this"* (#13). Participant nine was telling the story of how the school was growing and more Indigenous students were enrolling *"As it [the school] grew I said we needed another [Indigenous] worker because I was dealing with every day incidents on my own and it was exhausting"* (#9). Participant two commented that *"Koori student needed support. Just because I am Indigenous doesn't mean I am the best person to support them"* (#2).

Other participants felt workload with relation to Indigenous education was shared between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. Participant eleven stated *"Weekly meetings occur and every young person get support whether they are Indigenous or not. There's a whole of school approach"* (#11). Participant fourteen made a similar comment *"workload in supporting our young people is even. Indigenous young people go to all staff not just Indigenous"* (#14). Participant fifteen also stated *"all staff are flat out... all staff support young people"* (#15).

Workshop theme three summary

On the topic of curriculum, it emerged that participants observed limited Indigenous knowledges in classrooms of their flexi schools. There were narrow examples provided by participants of where they have observed embedding of Indigenous knowledges. Participants did, however, report that cultural events and celebrations was a common practice in almost half of the participant schools.

Research yarns on assessment practices produced limited data, although provided initial insights about flexi school assessment practices and the impact on Indigenous students. Only two participants (from two different flexi schools) indicated that their flexi school sites do undertake literacy testing with their young people. No information was provided regarding numeracy testing. Four participants specified that assessment of learning at their flexi school sites was competency based or using a VET (Vocational Education and Training) model. Two participants discussed issues around assessment including that their Indigenous young people are more hands-on learners and therefore struggle. The second participant made a broader comment about testing in general and the need for more culturally

appropriate methods of assessing Indigenous young people. Only one participant stated that assessment methods didn't really impact on Indigenous young people adversely.

The data exploring the issue of funding emerged clearly. Most participants reported emphatically that they are unaware of how Indigenous education funds are allocated and used. Further, participants also stated that while that aren't aware of how they are used, they felt that it would be helpful for them to know what funding is being provided and how it is being used.

The final research yarn was originally about pedagogy or instruction. This changed because of the participant cohort. The change was to explore workload distribution with relation to Indigenous education (with the workload including supporting Indigenous students, community engagement and a range of other duties). There was not enough data to support any conclusions from this research yarn. Although yarns did occur, they weren't reflected on the story-boards that captured the data. Two participants stated that they felt workload was uneven. A further two participants stated that they felt workload with relation to Indigenous students was a whole of school approach.

In sum, workshop theme three produced limited data via the story boards. The topics included in workshop theme three were featured in many yarns over the course of data collection. However, what was captured via the story boards has its limitations. Although data is limited, it will still provide an evidence base for further discussion in the analysis chapter. The fact that yarns took a different direction from those originally anticipated gave validity to the yarning methodology, which allowed for participants to determine the nature of the discussion based on what they perceived as important more than what I (the researcher) had planned for. This finding itself informs my self-analysis in Chapter 5.2.

4.5 WORKSHOP THEME FOUR: IDEAS AND ASPIRATIONS

Workshop theme four focused on two aspects of ideas and aspirations for improving Indigenous education in flexi schools. First, participants provided their ideas and aspirations on the school systems they felt will improve support for them as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in flexi schools. Second, participants outlined ideas and aspirations that are young person or student centred, with the

express aim of improving education outcomes for Indigenous young people in flexi schools. Participants also discussed what they felt might enable or block such ideas from transforming into reality.

Workshop them four, ideas and aspirations will provide data to give participants the opportunity to express solutions and ideas for aspects of their work roles they feel could be improved. Exploration of this topic was deliberately positioned as the final workshop during data collection. Ensuring participants were left with a sense of aspiration of the possibilities was an important consideration, particularly as the topics discussed in previous workshops were challenging and at times, sensitive.

Ideas and aspirations that are Indigenous staff focussed

The research yarn on ideas and aspirations that were Indigenous staff focused dominated this research theme. The reasons discussed in the workshop were that if staff are well supported, this will indirectly have a positive impact on the experiences of Indigenous young people. Participants #1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12 outlined the following ideas that they believe will improve their experiences and indirectly Indigenous young people in flexi schools:

"System - an Indigenous employment strategy"

"National appointment of someone to implement"

"Upskilling staff through professional development opportunities"

"Instead of a five-year planning cycle, create a ten year planning cycle"

"Funded study support for Indigenous staff including time to study. We should choose what we study"

"Opportunities between flexi's to move and develop"

"National Indigenous staff conference for flexi's - we need regular space to connect"

Further to the ideas outlined by many of the group participants, #13 named some additional ideas and aspirations including *"a network to email and share information; have a research arm that Indigenous staff can be part of; continue the support of significant events for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples; more*

money (grant opportunities) and it is vital for Aboriginal staff to maintain strong relationships with external agencies". Participant #15 also outlined their ideas and aspirations "I'd like to see more cultural days as a larger group. I would like to see pride grow; Indigenous funding should go back to kids; hire Indigenous people out of usual school funds".

Ideas and aspirations that are Indigenous student focused

Participants did not provide a lot of data in yarning about their ideas and aspirations for improving outcomes for Indigenous students. One reason to explain this is that it was the final workshop in the time allocated for data collection and due to time constraints, this research yarn was very rushed. Some of the data in this section was also informed by discussions captured on the story-boards previous workshop themes.

Participants #8, 9, 10, who were all from the same school site recorded that *"a new building and a sport and rec centre"* would make a significant difference for young people at their school site. Other ideas outlined by participant #3 from a different school site included *"educational outcomes and assessment tools ...need to be more culturally appropriate; more family orientated because it is better for our [Indigenous] young people; policy - have a position description for all staff so there is a requirement to know how to work with our [Indigenous] young people; young people will benefit from all staff doing cultural training"*. Participant #4, from another school site outlined *"I would like to see more culture here. More community being part of the school; have part of the school program dedicated to cultural for those that wish to participate; there should be someone that does prioritise that for our culture"*. Participant #13 recorded on the story-board that they would like to see that *"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are encouraged to identify as Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander."* Additionally, participant #13 also commented that they think *"more resources for our [Indigenous] young people - more sporting equipment, technology"*.

Other ideas and aspirations that emerged inadvertently through other workshop theme include a strong sense that Indigenous knowledges need to be more present in classrooms (see section 4.4.1). Although cultural celebrations appear to be strong, participants indicated that as far as embedding cultural knowledges into classrooms, there was still lots of room for improvement. While this aspect of ideas

and aspirations was discussed in a different workshop theme, it was the strongest data to be captured in relation to a strong sense of needing to improve this aspect of practice.

Blocks and enablers

There is also limited data that was provided via the story-boards on what participants felt what might block or enable their ideas from eventuating. This section of the workshop was also at the end of the session and was limited by time constraints. However, some participants captured their views on blocks and enablers of ideas and aspirations. Participant #15 stated *"I have different ideas I am working on. It is hard in [town of school - protected for anonymity] because its suppressed and red-necked. Our mob need to keep their heads low. People don't pop their heads up, there's no pride though it is slowly growing. Still run ins with councils - flag raising - they put locks on the flags so we couldn't raise them. A lot of racism around town."* Another participant explains *"people turning a deaf ear or blind eye and not wanting to have change is a barrier. A lot of people do not see how important it is for us"* (#14). Participant #13 saw the potential of school leaders and being a block or enabler of ideas and aspirations of Indigenous staff: *"to get ideas happening, it needs to come from the top, school leader has the ability to mandate things"*.

Summary

Workshop theme four, ideas and aspirations was deliberately positioned during data collection as the final data collection workshop. The limitations of this (and this will be discussed further in the analysis section of this thesis), is that there was minimal data captured on the story-boards. However, the data that was collected is helpful in gaining an initial understanding of how Indigenous staff imagine positive change within flexi schools for both themselves and Indigenous students. The value in having this initial understanding is that the ideas and aspirations have come directly from participants and interestingly doesn't necessarily align with how participants articulate issues that arise within their job roles. The divergence in the data about issues within participant roles and their ideas and aspirations will be unpacked further in the analysis section.

Participants outlined a range of system based ideas and aspirations that were focused on what Indigenous staff felt would better support them in their roles.

System changes such as an Indigenous employment policy, with a national appointment to support its implementation; study support programs; more opportunity for professional growth and development and more opportunities to keep Indigenous staff who are engaged in the same work more connected were all identified as critical. Less data was recorded about participant ideas and aspirations for Indigenous young people, although ideas such as new facilities, more resources, more culture and encouragement for young people to be Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander were recorded on the story-boards.

5. Analysis

This chapter will have two focuses. First, I will analyse the findings from the workshops and yarning sessions that explored Indigenous educative experiences in flexi schools. The analysis will draw from the findings as set out as results in chapter 4. This analysis will use the theoretical lenses provided by Indigenist Research Theory and Critical Race Theory that underpinned the design of this study (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Rigney, 2001; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001; Tuhiwai Smith, 1999). Further, the analysis theorises how Indigenous staff are undertaking educative roles in flexi school settings.

In the second section of this chapter, I use my autobiographical research reflections (kept as reflective notes throughout the study) to critically analyse my own experiences as an Aboriginal researcher, undertaking Indigenist education research. As outlined in Chapter 3, it emerged earlier on during this study that the impact of the confines of undertaking Indigenist research in institutionalised settings such as schools presented the urgency to reflect on these experiences to consider what this means in practice for Indigenous education researchers who undertake practice orientated research. The disconnect for me as an Aboriginal researcher (and practitioner) was evident as I was making sense of Indigenous theory and its implications for praxis. As I used what some might consider ‘unconventional methods’, I felt it was even more critical to capture elements of my experience in undertaking the research that future Indigenous researchers may be able to draw upon when considering their research design. As Tomaselli, Dyll, and Francis (2014) point out:

“the reflexive nature of autoethnography seems to ask more questions than it may answer. We do not presume that autoethnography can resolve all questions that arise; the human experience is fundamentally ambiguous and far too complex for single approaches. Despite not having solid answers, many of these questions can and must be addressed” (p. 348).

Thus, although I am not suggesting that my autobiographical reflections will present the solutions to all the issues that arise for Indigenous researchers (or for that

matter Indigenous teachers); I am proposing that if we do not ask the questions about the complexities of Indigenous-led education research, we will not be able to seek the answers. While there is now a body of strong Indigenous theoretical scholarship in Australia, its translation to practice is still emerging. As is common in qualitative research, I feel I was somewhat ‘changed’ as a result of doing the research (Tomaselli et al., 2014). The change for me occurred when my project came to life and was no longer ‘just’ research; it was my people in front of me, and we were ready to embark on the journey together. The gaps I identified to discuss in my autobiographical research reflections were only identifiable through the *doing* component of the study. Therefore, the addition of section 5.1 Indigenist research: autobiographical research reflections developed because of my learning that occurred during data collection and as new questions arose.

Due to the late addition of this new research question around my own experiences as an Indigenous education researcher, this second section might also be considered unconventional in that it is placed in the analysis section of the thesis where one would not usually introduce new literature. However, the analysis of my reflections did take me down the path of engaging with literature that I did not know I would need to engage with prior to undertaking the field work aspect of the study. Consequently, the second section of this analysis based on my autobiographical research reflections introduces some literature that was not previously been discussed in this thesis as I engaged with this literature in critically analysing my experiences as the researcher.

5.1 INDIGENOUS STAFF EXPERIENCES IN FLEXI SCHOOLS

The first section of this chapter will provide an analysis of the results reported in chapter 4. I will commence my analysis by critically discussing some additional contextual information gathered from the My School website and explain its significance to this study. This includes aspects of the My School information such as Indigenous enrolment data, NAPLAN reports and attendance data. I will then analyse the data on Indigenous staff roles. Situating my participants’ responses within the contextual snapshot of Aboriginal students’ experiences presented on the My School website, I analyse participants’ discussions around such issues as why they chose to

work in flexi schools; what is the significance of their job titles; the contrast between their official ‘role and the reality’ of what they do and how participants articulated Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing as a core aspect of their professional roles, irrespective of job titles. Counter stories of Indigenous staff will be central to the analysis of their experiences in relation to race and issues of racism. Finally, an analysis of curriculum practices of embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives also provides critical discussion about current practices experienced by Indigenous staff in this study.

5.1.1 FLEXI SCHOOLS IN INDIGENOUS EDUCATION

Flexi school context

In this section, I will discuss the additional contextual information collected from the ‘My School’ website (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016) from the results chapter, section 4.1. The purpose of including the My School information initially was to assist in further contextualising the study in relation to the roles and experiences of Indigenous staff in flexi schools. The My School information will be integrated throughout this analysis chapter in the context of analysing the data from participants about their roles and experiences. Additionally, the My School information has also revealed some significant information in relation to current Indigenous education policy and discourse that is important to include in this analysis.

In section 4.1, table 5 provided de-identified data from the My School website that included school profile data such as NAPLAN (National literacy and numeracy testing) ‘performance’, funding levels, school staffing and student attendance and engagement data. The website was created as way of providing parents, the community and educators information about school ‘performance’ and profiles in a simple and understandable way (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016). As flexi schools are registered school sites, the flexi schools who participated in this study have data available on the website.

The My School information revealed some important insights in relation to the role flexi schools are playing in the broader field of Indigenous education. My scholarly work to date has attempted to provide evidence of high Indigenous

engagement in flexi schools and make connections between the literature and practice to begin theorising why there does appear to be high levels of engagement (Shay, 2013, 2016; Shay & Heck, 2015). However, without enrolment data and very limited literature to draw from, making these arguments has been difficult. Undertaking a comprehensive scan of the My School data is well beyond the scope and intention of this study. However, the initial insights from summarising the 2016 data available presents tangible evidence that there are indeed high numbers of Indigenous young people engaging in flexi schools.

The sample of flexi schools in this study included schools from three States in Australia: Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria. The geolocational data on the My School website confirm the appropriateness of the sample of participants selected in this study, which includes five schools from metropolitan areas; two schools from provincial areas and one school from a remote area. The geolocations were defined by Jones (2004) for the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs for reporting on policy outcomes. Metropolitan is defined as a mainland state capital city or major urban statistical district of 100, 000 or more population. Provincial geolocations are defined as a city of 25, 000 to 50, 000 or more. Finally, remoteness is as defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics, which is calculated based on proximity to resources and facilities.

In the recent Close the Gap Prime Ministers Report, it assessed that almost 80% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in major cities or regional areas (Australian Government, 2016). While this sample is far too small to make any grand conclusions about what is represented in this data, it is evident that the schools that are part of the sample seem to be balanced in relation to basic Indigenous population data. For example, high enrolments of Indigenous students in this sample cannot be simply explained by their remote location. The spread of geolocations in this study appears to be in line with the statement made in the latest Close the Gap Prime Ministers Report that 80% of Indigenous people live in major cities.

Across all flexi school sites in this study, Indigenous student enrolments were high and disproportionate according to the current Indigenous statistics on Indigenous student enrolments. The current national data on Indigenous student enrolments outlines that Indigenous students currently comprise of 5.3% of total enrolments in Australian schools (ABS, 2016). In analysing this data, total Indigenous enrolments

for each school were added and then divided by eight to calculate the average number of Indigenous enrolments across this sample of eight schools. The average number of Indigenous enrolments across this sample of eight schools is 43.5%. Whilst great caution is given in making claims to the significance of this data due to the small sample, the representation of Indigenous enrolments reveals two substantial findings in relation to this study. The first, that in this study, Indigenous staff are working in schools with significant numbers of Indigenous students. The second is that this small sample demonstrates an urgent need for a national scan to explore exactly how many Indigenous students are engaged with this model of schooling and what this means for the broader Indigenous education agenda and its staffing.

The My School data revealed that generally, the flexi schools as defined in this study seem to be smaller in size (the smallest school had 75 students enrolled and the largest has 318 students enrolled). Although the smaller school size has been identified in the flexi schooling literature previously (Mills & McGregor, 2010, 2016; te Riele, 2012b); the smaller size of the schools in connection to the higher numbers of Indigenous students and staff has not been explored. School data also unveiled that in the eight flexi schools that participated in this study, in all school sites there were more non-teaching staff than there were teaching staff. What this means in the context of this study will be explored further in section 5.2.2.

Attendance levels

Attendance information provided on the My School website is also of relevance to this study on Indigenous staff roles and experiences in flexi schools. The data outlined on the My School website is subdivided into categories of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (note: there are no other student cohorts explicitly identified). Attendance rates are then reported on generally in Indigenous and non-Indigenous percentages. Attendance level data was differentiated from general attendance to those who attended 90% or more.

The first observation I offer in relation to this data is the specification of Indigenous status and how it is reported. As much as I would advocate that Indigenous students must be able to achieve the same educational outcomes as non-Indigenous students, the theoretical underpinning of critical race theory of this study means I must present an alternative perspective on how this is reported. CRT education scholars such as Ladson-Billings (2005); Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) argue that race is under-

theorised in education scholarship and is often overlooked to concentrate on issues such as gender and socioeconomic inequalities. In relation to the reporting specifically of Indigenous student attendance on the My School website, critique on what data is reported and why is necessary to consider the role of race and racism in understanding the role this data may have. Because Indigenous staff at flexi schools report a high level of commitment to working with Indigenous kids as a main motivation, this data on student experiences is not easily separated from the experiences of Indigenous staff – teachers and otherwise.

Some scholars question the effectiveness of race as a category in measuring educational inequality (Blackmore, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). As race is a social construct, key questions such as how race is assigned, are often raised. Ladson-Billings (1998) concludes that in the United States, US civil rights laws continue to serve the interest of whites. In the context of the My School data and the specific reporting on Indigenous students, similar critique must be undertaken. Given the Australian Government's ambitions to close (or in some targets halve) educational and health gaps, it may appear on the surface that reporting data that is identifiable by Indigenous and non-Indigenous status keeps the Government accountable on their policy commitments. However, the My School data only identifies Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by their enrolment status, NAPLAN outcomes and attendance status.

Only reporting on enrolment status, attendance data and NAPLAN scores is problematic from a critical race standpoint because of how this data constructs Indigenous students and by implication Indigenous staff. The Australian Government have reported it consistently that Indigenous students do not attend school at the same rates as non-Indigenous students and do not have the same literacy and numeracy levels (Australian Government, 2013a, 2014b, 2015, 2016). An equivalent amount of recent attention has been paid to the underrepresentation of Indigenous teachers and the impact this has on Indigenous students (Australian Government, 2014a; Santoro et al., 2011) The focus on Indigenous students as opposed to systemic failures (e.g. the lack of Indigenous staff) positions Indigenous students as the problem – they are enrolled but won't attend; failure to keep up with non-Indigenous peers signal intellectual inferiority and so forth. Thus, racialised constructs are implicated in how data is reported and perceived.

Notwithstanding and despite the critique above, a significant finding was revealed in relation to the attendance data. As outlined earlier, the Australian Government continuously reports that Indigenous students are not attending school at the same rates as their non-Indigenous peers (Australian Government, 2016). The reporting on school attendance is not differentiated in terms of the types of school sites Indigenous young people are engaged with. Through analysing the My School data on the eight flexi school sites involved in this study, it was revealed that half (four) of the flexi school sites in this study had Indigenous students attending at higher rates than non-Indigenous students. A further three sites did not have attendance data available and the final site had non-Indigenous students attending at a marginally higher rate. Attendance level data was not available for four of the flexi school sites. The remaining four had one site where Indigenous and non-Indigenous student attendance above 90% as the same; and the final three sites with marginal differences, indicating that non-Indigenous students at those sites were attending 90% or more at marginally higher rates.

The attendance data outlined shows some promising contrast to attendance rates in mainstream schooling contexts, as outlined in the latest Close the Gap Prime Ministers Report (Australian Government, 2016). Moreover, there is no shortage of literature that focuses on ‘poor’ attendance and how to get Indigenous students attending more frequently (Armstrong & Buckley, 2011; Lonsdale, 2013; Purdie & Buckley, 2010). While the recently added My School information was not originally one of my data sets, this small sample of information from the My School website is painting a contrasting story to attendance in mainstream school settings and reinforces the significance of Indigenous staff. Further investigation is required to apply more of a systemic and longitudinal exploration of the attendance data in flexi schools in comparison to mainstream schools to consider if understanding the context of flexi schools more and applying similar approaches in mainstream settings may assist in increasing attendance rates. As this flexi school sample only includes schools who change the provision of education to meet the needs of young people rather than changing the young people to meet the needs of system, this encouraging finding appears worthy of further examination. Finally, it demonstrates that flexi schools are a model of schooling playing a significant role in Indigenous education yet is overlooked in much of the ‘Indigenous education’ literature.

NAPLAN results

The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) is currently the mechanism that is used to measure the ‘gap’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student literacy and numeracy levels in years three, five, seven and nine. However, there is considerable critique in the literature about the role of testing minority students and whether it serves to assist in improving educational outcomes or infer racialized assumptions about the abilities of students of colour (Ford, 2012; Ladson-Billings, 1998). Further, Klenowski (2009) asserts that “equity in relation to assessment is more of a sociocultural issue than a technical matter” (p. 89).

The information provided on the eight flexi schools that Indigenous staff are employed at in this study on the My School website about NAPLAN results indicated that there were no NAPLAN results available. Analysis of this revelation is applicable to this study as the theoretical underpinning of CRT guided the incorporation of assessment as a topic to explore with Indigenous staff in this study (Ladson-Billings, 1998). The My School website explains that no reported results will mean that there were not enough participating students in the testing at those school sites (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016). Ford (2012) asserts that a common argument in relation to testing Indigenous students are that tests are not culturally appropriate. Ford, who uses CRT to underpin her position, further concludes that such arguments are “more invidious because they appear to be culturally sensitive” (p. 81). In emphasising cultural incompatibility in relation to testing of Indigenous students, helps Governments and indeed schools, make excuses for achievement gaps that Ford names as “scandalous” (p. 97).

The big question here is why do flexi schools, who have high numbers of Indigenous students enrolling and attending, not have NAPLAN results when NAPLAN testing is the main way that the Australian Government are measuring progress in closing the educational gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students? Some Indigenous staff in this study indicated that literacy and numeracy testing is something that would be that would be helpful and there are some families that want their young people to participate in testing: *"Testing helps identify areas they need support for"; " There are some families that want testing for their young people"*.

I must add here that posing this question may appear contradictory to earlier arguments I made about standardised testing and the disadvantage this can cause to

minority students (Ladson-Billings, 1998). Here I am not engaging in critical analysis of whether standardised testing (NAPLAN in Australia) further disadvantages Indigenous students or even whether standardised testing helps or hinders students more broadly. NAPLAN is the current way that the Australian Government measure progress of all Australian students, including Indigenous students. My question is then centred around why flexi schools do not use NAPLAN with a significant cohort of Indigenous students, particularly because the cohort of Indigenous students generally has already been disenfranchised from mainstream settings and may be experiencing significant and multiple social, emotional, educational and economic issues. Moreover, who makes the decisions on behalf of Indigenous students and families in flexi schools about whether students do undertake testing?

As assessment of students is one area of critique using my theoretical lens of CRT, discussion about assessment of Indigenous students was a topic in workshops with participants. Although there isn't a lot of data to draw from about Indigenous staff experiences in relation to assessment of Indigenous students, the lack of data requires further investigation of assessment practices within Flexi Schools. In section 4.4.2, I recognised that the lack of data on assessment may be attributed to participants being predominantly non-teaching staff.

Assessment of students is a small area of discussion in exploring the roles and experiences of Indigenous staff in flexi schools. However, given the context information provided by My School that the flexi schools in this sample have high enrolments of Indigenous students, and no NAPLAN data available, it is evident that assessment practices of Indigenous students in flexi schools is an area that requires further exploration.

Flexi schools are more focused on relationships and life skills outcomes (Mills & McGregor, 2010). However, CRT reminds us race is often a covert marker for how education systems persistently and systematically disadvantage racial minorities (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). In the Australian context, Indigenous students have further layers to systemic racism that is unique to being First Nations people who are still impacted by colonisation. Flexi schools are a system engaging high numbers of Indigenous students, possibly because mainstream schools are not meeting their needs (Shay, 2015). Flexi schools should therefore have equal responsibility in ensuring Indigenous young people are literate and numerate to their non-Indigenous peers. As

stated earlier, I am not advocating that NAPLAN is the way to ensure this. However, as supported by the data provided by Indigenous staff in this study, critical discussion is needed to explore why Indigenous students in flexi schools appear not to be participating in NAPLAN testing.

5.1.2 INDIGENOUS STAFF EXPERIENCES AND ROLES IN FLEXI SCHOOLS

This section will analyse the data on the experiences and roles of Indigenous staff participants. There is no existing literature on Indigenous staff experiences in flexi schools. Therefore, this analysis will focus on critically comparing and contrasting what is known about Indigenous experiences and roles in mainstream school settings in order to better understand Indigenous staff experiences in flexi schooling contexts. Pennacchia et al. (2016) clearly outlines that what happens in flexi schooling contexts is implicated in mainstream schooling practices. The use of Indigenist Research Theory will also be engaged to analyse how Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing are implicit when Indigenous staff describe the work they do in flexi school settings. The first discussion will be centred around the data that outlined why Indigenous staff are choosing to work in flexi schools. Second, the types of roles that Indigenous staff are undertaking in flexi schools is analysed.

“There were lots of Aboriginal kids [at flexi schools] and it felt right”

Indigenous participants in this study provided multiple reasons for why they are choosing to work in a flexi school. This analysis will be centred on the literature that outlines flexi school environments and will also draw from some of the literature on Indigenous roles in mainstream schools. The inclusion of literature on Indigenous roles in mainstream schools assists in exploring some of the reasons given from Indigenous staff about why they are choosing flexi schools. Some participant responses referred to their experiences of working in mainstream school settings and why they have subsequently chosen to work in flexi schools. By implication, rejection or resistance of Indigenous staff to mainstream school settings is connected to their reasons for choosing to work in flexi schools.

Some participants shared their stories about working in a mainstream school and contrasted this with their current experiences in flexi schools, which provided insights about why Indigenous staff are choosing to work in flexi schools over

mainstream school settings. The literature on Indigenous staff experiences in mainstream schools, including undertaking teacher, leadership or ‘Indigenous education worker’ or equivalent positions, indicates that our people are under-represented and consequently experience issues such as isolation, racism, high work load demands and many other barriers to what they felt they should be doing (Buckskin et al., 1994; Funnell, 2013; Gower et al., 2011; Mellor & Corrigan, 2004; Reid et al., 2009; Santoro et al., 2011). One participant stated *“I found it hard to be there for young people [in mainstream schools]. There were lots of Aboriginal kids [in flexi schools] and it felt right”*. Another participant shared their story of working in mainstream schools previously: *“My main role [in mainstream] was about truancy. I felt like there was a lot more I could do but there was only so much I could flex the school – 3 chances and they were out. We lost too many. I wanted to go to a school I felt supported students”*.

These, and other reasons given by Indigenous staff indicated that there are environmental reasons within the school setting that make flexi schools an attractive environment for Indigenous staff to work in. Other staff who didn’t necessarily contrast their previous experiences also gave reasons such as having family members who attend the school, high Indigenous student numbers, having a similar socioeconomic background as students who attend flexi schools, liking the approaches used in flexi schools and feeling like what they bring to their role is valued.

In section 2.2.3 in the literature review chapter, I synthesised the literature about what is known to engage Indigenous students in mainstream school settings and flexi school environments. Figure 2 illustrated the interconnectedness of these factors. The six key themes in the literature on what engages Indigenous learners was: schools nurturing cultural identity of Indigenous students; awareness and cultural competence of educators; engagement with Indigenous families and communities; presence of Indigenous cultures; employment and presence of Indigenous peoples and leadership of the school (Shay, 2013). The three key themes that emerged in the literature on features in flexi school environments included the centrality of relationships, community and sense of belonging and empowerment of young people (Shay, 2013).

Research on flexi school contexts is consistently concluding that flexi schools are using relational approaches to create a community feeling that give young people more authority and voice (McGregor & Mills, 2012; Mills & McGregor, 2016; Morgan

et al., 2014). In analysing why this group of Indigenous staff are choosing to work in a flexi school, it is evident through the responses provided that their choices are connected to the flexi school environment. Indigenous staff voices on the flexi school environment seem consistent with what is outlined in the literature. For example, one participant stated that *“In flexis they are flexible to the individual. I get a lot closer to the students and learn about them as humans. They’ re numbers at mainstream but they are people at ours”* Another participant stated *“[I] wanted to work in flexis since the time I heard about them... First thing I saw was young people. I liked the look of the school”*.

Indigenous staff in this study articulated environmental aspects of flexi schools and contrasts to mainstream school settings when telling their story about why they are choosing to work in mainstream schools. Although this is a small aspect of the study, the contrast in how Indigenous staff articulated their choice to work in flexi schools provides support for further exploring micro aspects of flexi school environments that appear to be appealing to some Indigenous people. As Indigenous people are under-represented in teaching and non-teaching roles in mainstream school settings (Andersen et al., 2015; Lampert & Burnett, 2012), gaining a deeper understanding why flexi schools appear to be appealing to this cohort of Indigenous teaching and non-teaching staff would be of benefit to the broader Indigenous education agenda.

Indigenous educative roles in flexi schools

Indigenous staff in this study included staff that were employed as the following: administration officer; canteen coordinator; family support officer; Indigenous youth worker; principal; student support worker; teacher; teacher aide and youth worker. Participants in this study comprised mostly of non-teaching staff. As there is no literature that explores the Indigenous staff experiences and roles in flexi school settings, this analysis will focus primarily on the contrast to the literature on Indigenous educative roles in mainstream school settings. Further, use of CRT and IST will also frame this analysis of Indigenous educative roles in flexi schools.

The primary role that Indigenous staff are undertaking in mainstream school setting is that of the ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Aboriginal’ education worker, although there are variations to the title (Buckskin et al., 1994; Funnell, 2013; Gower et al., 2011). The role of the Indigenous education worker (IEW) is principally equivalent to that of a

teacher aide in mainstream school, with the role seen as important by many schools and teachers. However, IEWs are performing complex tasks such as behaviour management, student support, family and community consultation, providing cultural support and liaising with parents and teachers (Gower et al., 2011).

There are two key differences in the studies of Indigenous non-teaching staff roles in mainstream schools and flexi schools. The first is the use of the term ‘Indigenous’ or ‘Aboriginal’ in the job title. The second is how Indigenous staff expressed their experiences in undertaking their roles.

The ‘Indigenous’ in the Education worker...

On the surface, inclusion of the term Indigenous or Aboriginal in the job titles of Indigenous staff may seem benign. However, as Indigenous staff who are undertaking similar non-teaching roles in flexi schools define their roles and experiences in different ways to IEWs in flexi schools, it is worth exploring race in analysing potential reasons for such difference. The CRT literature clearly emphasises the cautions in applying binaries in relation to race (Crenshaw et al., 1995; Ladson-Billings 2005). Superficial observations usually measure degrees of blackness and whiteness. Further, Ladson-Billings (2005) evaluates that racial categorisations are often determined by white people for the purposes of upholding white superiority. Indigenous education workers are labelled as Indigenous or Aboriginal in mainstream schools (Andersen et al., 2015; Buckskin, 2012; Gower et al., 2011). The question must then be asked why other positions in schools are not labelled according to white race? There is not one position other than Indigenous roles that I can find that exists in mainstream school settings that mentions in race in relation to a job title. I have never seen a job advertised as “White teacher aide” or “White truancy officer”.

In the context of Indigeneity in Australia, identifying as Indigenous is not as straight forward as what may be perceived by non-Indigenous Australians. A study by Carlson (2011) explored the complexities of what it means to identify as Indigenous in Australia and the impact that colonisation has had on determining who is or isn’t Indigenous. Carlson (2011) concluded that identifying as Indigenous is not as straightforward as one might think; it is fraught with historically and racially loaded assumptions, bias and constructs. Moreover, in another study that explored white and Black perceptions of Aboriginality, C. Sarra (2011) outlined the stark contrast of what non-Indigenous people understand about Indigeneity and how our own people

articulate what it means to Indigenous. Determining who is or who isn't Indigenous if the position is labelled 'Indigenous' then becomes a task for the employer, usually a school principal or leader. As the dominant educator workforce in Australia is white (McKenzie, Rowley, Weldon, & Murphy, 2011) and many non-Indigenous Australians self-assess their social distance from Indigenous people (Larkin, 2014), critical questions must then be asked about the ability of school leaders to make such a complex assessment.

Indigenous staff in this study described their roles clearly as incorporating their cultural knowledges, identities and connections. Although racism was still an issue (this will be discussed in more detail in section 5.1.3), it appeared less prevalently than in the data in the studies that investigated the experiences and roles of Indigenous education workers in mainstream school settings. In discussing relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff in this study, one participant said *"Generally, relationships are extremely well and there is great value of Aboriginal culture from staff. Something that I haven't experienced in mainstream schools as much. We have a great team and I feel culturally safe to be who I am without judgement. Staff also get family and cultural obligations and have been very supportive"*. Another participant noted that *"Between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff – we are family, we ask after each other, got each other's back. We come together because we are all there for the same purpose – for the young people. There is recognition of our cultural knowledge"*.

As the colonial construct of the Indigenous other and even the English words, Indigenous, Aboriginal, are laden with racialised ideas connected to the concept of *Terra Nullius*, a job position with such a title is likely be problematic in an institutionalised setting such as schools. Blackmore (2010) explains that "schools are also racialized in terms of their structures, cultures, values and representations" (p. 52). In Australia, white race privilege is operationalised in schools, visible in the multiple ways in which white cultures and values are discursively operating to meet the needs of white students (Blackmore, 2010). Therefore, it must be asked why schools need to call Indigenous staff Indigenous in their job titles when the term Indigenous can reinforce social distance (Larkin, 2014), otherness (Blackmore, 2010) and racial hierarchy.

These contrasting experiences of Indigenous staff in flexi schools shows disparity in the stories of Indigenous people working in mainstream and flexi schooling

contexts. The absence of racialising job titles (with the exception of one participant), then positions Indigenous staff in flexi schools as professionals who are Indigenous. C. Sarra (2011) outlined that Aboriginal perspectives on Aboriginality were strikingly in contrast with that of white perceptions of Aboriginality. Aboriginal people in this study described a sense of pride, respect for Elders, connectedness, spirituality, family as ways of describing their identities. In allowing Indigenous people to self-determine our Aboriginality or Indigeneity within work roles in professional settings allows for defining of our own lived experiences and realities as Indigenous peoples. Thus, my conclusion on the interesting finding that Indigenous staff in flexi schools tend to be employed in roles without Indigenous or Aboriginal in the title, is that there are implications here for mainstream schools. There is potential to critically explore what impact, if any, having Indigenous in the title of job roles of Indigenous staff in schools has on the experiences of those undertaking these roles.

“Our young people come to you for culture” – The role and the reality

This section will analyse the data from how Indigenous staff articulated their work roles. Through listening to how Indigenous staff describe their roles, two key themes emerged. The first key theme was the centrality of relationships that transcended across all work roles. The second key theme was cultural being. Cultural being is the term I have used to explain the epistemic and ontological ways in which Indigenous staff clearly articulated the Indigeneity in relation to their work roles. I will use IST to explore the ways Indigenous staff describe their cultural identities as important to their roles and the work they undertake in flexi schools. Further, I will argue that relationships and cultural being are intimately connected and brings knowledge and skills to flexi schools that are unique to what some Indigenous staff bring to their professional roles. Although the data is clear that the roles Indigenous staff are undertaking are important for multiple reasons, understanding and critically analysing the intricacies of what this means for Indigenous staff who add this value to schools is vital for the well-being and retaining Indigenous staff.

The Indigenous staff who participated in this study were employed in diverse roles (predominantly the role of youth worker). However, the key theme to emerge when Indigenous staff were articulating their work roles was relationships. Job titles were irrelevant to how Indigenous staff in this study described the main duties they undertook in their work roles. Some excerpts from the data: *“Building [relationships]*

is important - for myself, I have a big family so I've got those connections. Having those connections means trust. Kids can pick you out whether you are true blue or if you are there for the money”; “know the kids and their wants to know what young people are up to”; “Creating relationships - not pushy. Will wait for them to come to me”; “I wait to have breakie at school we talk about family and their skin groups and connect that way... Before you work with a child you must build that trust and respect you sit and talk with them about yourself and they tell you about them – it is a two way street... Our kids are respectful because we have spent time building relationships”; “Just be there for them, treat them like family” and “Indigenous kids call me aunty – I have got that relationship”.

In explaining how relationships develop and are prioritised, Indigenous staff in this study articulated that relationships develop primarily in three ways: through food, family and community. Indigenous theorists clearly articulate the concept of relationality and thus relationships the fundamental of indigenous worldviews (Martin, 2003; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Without homogenising Indigenous cultures, Moreton-Robinson and Walter (2009) argue that the knowledges of Indigenous peoples are grounded within social relations on country; ways of knowing and ways of being are through connectedness and lived realities. It is further distinguished by Moreton-Robinson and Walter that Indigenous ways of knowing and being through connectedness and relationships are only possible through extended knowledges of country and connectedness to country. Thus, making the point that although colonisation disrupted how we lived prior to invasion, “Indigenous knowledge systems remain intact and continue to develop as living, relational schemas” (p. 3).

Kombu-merri Elder and philosopher, Mary Graham also outlines the significance of relationality. Graham (2014) explains that while she does not attempt to theorise Aboriginal views on relationality, she concludes that relationality in an Aboriginal worldview is centred in identity and place – being, belonging, identity and connectedness. The array of connectedness as articulated by Graham spans across the social, cultural, spiritual and psychological. The notion of relationships being of importance to Indigenous people and the transference into education literature as being an engagement strategy or even framed as being part of the solution in improving outcomes for Indigenous students isn't new (Buckskin, 2012; C. Sarra, 2011). However, the concept of Indigenous staff bringing this connectedness and indeed

thousands of years of sophisticated knowledges centred on relationality, is something that should be considered when schools employ staff and have an expectation that Indigenous staff will bring Indigenous knowledges and relations with them.

Although Indigenous staff in this study are not employed specifically to work with Indigenous students, relationships with Indigenous students, communities and families is clearly part of the work that most of the participants undertake in their professional roles. One participant stated *“Indigenous young people will come to me because they trust me. We (Indigenous staff) bounce general ideas around with cultural activities we have network of Elders that work with staff (Indigenous and non-Indigenous). Set up so if there’s an issue then can help direct us to support the young person”*. Another participant spoke about their relationship with country and how they bring this to their role as a youth worker *“I do cooking/take them bush. Bush medicine. Good skills for them if they’re stuck in the bush it is the best tucker out. They feel connected there – no fighting and no squabbling”*.

In a study of Indigenous education workers in mainstream school settings, Funnell (2013) expressed concerns about the schools expectations of what cultural knowledge Indigenous education workers were expected to have and how this would be remunerated and valued in return. In another study that explored equivalent IEW roles, Gower et al. (2011) school principals named cultural and community liaison skills as the first priority and relationships as the second priority of skills required of an IEW or equivalent. What principals in this study failed to recognise is that without relationships, a person is unable to acquire or have cultural knowledge and community knowledge, if we look at the literature from Aboriginal scholars on relationality.

It appears the expectations of Indigenous staff in how relationships are operationalised may be different in flexi schools, based on the stories from participants. First, Indigenous staff in this study did not at any time problematise any aspect of relationality as being part of their roles. Second, some staff were emphatic that their way of working relationally through their knowledge as Indigenous peoples that this was valued by the school and their colleagues *“Our school leaders value our opinions and advice about working with our young people. There’s a non-Indigenous worker who always ask if she’s working with an Indigenous young person, I think that is respectful”*.

The concept of cultural being is bound with how relationships have been articulated in this study. Although it has been established that relationships are an integral element of a flexi school environment (McGregor et al., 2014; Mills & McGregor, 2010; Shay, 2016), the differentiated cultural worldview of relationality as embedded in Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies is one that should be recognised and supported in any school setting. Non-Indigenous practitioners are also encouraged to use relational pedagogies as a way of engaging meaningfully with young people who are attending flexi schools (Morgan et al., 2015). However, as explained by Moreton-Robinson and Walter, Indigenous ontological experiences and views on relationality differ through our multiple ways of understanding, being and doing and through moral codes and principles or “respect, reciprocity and obligation” (p. 6). These differences are evidenced in the yarns captured on story-boards:

“definitely our way of working with our young people is different. Sensitive to their needs, understanding, able to reflect with young people, I have that cultural instilled in me. I've always been the only Indigenous person in my job. I've never worked where there's been a concentrated group for me it's a path and journey of growth. Learning with young people about their journey, grow with them, walk beside them”

“You don't have to seek Aboriginal kids out they will seek you. I believe Indigenous workers in flexi's are underrated”

“My way of working is different = I was always in trouble at mainstream because I prioritised young people over the needs of the system. Non-Indigenous staff tell young people what to do rather than show them importance of certain celebrations or events - disappointing. It seemed like it wasn't a priority or important to be remembered. It hits me on days such as sorry day... I give love to my mob”

“My way of working with our young people is different - kinship, the continuous incorporation of Aboriginal perspectives in everything and in all that I teach because I am Aboriginal. I can pass down stories to our young people and the young people trust me because I am Aboriginal”

“Being Aboriginal, you’ve got that connection with the kids... I have about 20% of my grandkids there and about 30% Indigenous kids in total. Our young people come to you for culture, family trees. Finding out where kids are from so they know I show kids their family and their cultural connection. At school I try and help them make more positive choices and help them see there’s more important things than facebook and technology. We go bush, make boomerangs and spears and they’re willing to do it. They’ve got respect for us Aboriginal workers. If we weren’t there they’d be disrespectful to non-Indigenous people. It is recognised because they’ll get one of us”

“Before you work with a child you must build that trust and respect you sit and talk with them about yourself and they tell you about them – it is a two-way street. We are going to do a bush food and medicine book with young people it will give them a sense of achievement and belonging. It is a good way of bringing out their identity... As murri workers we relay messages. They need that to teach our young people”

“I try and treat people equally but understand difference as well. I see non-verbals instead of getting excited about a murri young person's work, to not shame them out I give them a little ‘deadly’ instead”

“my way of working with our young people is different - more open, they know [my] history and family in community. Whitefullas say you can't tell young people your history... we joke around, we can take it, give it, way of thinking... think outside the box. Whitefullas follow the book too much. Non-judgemental/more understanding [is needed]”

In sum, it is clear that Indigenous staff bring their relationships and cultural knowledges to the roles they are undertaking in flexi schools. An exploration of whether this is connected to the high numbers of Indigenous students enrolled would be valuable to consider the implications that this finding might have for mainstream school settings. Further, more robust discussions are needed in the literature and practice about how this impacts upon the employment award and remuneration of

Indigenous staff if they are being called upon to use this knowledge and their relationships (with country, community, families) when they are employed as youth workers, or teachers for example.

5.1.3 RACE AND RACISM IN FLEXI SCHOOLS

"There are still some ignorant non-Indigenous staff who are disrespectful and don't want to learn"

The analysis of race and racism in flexi schools, as articulated by Indigenous staff will stay true to the core tenets of CRT and IST – centring the experiential voice of Indigenous peoples. As discussed in chapter 4.3, although Indigenous staff had many in depth yarns in the research workshops, the data that was recorded was carefully mediated by participants. I therefore state upfront that the sometimes limited data should be treated as data in and of itself; and as the researcher who facilitated the workshops, I must report that some Indigenous staff were somewhat apprehensive to have their stories recorded in full due to fear of it being recognisable. However, the data that was recorded led to the conclusion that like other education institutions across Australia (Aveling, 2007), racism in various forms is also an issue in flexi school settings.

Indigenous staff in this study provided examples of direct and indirect racism, individual experiences of racism with their colleagues and systemic racism. Indigenous staff also provided observations of whether they believed racism was an issue for Indigenous students in flexi schools. Although most participants said yes, they believed racism was an issue for Indigenous young people, they were also quick to conclude that it is often resolved quickly. Studies that explicitly explore issues of race and racism in Australian schools are scarce, but are clear that racism is an issue, particularly for Indigenous students (Aveling, 2007). Therefore, this section affirms that although flexi schools are described in the literature as being more student centred, relational and community orientated (McGregor et al., 2014; Mills & McGregor, 2016; Morgan, 2013); they are not excluded from re-producing racialized social norms that continue to impact negatively on Indigenous peoples.

“Our conceptions of race, even in a postmodern and or postcolonial world, are more embedded and fixed than in a previous age” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9). In

Australia, race is deeply sowed into the fabric of society (Aveling, 2007). Indigenous Australians from the time of invasion were constructed as intellectually inferior, sub-human and primitive; on the basis of disprove scientific notions of race and racism (Rigney, 2006). As race and power distribution are not dispersed equally (Hylton, 2012), particularly in the context of Indigenous Australia, how this impacts on Indigenous peoples in a context like flexi schools is an important reminder to education researchers not to neglect race as a site of focus in understanding education equity issues.

Race and therefore racism are complex concepts to research for multiple reasons. Although it has long been acknowledges in the literature that race is indeed a social construct; biological understandings are still the pervasive in all aspects of societies globally (Obach, 1999). The problematic of race definitions and how they change over time is also an issue (Obach, 1999). In relation to Indigenous Australians, Carlson (2011) outlines that over 200 definitions since invasion have been imposed by the Australian Government to attempt to define Indigeneity, without consent or input from our people. These definitions have been of great benefit to white Australia – for both ease of erasing our people from the national story and ensuring our place as First Peoples is diminished for the purposes of land acquisition. For this reason, non-Indigenous perceptions of Indigeneity and Indigenous articulations of Indigeneity are in stark contrast (C. Sarra, 2011). Solórzano and Yosso (2002) define racism in three ways; exerting superiority, the holding of power to carry out racism and the act benefiting one group. The definition offered by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) was seen in numerous examples provided by Indigenous staff.

“Teaching staff will leave pick-ups and drop offs to support staff”; “When it comes to events they [non-Indigenous staff] don’t put their hand up to help”; “There are still some ignorant non-Indigenous staff who are disrespectful and don’t want to learn”; “with staff its[racism] not as open, it’s calculating - pity, feel sorry for”; “I have experienced racism - I have tried to get advisory groups but it gets blocked. I have tried to organise proper cultural support for young women - blocked”; “they [Non-Indigenous staff] keep referring to mainstream services”; “whitefulla nepotism - they bring in their mates... non-Indigenous staff anxious and behave accordingly. Awkward, fakeness, gammon 'we don't have the relationship with young people like you do' I'll just leave it up to you”; “Some indirect racism – one particular non-

Indigenous staff member always has something on when cultural events are happening. Every time.” “When I was talking to non-Indigenous staff about this research they said we don’t need cultural awareness we have worked with Indigenous kids for [many] years”; “I experience racism every day. My boss is white and head of well being is white - they team up. That’s direct and indirect. They never team up in a positive sense - I have lots of examples... Another Aboriginal staff member has been harassed. She stands up to management - 2 on one, isolation, divide and conquer, exclusion and division... indirect racism - being excluded around issues to do with all of our young people”

These vignettes from the data support that the definition of racism offered by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) is present in the narratives of Indigenous staff in flexi schools. The exerting of superiority is apparent in Indigenous staff experiences in various ways; leaving tasks for Indigenous staff to do, blocking of programs or ideas by Indigenous staff, self-proclaiming of cultural expertise and positing of non-Indigenous external providers and staff as knowing better than Indigenous staff in relation to cultural matters. In these examples, the exerting of superiority in the micro environment of flexi schools is only possible because of the social positioning of non-Indigenous and white Australians in holding power over and power to exert superiority, which continues to serve the interests of non-Indigenous and white Australians. In this context, the data demonstrates lucidly the racialized power dynamics present in Australian societal discourse that continues to uphold white and non-Indigenous authority to know what is best for Indigenous people.

“Sometimes racist comments come from other First Nations People”; “Yes, I have experiences racism at my school it was an incident involving another Indigenous worker”. There were only two participants who mentioned incidents involving other Indigenous people. Lateral violence is the term used to describe “harmful and undermining practices that members of oppressed groups can engage in against each other as a result of marginalisation” (Wingard, 2010, p. 13). As flexi schools appear to be employing higher numbers of Indigenous people than mainstream schools, the lack of incidents reported by participants in this study may indicate that incidents of lateral violence in flexi schools is low.

Indigenous staff in this study also identified systemic racism when discussing their experiences of racism: *“There are still some ignorant non-Indigenous staff who*

are disrespectful and don't want to learn. There's still a lot of misunderstanding about our culture many of our stories and beliefs are still there but they need to be cherished again. Those stories have morals and codes of behaviour embedded. There things to know about places – there are places you can get pregnant or places where you can be healed”; “There has been times when our young people have been racist but our staff have put a stop to it straight away. Our town is an old mining town and has been redneck in the past and these views have carried across from young people's families etc... Racism will always be an issue in society and that reflects in school also”. In these two examples from the data, both a lack of valuing or inclusion of Indigenous knowledges was identified and broader societal issues of racism impacting on the school context was also identified.

Vadeboncoeur (2009) outlines the tensions that exist when considering the role of flexi schools in broader education discourse. Vadeboncoeur argues that the very existence of alternative school sites highlights the contradiction of democratic ideals in education and neoliberal economic shrewdness. The ‘sorting machine’ of said neoliberalism has resulted in scores of young people who lack the social, cultural and economic capital to fit the education system to require alternatives school to have any chance of gaining a formal education. In an Australian context, Indigenous over-representation in flexi schools can be linked with neoliberalism; however, the role of race in the sorting machine in the context of institutionalised racism is also worthy of further investigation.

The Australian Government and scores of scholarship recognise the failure of educational institutions to provide Indigenous Australians the same educational outcomes as non-Indigenous people (Australian Government, 2014b, 2015, 2016; Bodkin-Andrews & Carlson, 2014; Lonsdale, 2013; Purdie & Buckley, 2010). The role of institutionalised racism in the educational disadvantage that Indigenous people face has also been recognised (Aveling, 2006; Vass, 2013). Therefore, the question of whether alternative schools in Australia, who appear to be engaging high number of Indigenous students and staff (Shay & Heck, 2015) is silencing the extent of which institutionalised racism is impacting on Indigenous engagement in mainstream schools is one the should be given urgent attention. Vadeboncoeur (2009) assess of alternative schools, that “[T]hey are repositories for difference that enhance the illusion of sameness, of homogeneity, for those who remain in mainstream schools” (p. 294).

As traditional education research has ignored issues of race, it was important to include opportunities for Indigenous staff to voice their experiences of racism in their work environments, as defined by participants (Parker & Lynn, 2002). Flexi schools are described by students using adjectives such as “caring, small, community, family, respectful, equal, supportive, non-judgemental, mutual responsibility” (Mills & McGregor, 2010, p. 11). Further, they are described in the literature as being focused on caring for students, creating a warm environment and using relational approaches to support young people who had previously been disenfranchised from mainstream school settings (Mills & McGregor, 2013; Morgan, 2013; K. Wilson et al., 2011). However, the data from this study demonstrates that despite flexi schools being an environment that has these positive features, they are not immune to the grip of power that race holds in mediating relations and providing actors to reinforce the racial hierarchies created by social institutions. Moreover, using CRT to consider the broader context within which this study is situated, it provides opportunity to further analyse the role of institutionalised racism in the context of Indigenous engagement with flexi schooling context.

5.1.4 CURRICULUM AND INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGES/PERSPECTIVES IN FLEXI SCHOOLS

“Not too sure if there's any curriculum involving culture, there could definitely be more”

There is currently no literature that discusses or explores curriculum practices in relation to embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in Flexi Schools. The data provided by participants in this study provides a beginning point for considering these practices further. Australia currently has a national standardised curriculum, ostensibly to ensure all students in Australian are learning are exposed to the same learning opportunities and content (ACARA, 2015). The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is the establishment that designs curriculum for all Australian schools. In consultation with Indigenous education bodies, ACARA has named embedding of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into the curriculum as a cross-curriculum priority area (Ma Rhea, 2013). Furthermore, the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2013)

mandate that teachers should be proficient in both having the content knowledge to embed and, further, have teaching strategies that are inclusive of Indigenous learners.

Almost half of Indigenous staff participants reported that cultural events, programs, activities and celebrations were present within their schools. *“We do cultural activities but I don’t see enough in classrooms”*; *“They wanted to put harmony day and reconciliation day together. No Indigenous knowledge that I know of is in the curriculum”*; *“we do cultural activities but I don’t see enough in classrooms. There have been excuses given but they are rubbish. Teachers have stopped Indigenous studies. I have been taken away from helping in classrooms with Indigenous studies to something else”*; *We do cultural activities NAIDOC, painting. We do have a budget - sometimes we can pay for meals, sorry day, NAIDOC. Spent money on boomerangs”*. In section 3.2.2, I highlighted the critique in CRT literature that questions the effectiveness of cultural activities and the risk of cultural activities alone becoming superficial notions attached to multiculturalism. Ladson-Billings and Tate (2006) argued that although multiculturalism is the primary approach used in education to encompass racial/cultural diversity, it can be problematic in several ways. Ladson-Billing and Tate concluded that educators in the US can be focus on superficial activities such as eating ethnic foods, cultural dance and dress in place of more meaningful but perhaps more challenging practices such as embedding diverse cultural perspectives throughout curriculum. Moreover, they evaluated that not only can this practice cause competitiveness amongst cultural minority groups, it simultaneously upholds hegemonic racial superiority of the dominant race. In an Australian context, Blackmore (2010) also critiqued multiculturalism as potentially essentialising culture to superficial notions as well as not effectively disrupting the white cultural normative in schools.

The changes to the national curriculum and professional standards for teachers was a positive step in the direction of moving away from tokenism and soft ideas of multiculturalist practices to creating an educator workforce who has the knowledge and skills to effectively include Indigenous knowledges and perspectives (Ma Rhea, 2013). However, it appears from the data in this study that flexi schools are relying primarily on cultural activities and events rather than embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in classroom curriculum. A couple of further examples of participants identifying gaps in school practices in relation to curriculum: *“young*

people do not have enough exposure to Indigenous knowledges in their classrooms. Been trying to get mens and womens group going - higher up felt issues around gender specific... They don't do enough cultural trips - not a priority"; "They [teachers] attempt to embed Indigenous knowledge but sometimes it is hard to implement it in the day to day but during NAIDOC and Reconciliation weeks, it is there".

Embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives is not only important because it is mandated; it is important because it helps shift the re-production of cultural and racial hegemony (Hart, Whatman, McLaughlin, & Sharma-Brymer, 2012). G. Sarra (2011) argues that:

“the voices of Australian Indigenous peoples must be heard in order to correct the imbalances and inaccuracies that have influenced the attitudes of society, in the past and in the present. It is these same imbalances and inaccuracies that are poisoning the body politic and preventing this nation from achieving greatness.” (p. 617)

Furthermore, embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into curriculum plays an important part in affirming the cultural identities of Indigenous students (Ma Rhea, 2013). As flexi schools are engaging high numbers of Indigenous students, embedding Indigenous perspectives and knowledges into curriculum in a meaningful way should be an essential aspect of curriculum. However, the data provided by Indigenous staff in this study indicated that there is a need for more embedding and moving beyond cultural activities and celebrations.

Summary

In summary, section 5.1 was an analysis of the data that explored Indigenous experiences and roles in flexi schools. One interesting aspect of the study is how the methodology led to unexpected responses. What my participants wanted to discuss was not always what I had predicted, yet Indigenist methodologies privilege agency and voice, and are flexible enough to follow new lines of thought. The methodology I used gave participants the ability to control most aspects of the study, including what was and was not recorded as data. As an Aboriginal researcher, the ability of participants to be collaborators and have this authority was of great importance to me. Second, in using this methodology, there were time constraints imposed by the institutions (schools) that I worked with that meant I was not able to spend more time

with participants to expand on my data set. These limitations are analysed further in the next section, 5.2. Recognising these limitations is not to distract from the voices of Indigenous staff in this study. There were aspects of their experiences and stories that emerged strongly in this data.

Although not a data set of the study, I commenced the analysis with the information from the My School website that assisted in contextualising this study. Including the My School information in the analysis is important because the information provides important insights in the context of both this study and broader Indigenous education discourse. I then discussed the environmental aspects of flexi schools and how Indigenous staff identified these strongly when discussing why they are choosing to work in flexi school settings. The focus on relationships and high numbers of Indigenous students appear to be appealing for this cohort of Indigenous staff and I argued that there may be implications here for mainstream schools to consider.

Indigenous staff in this study were mostly non-teaching staff. However, in my analysis I pointed out that unlike mainstream settings, Indigenous staff in this study (aside from one participant) did not have Indigenous or Aboriginal in their title. I question the reasons behind using this title in mainstream school settings and analysed whether the appointment of staff in professional roles without being racialized upon employment may have an impact on their experiences in undertaking their roles. In this study, job titles were relatively insignificant in how Indigenous staff articulated their duties and responsibilities. All participants emphasised the importance of bringing their relationships and prioritising of relationships to their roles, as well as their cultural knowledges in a range of capacities. I used IST to gain a deeper understanding of how Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies work to benefit the schools, particularly as Indigenous staff are not remunerated or compensated in any way for bringing such knowledges.

Finally, I centred the voices of Indigenous participants to articulate their experiences and observations of how issues of race and racism are manifested in flexi school settings. Despite the literature being emphatic about doing school differently, there was still strong evidence in the data from this study to support that racism is an issue in flexi schools as it is in other school settings. Participants who discussed curriculum practices identified an over-reliance on cultural activities and practices in

place of meaningful embedding of Indigenous knowledges and curriculum in classrooms.

5.2 INDIGENIST RESEARCH: AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL RESEARCH REFLECTIONS

Due to the emerging nature of Indigenist research in Australia, it became clear at various times throughout undertaking this project that my reflections from doing this research may be just as much of a contribution as the data from the research itself. I have named this section 'autobiographical research reflections', which I have borrowed from narrative methodology literature (Bold, 2012). Bold (2012) discerns that some of the most insightful research is that which captures the whole story. But there is a critical aspect to my autobiographical research reflections. Haig-Brown and Archibald (1996) propose that critical ethnography is a transformative methodological approach in research and practice that involved First Nations education. Haig-Broan and Archibald argue that although it is sometimes untidy, it is critical that researchers and practitioners critically unpack their experiences to consider issues of praxis and transformation. In this research, I recognised the need to think and write as much about the process as the data itself. In section 3.1.2 I outlined some of the key literature on Indigenous Standpoint Theory that I considered when conceptualising this research. Through engaging with this literature, it became apparent that because of the historical exclusion of our people from knowledge production, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are still establishing our own corpus of work that theorises knowledge production in a way that embodies our ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin, 2003).

Undertaking research has at times challenged me to my core. I have felt conflicted, confused, frustrated and bleak about how I am positioned as an Aboriginal woman (with other intersectionalities that I don't believe influenced my research work on this project as significantly as my Aboriginal and gendered identities). It has prompted me to consider what the experiences have been of those who have gone before me, through times when our people had very little representation in any place of authority. Being 'younger' (both culturally and in academic terms), the other factor that became clear as I developed this research, is that there is limited literature by Indigenous researchers to draw from that reflects my own lived experiences and standpoint as a 'younger' Aboriginal woman. Furthermore, my standpoint as an

experienced educator and youth worker I feel is at times lost in my attempts to 'speak back' to how I am constructed by the dominant culture as an Aboriginal woman. It is my hope that through more Indigenous researchers writing of our experiences of undertaking research that is Indigenous focused, we can broaden and diversify the methodological literature for future generations that will come after us.

In this section I will outline my reflections focusing on three key topics. The first is my reflections about negotiating the space as an Aboriginal researcher in institutionalised education settings. I will discuss and provide an in-depth analysis of the issues that arise specifically for Indigenous researchers access to research participants in institutionalised education settings. Further, I will also raise some questions about existing Indigenous research ethical guidelines and the issues that they do not address for Indigenous researchers. The second topic of reflection will centre on using yarning methodology in Indigenous education research. I unpack how yarning and relationality co-exist to benefit Indigenous research and the practical implications that can arise for Indigenous researchers. I will also critique the use of traditional methods of data collection such as voice recording when using yarning as a research methodology.

5.2.1 ACCESS AND INDIGENIST RESEARCH

Owing to historical practices in research that dehumanised, objectified and excluded Indigenous peoples from knowledge produced *about* us (Rigney, 2001), there is now a body of literature that emphasises ethical practices in conducting research that involves Indigenous peoples and communities. The increasing presence of Indigenous researchers presents opportunity for ongoing debate about conducting research with an Indigenous focus, from Indigenous perspectives in addition to non-Indigenous perspectives. Although there is an emerging body of literature that speaks to Indigenous researchers (Foley, 2003; Martin, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2003; Nakata, 2007a; Rigney, 2006), much of the literature speaks to and for non-Indigenous researchers undertaking Indigenous research.

There are two key documents that a researcher (Indigenous or non-Indigenous) must be familiar with if they are wanting to conduct research in Indigenous communities. The first ethical research guidelines for Indigenous research was developed by the National Health & Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and published in 1991. This earlier version has now been replaced with 'Values and Ethics:

Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research', published in 2003 (National Health & Medical Research Council, 2003). The guidelines focus on research in Indigenous health contexts although they are often referred to by many researchers across disciplines. The NHMRC guidelines outline values and ethics needed for conduct of ethical Indigenous research including principles of reciprocity, respect, equality, responsibility, survival and protection and spirit and integrity (National Health & Medical Research Council, 2003). The NHMRC emphasise relationships to counter the poor consultation that has occurred in the past with Indigenous participants of research. Moreover, the establishment of trust is also proposed as being central to shifting the power relationships that were the source of poor research relations between non-Indigenous researchers and Indigenous peoples.

The second key ethical framework was developed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). First published in 2002 and then updated and republished in 2012, the 'Guidelines of Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies' is less health specific and provides researchers another set of recommendations for ethical research involving Indigenous peoples (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012). In the AITSIS guidelines, fourteen principles are set out to frame how researchers should conduct ethical research with Indigenous peoples. The principles address issues such as rights and recognition of Indigenous peoples, consultation and informed consent, beneficence and outcomes serving the interests and needs of Indigenous peoples. AIATSIS cite human rights and self-determination as the underlying principles for the development of these guidelines.

The guidelines and other literature that I engaged with when considering that my study will be Indigenous focused and only working with Indigenous participants, are written to a broad and what is assumed, mostly non-Indigenous audience. To me this places Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers in an ambiguous position. It can't be assumed that because we are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander that we will undertake research ethically. Notwithstanding, we are also circuitously bound into the very existence of the guidelines. Although we (Indigenous peoples) are now present and actively contributing to scholarship *about* us, the development of a body

of literature that reflects the complexity of how we are currently positioned in the research space is still emerging.

I engaged with the AIATSIS and NHMRC guidelines when conceptualising this research and writing the ethics application for my project. Further, I also used them as the basis of my discussion in section 3.7 'Ethics and Limitations' because they are considered the central Indigenous research ethics documents in Australia. I also engaged with literature (mostly within the IST literature, 3.1.2) that provides alternative methodologies that reflect our epistemologies and ontological positions. It was only when I commenced the research that it became clear that there are obvious gaps in this research literature.

The first gap I identified was that although I am Aboriginal and undertaking research that only includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, this research was to take place in the specific context of schools. The institutionalised nature of education systems (both schools and universities) presents considerable issues in the practicalities of undertaking what I would name as Indigenist research in institutionalised contexts. Below is a reflection from my experience in navigating access to school sites for this research.

Reflection

Once I defined what flexi schools I want to work with in my study and why, I set about considering how I would work with participants. I had good existing relationships with some school communities because of my experience of teaching in multiple flexi schools. However, because I am now a researcher, how I approach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to participate will need to be how the university dictates is an appropriate method for contacting potential participants. This was indeed a conundrum. My experience and knowledge as an Aboriginal person tells me very distinctively to ensure that I have consulted with mob on the ground, first and foremost. This did take place informally (well before I enrolled in a PhD), which is how I knew that this research was something that Indigenous staff would see as valuable. However, I am now formally the researcher so bypassing formal hierarchies within the schools that I want to include in my study was not only a bad idea, it would be considered an unethical process.

Once I identified the schools, they were contacted via email as promised in my ethics approval. The way of negotiating forward differed because some flexi schools belonged to a network of more than one school and others were stand-alone independent schools where I had contacted the principal directly. I was only invited to meet face-to-face with one person who was in a high position systemically to make a decision about whether or not to grant access to Indigenous staff at their school sites. He was a white male manager with whom I had an existing relationship with. We engaged in good critical conversation about what participation would involve, what my research questions were and discussion about my research design. This particular leader was emphatic of his support of the research. He made the decision in this meeting that he felt my research was so important that he would fund the cost of having Indigenous staff from multiple sites out from their schools for a day.

I drove away from that meeting feeling relieved. This man who held all of the authority to say yes or no to accessing Indigenous staff at multiple school sites (some of which have very high Indigenous enrolments) had not only said yes to supporting me to access participants, but also expressed that he valued the research I was about to embark on. In the car on the way home, I stopped to think - what if he had said no? What if he didn't know me, would that have impacted on his decision? If I was non-indigenous, would he have still supported the very same study? That is great that he supports it, what if the school authorities below him don't support it?

As it turned out, the issues underlying some of the questions I asked myself on that drive home would continue to emerge as I contacted other schools that were stand-alone sites to recruit Indigenous participants. I had many schools who completely ignored my recruitment email. The ignoring of my email could only lead me to one of three conclusions. The first, that the principal discussed it with their Indigenous staff and they said no they weren't interested and the principal decided not to reply to communicate this. The second, that the principal didn't like what they read about the project and decided that they didn't want their Indigenous staff to be involved in such a study. The third, that the principal is too busy or saturated with research requests that they decided to ignore the email all together.

There were other replies. One was that there were not any Indigenous staff employed at the school currently. A legitimate reason not to be able to participate, I thought! The other was from a principal stating that they are not a flexi school. I took

the time to reply and explain how I defined flexi schools (non-deficit) and that their school did offer education (with high Indigenous enrolments) that fits this definition but I did not get a reply to this email.

The principals and school leaders who worked directly under the man in the leadership position who had supported the study initially had mixed responses to my follow up communication. The majority were supportive in principle although the practical reality of having Indigenous staff away from their roles in schools surfaced as a very real barrier. Then there were others who were very proactive in passing information along and providing Indigenous staff the opportunity to participate in work time if they chose to.

5.2.2 INSTITUTIONALISED EDUCATION SETTINGS AND INDIGENIST RESEARCH

The institutionalised nature of education presented very real implications and lessons for me as an Aboriginal researcher that I feel is presently missing from Indigenous research literature. Indigenist research theories and methodologies are becoming a strong presence in the literature, although the translation of the theoretical principles to the practical reality of undertaking education research is not well documented. Ethical conduct of Indigenous research is emphasised through the guidelines discussed above by Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2012) and the National Health & Medical Research Council (2003). However, how are Aboriginal researchers able to conduct research that is motivated by our agendas, ideas and aspirations in a discipline and context that perpetuates imperialism, racism and exclusion?

Berg (2007) characterises “an institution as an established societal installation (p. 581). The social reproduction of cultural norms, traditions and knowledges can then be attributed to how educational institutions reinforce nation state identities and push out those who resist or reject the dominant agenda (Berg, 2007 & Ramirez and Boli, 1987). Jakobi (2011) argues that the new world order, underpinned by institutions, standardises interactions, routines and taken-for-granted beliefs. The very recent history of colonisation in Australia and how Indigenous Australians are positioned within the colonial state is a factor that requires deeper consideration for what this means for knowledge production in relation to Indigenous education.

My experience in navigating access to Indigenous participants in school sites guided me towards thinking about how Indigenous researchers negotiate institutionalised, western dominated spaces to undertake research that is proclaimed as being ethical in Indigenous research guidelines. Principles such as self-determination and consultation are nearing towards impossible when Indigenous researchers seek to undertake Indigenous research in education contexts and I would propose other institutionalised settings also. The regulating and governing of research agendas in education lays squarely with either bureaucrats in a large system or education leaders are in charge of individual school sites.

The function of institutionalising schools is closely connected to the need for nation states to uphold national identities and values (Ramirez & Boli, 1987). Nation states achieve their purpose of conformation through control, regulation and expected compliance by schools in upholding unity in 'shared' values and goals. This emphasis on national development in each individual school has resulted devaluing of the continuation of indigenous knowledges and principles, as well as diminishing of local and minority needs (Ramirez & Boli, 1987).

Berg (2007) evaluates that schools as social institutions execute their roles in two ways, steering and leading. Steering is defined as "a matter of wielding power and, generally speaking, maybe defined as influence in a certain definite direction in relation to given conditions" (Berg, 2007, p. 578). This influence is further described as explicit (formal, governing) and implicit (historical, social or community expectations (Berg, 2007). Leading, Berg (2007) argues, is the tasks and work associated with steering. It could be said the leading is then informed by steering, including the role of making decisions about which research is important in a school or which is not.

Understanding how schools as institutions operate to serve the interests of the dominant culture is a critical aspect of the discussion about Indigenous researchers access to undertake Indigenous research in schools. For an Indigenous researcher to reach the position of being the researcher, one must: successfully navigate an institution as a child that is not functioning to support their interests or needs; access a different but similar institution to undertake tertiary studies (in an environment where we are even less critically under-represented); return to undertake research training where the likelihood of having someone teach you who is of the same cultural

background is very low and finally, construct a research project that affirms who you are culturally but also meets the needs of and is accepted by the institution. Once this is achieved, an Indigenous researcher who wants to undertake education research will then need to navigate the school institution again; this time, from the position of a researcher.

Shifting from the object of research to the researcher means a re-construction of how we are socially positioned as Aboriginal peoples. In navigating schools as institutions, this means that Indigenous researchers will inevitably be met with similar issues as we were met with as students of the same institutions including being constructed as 'other'; inferior; sub-human and so forth. When Indigenous peoples become the researcher, it is not just the straight forward issues that arise with accessing school sites to undertake their research; there is a set of historical and social assumptions that we are structurally and individually met with.

The notion of self-determination, espoused by the two key ethical Indigenous research documents outlined earlier (AIATSIS and NHMRC) is therefore very unlikely to be possible in Indigenous education research. To consult with Indigenous people, create shared visions and collaborate with Indigenous peoples within education institutions is only possible if the 'gatekeeper' grants access. In school institutions, the gatekeeper will be the school leader (principal, lead teacher, head of campus) or higher up the bureaucracy within the system. In the Australian context, this person is unlikely to be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person, given how critically under-represented we are in educator and leadership roles (Australian Government, 2014a). In undertaking critical self-reflection and thinking deeply about what this means for me as an early career Aboriginal researcher, it became clear that we (Indigenous education researchers) need to be clear about the position we find ourselves in and develop frameworks and scholarship that reflects the reality of our experiences in undertaking Indigenous focused research in education settings. The role of gatekeeping within institutions will now be analysed. Such analysis is critical in bringing forward new ideas about ethics and new conversations for Indigenous researchers who want to undertake Indigenist research in education contexts.

5.2.3 GATEKEEPING INDIGENIST RESEARCH IN EDUCATION: ETHICS OR 'PROTECTIONISM'?

Predictably, there is a body of literature on the concept of gatekeeping in research (Heath, Charles, Crow, & Wiles, 2007; Murgatroyd, Karimi, Robinson, & Rada, 2015; Sanghera & Thapar-Björkert, 2008; Shoemaker & Vos, 2009; Wanat, 2008). Gatekeeping of research has been written about across disciplines, with Wanat (2008) proposing that gaining access in a research context is unique to each study. The impartiality of the gatekeeping role has been noted in the literature for some time as being problematic (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Murgatroyd et al. (2015) examined the role of gatekeeping in health research, identifying that gaps between practice and research will persevere with the "misuse of gatekeeping powers" (PS163). Murgatroyd et al. (2015) further distinguishes the misuse of gatekeeping roles as "Nimbyism"; a term which was used originally in the 1980's to describe residents who were in opposition of new developments in their neighbourhoods. Although residents agreed with the social outcomes that these developments might produce, they didn't want them in their neighbourhood. Thus, the term 'not in my backyard' was born. Murgatroyd et al. (2015) explain that there are several layers to Nimbyism that impact on researchers. "Conditions of entry, defining the problem of study, access to data and respondents, funding and scope of analysis" (Murgatroyd et al., 2015, p. S163) are all influenced by Gatekeepers.

Heath et al. (2007) proposes that gatekeepers can play an important ethical role, particularly for research involving children and other participants who are perceived as vulnerable. However, ethics in qualitative research include informed consent, which can only take place if potential participants have the opportunity to engage fully with the would-be researchers. Heath et al. (2007) further explain that in an institutionalised setting, most are "age-structured" (p. 405) consequently positing adults as authorities and decision-makers. As institutionalised settings have a set of enforced conditions well outside the influence of potential participants or gatekeepers, Heath et al then question the ability to authentically gain informed consent if the participation is only decided upon by a gatekeeper. The issue that arises from this set of conditions is then about agency and decision making on behalf of potential participants. Status inequality, subordination and organisational constraints are all genuine issues that emerge when considering the ethics of gatekeeping and informed consent.

Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert (2008) conclude that the underlying dynamic that influences whether access is granted by a gatekeeper is the researcher-gatekeeper relationship. Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert (2008) outline that "it is a relationship that is fraught with inconsistencies and instabilities" (p.544). Sanghera and Thapar-Björkert (2008) wrote of their research context, which was an inquiry of social capital in a complex, low socioeconomic community called Bradford in the United Kingdom. Ethnic diversity in the community is high and the researcher was wanting to research participants who may not have been of the same 'class' position, but likely of the same race categorisation. It was the position of the researcher that led to some rich insights about positionality (race, class, gender) and how it governs professional and social relationships. As the researcher was "British-born with Indian skin" (p.554), the researcher found himself fielding questions not only about his research, but about why he had brown skin and of Indian appearance but had a British accent. Accordingly, how gatekeepers constructed him as a person impacted on his relationships and interactions with him.

The unpredictability of how relationships are operationalised in gatekeeping/researcher interactions matters because it impacts on how knowledge is produced (Wanat, 2008). Wanat (2008) argues that high level gatekeepers tend to steer away from sensitive topics. Mediating access to participants is not only based on perceived benefits, it also based on perceived threats (organisational and individual). Wanat (2008) also raises the issue of translation of higher cooperation to lower level cooperation. Providing access through a systemic gatekeeper at a higher level does not always mean that the lower level will provide access to potential participants, particularly if the access isn't supported with resources or general support of the study. Wanat (2008) concluded that personal connections, at higher or lower levels in school research has the most impact on how researchers navigate gatekeeping.

Gatekeeping generally in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is also not an unfamiliar concept. The Merriam Webster dictionary defines gatekeeping two ways. The first is defined as "a person who guards a gate". The second is defined as "a person who controls access" (Merriam-Webster, 2016). The metaphorical gate that can be applied when thinking about the concept of gatekeeping in Indigenous communities is the entry way to social, health, education, and economic equality that Indigenous peoples have fought for since invasion of Australia. Although who controls

access to this equality is greater than just one person, the system that has blocked equality from being met over the past couple of centuries continues to prevent access to this equality. The person or persons who control the access are simply actors that are serving the interests of the very system that blocks access to equality, repeatedly.

Historical policies such as protectionism are implicated in the gatekeeping that continues to pervade in many Indigenous communities around Australia. The protectionism rule that governed Indigenous peoples particularly from the early nineteenth century created a discourse that Indigenous peoples require protection or saving from ourselves and from others (Moran, 2005). What was initially a Government policy that was presented as preserving and safeguarding Indigenous peoples saw many thousands of Indigenous peoples removed from their traditional homelands and consequently separated from their families, language, and culture. Although the policy names (merging, absorption, assimilation) and ideology varied slightly over the subsequent decades up until the latter half of the nineteenth century, one consistent remained: the control and ruling of Indigenous lives by white missionaries, government officials and managers (Moran, 2005).

As outlined above, different scholars have written of their experiences of gatekeeping in varying discipline and context specific circumstances. This body of literature assists in critiquing how research and therefore knowledge production is mediated and for who's interest is the knowledge being created. In the context of Indigenous Australia, there are several key points in situ that I believe need to be raised for future Indigenous (and perhaps non-Indigenous researchers) in relation to gatekeeping Indigenist education research, by Indigenous researchers.

At the beginning of this section on gatekeeping, I cited the term Nimbyism, which referred to gatekeepers who might in essence support the social or moral value of the research, but 'not in their backyard' (Murgatroyd et al., 2015). In reference to Indigenist research conducted by Indigenous researchers, I believe this will continue to be an ongoing issue for some time to come. In the research context, we continue to see research that focuses on Indigenous learners as the problem; an abundance of research undertaken by non-Indigenous researcher researching the problematic 'other' and an ongoing obsession with comparative, scientific measurements of educational outcomes (Harrison, 2007).

Although many schools are now providing practices that are considered culturally inclusive, there remains a deficit discourse saturated with concepts of otherness that ensures Indigenous students are kept well below their non-Indigenous peers. The broader education policy space has seen some positive changes: the introduction of embedding Indigenous knowledges as a cross curriculum priority area (ACARA, 2015); the introduction of teacher standards that require teachers to know about Indigenous histories and have strategies to teaching and support Indigenous students (AITSL, 2013) and increasing universities ensuring mandatory Indigenous education units within pre-service teacher education programs (Hart et al., 2012; Ma Rhea, 2013). Yet, these broader policy changes may not necessarily mean that Indigenist researchers who wish to undertake research in an education space on one of these topics will be granted access by a gatekeeper.

The school gatekeeper may be increasing their work in the area of Indigenous education. However, a study that might include critical observations or in-depth analysis by the cultural 'other' may be perceived as useful, but 'not in their backyard'. In the context of this study, although I have no evidence beyond the correspondence between myself and gatekeepers, I believe this was an issue in some cases. I do not doubt the considerable limitations on school resources. However, a common issue that emerged at data collection at all sites was the ability to gain access to participants. Gatekeepers were quick to assure me how important the topic of Indigenous staff was, particularly due to the high Indigenous numbers of students and staff. Conversely, some gatekeepers only allowed access after ongoing persistence on my part or compromising on how I had planned to work with participants in collecting data to utilise the little time that was made available.

Murgatroyd et al. (2015) discussed the multiple aspects of control that gatekeepers have in research: "conditions of entry, defining the problem of the study, access to data and respondents, funding and scope of analysis" (P. S165). The historically situated discourse in Indigenous education has always been socially and ideologically stipulated by white Australia. The conditions of entry in accessing education up until the latter end of the nineteenth century were clearly governed by racialised ideas that Indigenous peoples were intellectually inferior or "uneducable" (Price, 2012b, p. 2). The conditions of entry into the space of knowledge production has not been different, with an emergence Indigenous scholars writing of the

challenges and their experiences of undertaking research within Western knowledge systems (Martin, 2012; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; Nakata, 2007a; Rigney, 2001).

In my study, my circumstances were that I had existing relationships with some school sites, which I believe impacted on how my conditions of entry were constructed in those cases. In others, the opportunity to discuss conditions of entry were blocked entirely without any prospect of negotiating or mediating with gatekeepers. The clear lack of neutrality in the role of gatekeepers in institutions such as schools with would-be Indigenist researchers such as myself, presents serious issues in being able to authentically consult and collaborate with Indigenous participants in school sites, as espoused by ethic guidelines and Indigenist theorists. With gatekeepers holding the authority to grant entry or place conditions upon entry, there is very little prospect for Indigenist researchers to define our own research problems and negotiate directly with participants about further defining the problem and the focus of the study. This is problematic because standpoint and how we perceive, observe and construct research problems, matters.

The abundance of research on Indigenous education has not resulted in any significant discoveries or improvements, and this research has been undertaken by mostly non-Indigenous researchers (Harrison, 2007). Counter stories are imperative, not just because it is essential to hear from those who hold the experiential knowledge; but because experiential knowledge provides a different lens with which to construct and analyse the problem. Through exploring the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples, the topic of race and racism often surfaces (Carlson, 2011; C. Sarra, 2011). Critical race scholars argue that specific examination of the role of race and racism, including schools and education systems, is vital in examining racial educational inequality that persist in many Western countries (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002; Zamudio, Russell, Rios, & Bridgeman, 2011). The avoidance and conflated understanding of the topic of race and racism by educators is well documented (Aveling, 2002, 2007; Blackmore, 2010; Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012). Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson (2014) evaluate that without insider or counter experiences outside of the realm of Western epistemologies framing inquiries on important topics such as race and racism, "it becomes apparent

that the insidious effects of epistemological racism still plagues the Indigenous Australian educational research agenda" (p. 3).

Gatekeepers hold far more authority for Indigenous peoples than simply allowing or blocking research from being undertaken; they hold the authority to control how knowledge about us is produced and re-produced. Although the Australian Government promotes their resounding support for improving educational outcomes for Indigenous people, the lack of authority to control something as significant as knowledge production *about* us seems to be in complete contradiction to current education policy. As Bodkin-Andrews and Carlson (2014) point out, not only is it exclusionary by virtue of the dominance of Western knowledge systems, it also reproduces a different form of racism.

The role of ethics and gatekeeping are closely related. As mentioned earlier in this section, Heath et al. (2007) analysed the role of gatekeepers in gaining informed consent with children and vulnerable groups. Heath et al. critiqued positionality of potential participants, researchers and gatekeepers as problematic in undertaking the process of informed consent in research contexts. In their example, Heath et al. discussed the barrier of age structures within institutions in giving children the ability and agency to make decisions about their participation. Although the role of the gatekeeper is to protect children from being exploited thus bound with ethical research practices, it also has a paradoxical function of impeding a child's ability to be included in the decisions about them, that impinge on them.

Indigenous peoples in Australia are categorised as a vulnerable group in research (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012; National Health & Medical Research Council, 2003). The status of vulnerability is due to the extensive objectification, exploitation, exclusion and subjugation of us in research that have been conducted in the not-too-distant past (some would argue there are still examples of such studies) (Martin, 2012; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; Rigney, 2006). While Heath et al. (2007) analyse age structures within institutions to consider how gatekeeping impacts on the rights and agency of children, intersections of age structures and race are important sites of causation to analyse when discussing ethics and Indigenist research.

As discussed extensively in section 3.2, how race and racialisation are critical when discussing positionality of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous people have been

racially constructed in Australia as inferior, other and less worthy since invasion (Moreton-Robinson, 2009a). The social racialisation of Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples in Australia is then also connected with how gatekeepers undertake their ethical roles in 'protecting' us from further research that has not served our interests or accurately represented our lived experiences. Furthermore, protectionist discourse (that we need protecting from ourselves and others) must impinge on a gatekeeper's ability to reconcile the social construction of us needing protection with the 'vulnerable' Indigenous person now asking for access to their own group to undertake research. Social racialisation of white Australia implicitly tells a gatekeeper that they have more knowledge or authority to make decisions on behalf of the vulnerable Indigenous group that they are protecting. The invisible authority that is granted to make such decisions is constituted by how whiteness discursively operates to keep Indigenous peoples subordinate thus maintaining the power and privileges that continue to benefit white people and systems (Blackmore, 2010; Moreton-Robinson, 2003). Recognition of this very real obstacle for Indigenist researchers who want to undertake research in institutionalised contexts such as schools is necessary to progress discussions about ethics and Indigenous research.

Wanat (2008) explains that gatekeepers in schools will often avoid topics that are sensitive. The topic of Indigenous peoples and affairs, in addition to racism could not only be categorised as being sensitive, but fraught with historically situated denial, untruths and assumptions. The difficulty in getting (non-Indigenous and white people in the main) to engage critically in Indigenous studies in education undergraduate programs has been written about by scholars such as Aveling (2002, 2006); (Hart et al., 2012; Phillips, 2011). These authors stress the importance of compulsory Indigenous Studies in teacher education programs, yet acknowledge that students often enter the learning space with hostility, resistance and limited existing knowledge to draw on. The fear and resistance that exists in compulsory Indigenous education coursework is not limited to pre-service teachers.

Ma Rhea (2013) reported that there is wide-spread fear and concern amongst teachers nationwide in the recent policy changes that included mandatory teacher standards that require teachers to now know about Indigenous peoples, histories and cultures as well as know how to effectively teach Indigenous students. Evidence is mounting that we currently have an education workforce who self-identify their

deficiencies and lack of understanding about Indigenous peoples and issues. In relation to gatekeeping Indigenist research, the paramount question is, how are gatekeepers who likely have limited knowledge themselves about Indigenous peoples, cultures, communities and issues able to make sound decisions about whether research (by Indigenous or non-Indigenous researchers) is appropriate and in the interests of their Indigenous students or staff? Moreover, researchers with specific experience and training in conducting Indigenist research is extremely limited. Leaving decisions to gatekeepers that have not engaged in any research training or have very limited understanding about the context of Indigenous research is not serving the interests of Indigenous peoples.

In sum, I have used notes from my reflections in navigating access to school sites to consider what researching in institutionalised settings means for Indigenist researchers. I briefly outlined two key documents, the NHMRC and AIATSIS ethics guidelines for conducting Indigenous research. My reflections and understanding of the ethics guidelines for undertaking Indigenous research revealed another gap in the literature whereby Indigenist researchers are using frameworks that are catering for a mostly non-Indigenous audience. Through using my reflections, I could critically analyse my experiences through examining literature on institutionalisation of education, gatekeeping and Indigenist research. Although I identified more problems than solutions, this section is a critical aspect of this study in recognising the nexus between theory and practice in Indigenist research and creating literature by Indigenous researchers, for Indigenous researchers.

5.2.4 YARNING METHODOLOGY IN EDUCATION RESEARCH

I always make the time to yarn. Yarning, relationships and connecting with people has always been a fundamental part of who I am. Doing my PhD as an induction into the academy, I noticed the distinct lack of yarning that takes place in universities. The demanding and individual nature of an academic role means that myself and my colleagues are in a constant state of overworked-flux. This lack of time means teaching, research demands, community commitments and HDR supervision sometimes takes precedence over taking the time to have a yarn. Though in most cases (and sometimes with a little persistence), I have found most people seem to enjoy yarning, once they fully engage in the moment.

My love of yarning has been invaluable to my development and growth as an academic. Although I yarn in different ways with different people (Elders, Indigenous colleagues, non-Indigenous colleagues, my family, community people, academic, non-academic staff), the result of yarning is always the same - the establishing of a connection, and in most cases, a relationship. The way I yarn isn't just because I like to 'have a chat'. For many Aboriginal peoples, yarning is foundational to how we connect and interact with others (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010). Dean (2010) explains that providing a singular definition of yarning is not appropriate because to do so would not reflect the diversity of yarning within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and communities.

Yarning is an English language term that means 'thread', used to sew with (O'Conner & Kellerman, 2015). An old sailor's expression, to 'spin a yarn' reportedly originating from the 19th century meant that yarn in the English language was also understood to mean telling a tale or spinning story or tale (O'Conner & Kellerman, 2015). It is not documented how Indigenous peoples took up this term and creating yet another meaning for the same term. However, I have asked my Elders who have said that the term yarn or yarning is in their living memories and its meaning is not understood by them as telling tales or untrue stories. It is similar to the yarning literature in that it is about sharing through discussion and connecting.

For me, yarning is the establishment of our relational connections (kin, country, community) and our reading of each other: physically; spiritually; socially and in a work setting, professionally. Equally, yarning is about listening. It is about listening to each other, listening to ourselves and listening to our (gut) feelings. The connecting and reading happens for me with all who I engage in a yarn with, although connecting emerges differently with Indigenous people than it does with non-Indigenous people. The literature on yarning as a methodology is emerging. In section 3.3, I introduced the work of Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) who wrote about yarning as a legitimate research methodology. As I have used the work of Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010), I will begin my reflections with re-visiting key aspects of their work.

Bessarab and Ng'andu highlight the difficulties, particularly for Indigenous researchers in using yarning as a methodology because of the distinct lack of literature available for researchers to utilise. Moreover, as there is an established methodological body of work on narratives within Western research paradigms, this becomes even

more of a challenge for Indigenous researcher's fight to legitimise use of methods that reflect Indigenous knowledges and ways of being, knowing and doing. Bessarab and Ng'andu distinguish their experiences as indigenous women (from two different countries) and frame the legitimacy as not just rejecting Western paradigms that objectified us in the past, but in discerning the distinctness of yarning within the cultural protocols and norms within which yarning takes place.

Bessarab and Ng'andu outline that there are distinct forms of yarning that take place in research settings. Social yarning, as a "significant precursor" (p. 42) to the research in establishing relationships and connections with participants. Research topic yarning is yarning that is specifically about the research questions and takes place in semi and unstructured interviews. Collaborative yarning, they explain, can be about the research but takes the form of sharing ideas and concepts. Finally, they introduce the concept of therapeutic yarning, including personal disclosures, yarning about trauma or emotive topics that may still be related to the research. Bessarab and Ng'andu illustrate that these yarns will not always take place in a linear way; they are interrelated and often feedback and tie into each other. This illustration is represented in figure 5 below:

Figure 1: The Yarning Research Process

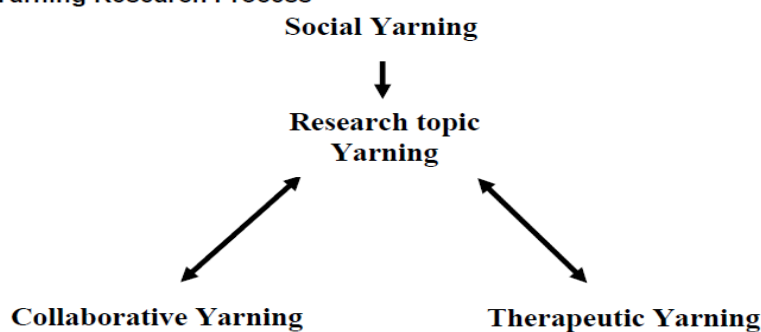


Figure 5: Yarning (Bessarab and N'Gandu, 2010, p. 40)

Bessarab and Ng'andu developed their methodology using reflections from their own research contexts, both community based and exploring issues of health (Ng'andu) and gendered experiences within family (Bessarab). I am not critiquing their reflections of using yarning in their context. Rather, I am seeking to achieve the same outcome of deeply reflecting on yarning as a research process in my research context. As discussed in the previous section on institutionalisation and gatekeeping, the

conditions imposed because of the specific context of this study resulted in several key issues that emerged that I believe is relevant for Indigenist researchers undertaking research in a similar context. Although yarning worked alongside story-boarding (Stuart, 2012) to form my methodology, the restrictions of how I could undertake yarning as part of my methodology as an Indigenist researcher were also influenced by how my research was mediated by the institution. Further, my reflections of how I used my methodology in an institutionalised education context focus on not only the epistemic implications, but the ontological and axiological implications. Below is a reflection about my use of yarning methodology.

Reflection

Using yarning methodology was a late addition to my research design. When I went through confirmation for my project, some feedback I received from the panel was that although it was clear in how I conceptualised this project that relationships were a very important consideration of all aspects of the project, they didn't feature prominently in my research design. In using IST, theoretically, relationships are named as important but I didn't capture this in my research design. Perhaps I was a little worried about how it would be received. As I moved through undertaking my study, my confidence in who I am as an Aboriginal researcher grew and I realised how yarning was so deeply embedded in how I develop, maintain and grow my relational connections.

As I navigated access to participants, it became clear that yarning would also be limited by the restraints placed upon me from both the university and the schools I was working with. I knew immediately when I decided to include yarning methodology that I felt strongly about not recording yarns - I felt that it would be disrespectful and intrusive. I know how yarning goes, every which way, and I knew just because I was undertaking formal research, participants might yarn about things naturally and not remember they were being recorded. Also, I wanted to work with participants in that moment to decide what aspects of their yarns they wanted recorded for the research.

Data collection was different at each school site. The first data collection session, which was facilitated over a full day was with a larger, mix gendered group from different schools and with Indigenous staff employed in different roles. I had

envisaged having the research yarn topic visible and participants work in pairs to story-board each other's yarns or responses. When I first met with the group, there were some participants who I had not met before but others who I had various relational connection to. For example, one participant I knew very well from my home community. Another couple of participants I had known in various professional contexts. The rest of the group, I was making the initial connection with. I did this in a cultural way, I introduced myself and my family and cultural connections (traditional connections, community connections). It was this introductory yarning that set the tone for the day, as I also made the space for participants to ask any questions about me or the research project.

It became clear early on that participants wanted to remain as a whole group. It also emerged quickly that not recording participants was the right decision, some participants said they were relieved that it would not be recorded. Although I had spent hours writing numeric codes that I would assign to individuals at the beginning of the day to ensure I captured the data correctly, I respected the group's wishes and recalibrated - quickly. I knew that I needed to collect the yarns via story-boarding but the group said they would rather yarn it through as a whole group with me and I write the story-boards and check in as we go. This method worked extremely well and put participants in the driver's seat. Participants would yarn through each research topic. As we are yarning, the person would say "did you get that Marnee?" Or when I was reading back what I had captured as they were yarning, participants would often correct me or decide they wanted things taken off or added.

The time flew by. Three challenges arose during the day. The first was how exhausted I was, being solely responsible for capturing the data meant I was trying to remain switched on, keep an eye on time, hope that my writing arm didn't drop off, keep focused on the research yarn, whilst also making sure everyone was feeling comfortable. The second was being in a group setting, there were some members of the group who were less interactive or wanting to yarn for long to capture their thoughts or ideas (there were a variety of reasons for this). The third challenge was that some of my topics, including race, was something that many participants wanted to yarn a lot about. However, there were comments over the course of the day (they happened more during the race and racism workshop) that they weren't sure if they

should say that, indicating that there was a level of worry about whether their boss or colleagues might find out they had said certain things.

At other school sites, data collection happened similarly in the initial introduction process and participants telling me early that they would rather yarn and I can capture on the story-board and read through after each workshop topic. At one school site, I was given limited time with staff individually. This meant that I was one-on-one with both male and female participants. This was the only option given to me to work with Indigenous staff at this particular school site. The second school site was a mixed gender group of staff who decided to stay in a group. As it had taken a lot of persistence on my part to get to work with this particular group, I had to work with the time that the school principal provided, which was only a couple of hours. Again, the group opted to yarn and I capture yarns on the story-board and do check ins about what I captured. The group gave me feedback that they really liked the process. The difficulty at this site was having such limited time. Some staff ended up staying back in their personal time to continue working through the research yarns.

When I looked back at the story-boards, I recalled there were many times when participants were yarning but said "don't write this Marnee". I treat some of these gaps as data in and of itself. Silence in yarning and other contexts is significant for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. My biggest fear was whether this would then meet the university requirements of what would be considered 'rigour'.

Upon reflection, it became clear that yarning is indeed possible in education research, even with the restrictions imposed due to the institutionalised nature of the context. Although education settings are often restricted by time and space, my study is one example of how it is possible to use an Indigenous methodology even with the restrictive and Western imposed conditions. Although the yarning methodology proposed by Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) clearly articulated their experiences for their research contexts, yarning was less compartmentalised in my study. I used yarning methodology in both group and one-on-one contexts, and in both I found that yarning was not sequential and was highly dependent on existing connections and relationships. I have represented my experiences of yarning in a research context in a diagram I developed that visually represents how yarning took place in this research and could potentially be useful for future researchers:

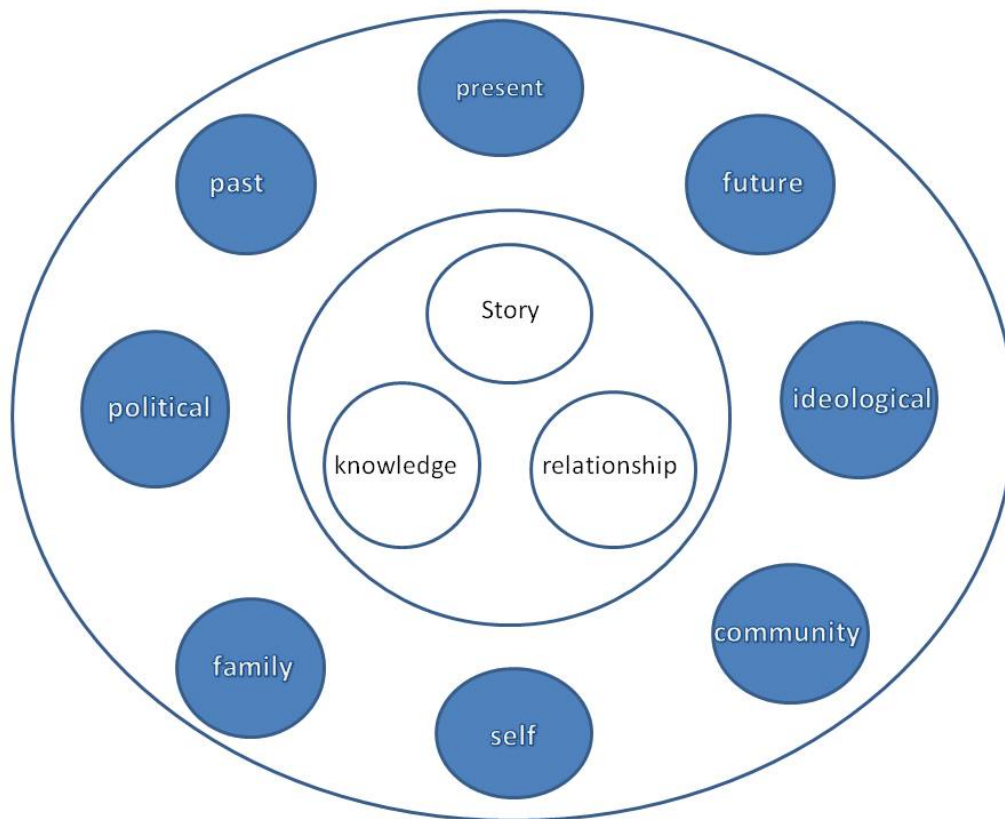


Figure 6: Research yarning in education contexts, Shay, 2016

In figure 6, I illustrate the multidimensional, interwoven way that yarning took place in my education research project. Although some yarns were what Bessarab and Ng'andu would have characterised as "research yarns", there were many elements which entered the discussion in often non-direct ways. The diagram is represented through use of circles. Circles are significant to many Aboriginal peoples and in some Aboriginal cultures can be symbols of meeting places, waterholes, food and relatedness. In articulating Aboriginal ontology, Martin (2008) explains that "circles are important because there is no beginning and or no end and therefore no completions but continuous cycles" (p.80). Although time conditions are an imposition in research that occurs in institutionalised contexts, once the relationship is established, I propose that Indigenist research undertaken by Indigenous scholars is an ongoing engagement - beyond the life of the project.

In figure 6, yarning is central as it is the core of the process or methodology. Embedded within this process are the three core aspects of the process: story, knowledge and relationship. Story was often drawn upon to recall responses to

research topics, share responses and analyse experiences. Story is underpinned by knowledge, which often sits within and what might be perceived as outside the realm of the research topic. Through using yarning as a methodology, it affirms Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing of participants. Story that is not restricted by Western conditions outlined in narrative theory scholarship (see section 3.3) is essential in recognising not only the epistemic contribution from Indigenous participants, but the ontological significance of story. Finally, relationships were also drawn upon throughout the process of yarning. Within the research space, relationships impacted on how yarning occurred. Relationships can include relationships with people, institutions, country, community and animals.

In this study, researcher-participant relationships mattered. In some instances there was an existing relationship, and in others a relationship was developing. Relationships between participants in this study also mattered. There were some participants who were related (kin) or had different roles that had gender and age related implications in their authority to speak on particular issues. In theorising relatedness and its connectedness to Aboriginal ontology and epistemology, Martin (2008) articulates the "practices of living relatedness" as the "ontological premise" (p. 80) as bound with an Aboriginal epistemological framework. In other words, we can't *know* without relatedness. Thus, relationships or relatedness is a core part of knowing and sharing knowledge in the process of yarning. Relationships then impact on how yarning occurs, whether it is community based research or the research takes place in an institutionalised context like education.

There are eight circles that surround the inner circles of the diagram. These circles represent: family, self, community, ideological, political, past, present and future. All of these are what participants bring to any one yarn. They are deliberately placed in a circle to demonstrate the connectedness and the way in which these elements discursively operate; organically and with no one having more importance over another. In a circle, all is equal. It is not possible for one element to be in a higher order than the other. Therefore, the past is no more or less important than the present, or the future. Community is no less or more important than family, or self. Political is no more or less important than ideological. But they all inform participant and researcher's positionality within the yarning space. Moreover, a response is not possible without participant's drawing on at least one of these elements at any one time.

Threads of each of these elements could be heard as each participant shared their responses to the research yarns.

Perhaps the most glaring insight gained from listening to participants and their feedback about the methodology was the need to resist traditional qualitative methods such as interviewing and recording group discussions, particularly when using a methodology such as yarning. All the data generated from my field work is equally as valid and although there are gaps in some areas, this is data in and of itself and can provide researchers important revelations for using different methodologies to explore the same topic with similar cohorts. Providing participants, the best conditions possible in an institutionalised setting to express their responses will assist in understanding complex issues that continue to result in educational disadvantage for Indigenous peoples.

5.2.5 RELATIONALITY AND YARNING

Many indigenous scholars globally discuss the significance of relationships to many indigenous cultures (Bull, 2010; Martin, 2012; C. Sarra, 2011; Tuhiwai Smith, 2012; Yunkaporta, 2009). Yarning is implicit in relationships and vice versa. Yarning is a process for establishing connections, boundaries, expectations, accountability and social conditions (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010). Through acknowledging and articulating the role of yarning, it be adding rigour to the often-contested paradigm of Indigenist research. Although yarning is socially embedded, what this means in a research context needs to be further analysed by Indigenous scholars.

Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) explained that yarning is often non-linear and can move quickly from a focus on a topic to other topics that may not be related. As yarning takes place throughout a period, relationships strengthen thus yarns may become more in depth or move to a personal nature. As a researcher, the boundaries of how relationships emerge and develop in the research context is an important consideration. I believe this is particularly important for Indigenous researchers because we have far less scholarship that accurately represents our experiences to draw upon.

In my reflection, I discussed how I yarned in the beginning phases with participants about who I am and my family and community connections. Even though

this wasn't an issue in my study, it is worth noting that this process can be a perilous one for many Indigenous people. As I wrote my reflection, I wondered what would have happened if there was a participant who had previously had an issue with a family member or community member that I am closely connected to? Would this impact on their ability and willingness to participate in my study? The other thought I had was what if the group had questioned who I was? How did they read my cultural identity?

The Indigenous specific issues and tensions around researcher-participant relationships are often discussed in the literature as insider/outside research (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). However, some problematic issues that arise when such binaries are applied to Indigenous relationality. Intersectionality is widely accepted as impacting on one's positioning (Bhopal & Preston, 2012). Intersections of gender, race, sexuality, socioeconomic status, educational attainment, where a person lives, for example, all impact on how a researcher can be perceived in relation to their insider or outsider status. Thus, Tuhiwai Smith (2012) reminds us that although one can be observed as an insider by an outsider, they may in fact be perceived as an outsider by an insider.

The relational nature of the tensions that arise in considering the position of researcher-participants are well documented in Western literature (O'Leary, 2010). Issues such as insider status can emerge for Western researchers in what appears to be a similar way as it can for Indigenous researchers. For example, a teacher in a regional area may want to undertake an action research project within their school. The school is in a small community where most members of the community are of the same race or ethnicity, white Australian. Therefore, the teacher's race status is not prominent in this situation. However, the teacher's status as a paid employee at the school site that they want to research in is a strong consideration. As is their status of living in a small community where many students and staff interact socially with the teacher outside of their role.

In the fictitious example above and many real-life examples of Western qualitative researchers, insider/outsider positioning of researcher-participant relationships are often a consideration. Through the ethics process and conceptual design process, Western researchers have a wealth of discipline specific literature to consider how to recognise where there may be potential issues and how to address this in the research design and negotiation with participants. For Indigenous researchers, the core divergence of how these issues emerge is centred on ontological, axiological

and epistemic differences. Although Indigenous researchers like myself are researching in a Western, institutionalised context, this does not mean that I relinquish my cultural and social obligations as an Aboriginal person. Below I will attempt to outline some of the core issues that emerged during my reflections of using yarning methodology and thus relationality within this context from my Aboriginal perspective.

In the introduction to this section, I discussed notion of relationality in how Aboriginal peoples introduce ourselves. This protocol is not only a core part *being* Aboriginal, it is also an important cultural protocol so that other Aboriginal peoples are able to place you and how you are related (to country and kin, place and space) (Martin, 2012). Indigenous researchers undertaking education research in institutionalised contexts will need to be able to engage this protocol, irrespective of the time constraints that exist in institutionalised settings such as schools. For Aboriginal researchers, research takes place within the context of our Aboriginality and the values embedded within our epistemologies (Bullen, 2004). However, allowing connections to be made through discussing your family and community connections takes time. Building this time into the research design for Indigenous researchers is crucial if we are to truly bring Indigenous ways of doing and being into education research. This can be a challenge for Indigenous higher degree research students and early career researchers if they have supervisors who don't understand the significance of these protocols (Laycock, Walker, Harrison, & Brands, 2011). Furthermore, the increasing pressure from universities to have research degree students complete their studies within strict timeframes performs in a sense epistemic exclusion and dismisses Indigenous knowledges that are often espoused in Indigenous education statements and other formal university documents. My reflections have allowed me the space to consider the very real and practical barriers that Indigenous researchers face and the importance of constructing a scholarly argument for why Indigenous researchers sometimes have a different set of issues to consider to non-Indigenous researchers.

Relationality and connections that often morph outside of the professional, or research-participant relationship, can sometimes mean that Indigenous researchers can hold an "ambiguous status as both insider and outsider" (Bullen, 2004, p. 10). Consequently, the demands of being a researcher when it meets our own lived realities

as Indigenous peoples can be somewhat challenging (Bullen, 2004). Yunkaporta and McGinty (2009) outlined the tensions that can arise when Indigenous researchers undertake research in communities outside of our own. Yunkaporta and McGinty further identified that the ethical tensions in their study were located at the intersections of non-local Indigenous researcher, local Indigenous community and academic perspectives. This resulted in issues such as delays and ambiguity of insider/outsider status, leaving the researcher to develop praxis on the ground. As highlighted in my reflection, I was not necessarily in the position in this research project, but it did occur to me upon reflection that there is always a possibility that I may come across another Indigenous person who might have had conflict with my family or someone I am connected to in community (or possibly me). I was also hyperaware of other important cultural considerations such as gender and age when engaging in yarning as a research method.

Indigenous Australians are a minority, comprising of approximately 3% of the population nationally (ABS, 2013). We are a small community and can often make connections, even when we are far from our home communities. Primarily, I believe this one of the greatest strengths that Indigenous peoples bring to the academy and to an emerging Indigenous research agenda. Our lived experiences and connections mean that we have direct and lived understandings of educational (and broader) issues that impact on our peoples every day. Moreover, Tuhiwai Smith (2005) argues that Indigenous research presents "new and different ways to think through the purpose, practices and outcomes of schooling systems" (p. 94). However, with these advantages and opportunities comes potential for issues to arise.

Issues such as having participants who might be your relations or kin, having more senior family and community of participants and the researcher within the one group and historical conflicts within family groups are just some of the issues that may come up when bringing a group of Indigenous peoples together. Managing conflict or issues is not something that is covered in research training as it is not usually such an issue for Western researchers. Therefore, Indigenous researchers are often left to figure out how to manage these types of situations as they occur in the best way that they can. Furthermore, the consequence of such conflict arising in a research space can often transcend professional boundaries for Indigenous researchers. Put simply, if we make a mistake or offend; if we undertake work that is not seen by our respective community

as contributing to the betterment of our whole community as opposed to ourselves as individuals; if we don't do a good job or if we don't interact in a way that the community or group view as culturally safe and respectful, there can be very personal consequences for Indigenous researchers. By personal consequences, I am not referring to personal financial loss or a stain on my professional reputation. When an Indigenous person identifies and represents themselves as Indigenous, we identify our families and communities when we do so. Therefore, the consequences of our personal and professional actions reflect and implicate our families and communities. The reality of being a minority and utilising specific and unique knowledges that we have in a research space means that the body of methodological literature is yet to fully explore in depth unique issues such as this.

In sum, I have discussed relationality as one of the core strengths that Indigenous researchers bring to the space of knowledge production. I reflected on relationality and what that meant for this project and considerations I need to continue to think about in my future work as a researcher. I identified issues such as the limitations of insider/outsider binaries that are applied in the literature when Indigenous researchers consider their positionality in the context of being researcher. I also identified what I consider core issues of boundaries and how they transcend for Indigenous researchers, which for cultural epistemic and ontological reasons, differ from the experiences of Western researchers. In the following section, I will discuss further how these issues are implicated with collection data in using Indigenous methodologies such as yarning.

5.2.6 COLLECTING YARNING DATA

Yarning as a methodology is emerging in research literature. The scholarship that is available provides a solid foundation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers to consider the importance and significance of yarning as a way of sharing information with Indigenous peoples within the context of research (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010; Fredericks et al., 2011; Geia, Hayes, & Usher, 2013). However, one gap that emerged upon engaging with this scholarship was critical discussion about how to collect yarning data.

Some authors do not mention specifically how yarning data is recorded (Dean, 2010; Fredericks et al., 2011; Geia et al., 2013). However, Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) explain that the yarns with research participants were voice recorded in their practice examples. One author explained that they felt they needed to find an appropriate time during social yarning initially to introduce the voice recorded to participants (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). It was reported that two participants refused when the researcher made the request to record the yarns.

Indigenous scholarship about yarning and how data is collected through yarning as a methodology appears to be synonymous with the broader research literature on interviews and focus groups. There is an overwhelming number of qualitative researchers who view story or reported experiences from participants via interviews as the most effective way of understanding a research problem and generating quality data (Oliver, 2010; Silverman, 2006). Although within this scholarship, the method of audio or video recording interviews or focus groups has been critiqued by some scholars as presenting issues that researchers need to consider when conducting interviews (Al-Yateem, 2012; Oliver, 2010).

In a similar way to the broader literature on interviewing participants, the yarning literature espouses to elicit the same quality of knowledge but with Indigenous participants, in a culturally safe way (Fredericks et al., 2011). However, through recording Indigenous participants and using yarning as a way to draw information, story and knowledge to solve research questions, I believe there needs to be much more advanced discussions in yarning scholarship about the ethical implications of this. Moreover, the questions and critical discussion that has emerged from recording interview data can assist in thinking through similar issues when considering the most effective way to collect yarning data.

One of the most prevalent issues discussed in interviewing methodology scholarship is the paradigmatic debate between constructivism and positivism (Speer & Hutchby, 2003). Positivist researchers caution using interviews as a method for researching human experience as they argue that the construction of story loses the objectivity of human behaviour and interaction (Speer & Hutchby, 2003). Conversely, Punch (2009) explains that the use of interviews in qualitative research is considered to be an effective way of "accessing people's perceptions, meanings, definitions or situations and constructions of reality" (p. 144). Thus, advocating a constructivist

position of understanding human experiences. Silverman (2007, 2013) argues that although researchers who identify with constructivist paradigms champion the interview method as providing voice and space for participants to tell their own story as the most authentic way creating knowledge about issues and groups, their justification for using interviews is somewhat contradictory as it is over-reliant on positivist notions of validity and truth. The persistence and over-reliance on interview data as a way of understanding human experience is further critiqued by Silverman (2006), who argues that all interview data is socially embedded therefore is unable to be locked into a positivist reality of objectivity and validity that so many qualitative researchers continue to believe that interview data produces. Irrespective of a researcher's position of positivist or constructivist, the most common method of collecting interview data is through audio or video recording (Punch, 2009; Speer & Hutchby, 2003).

The arguments for audio or video recording include capturing the entirety of the interview or reported experience or story from participants (Punch, 2009; Speer & Hutchby, 2003). Regardless of whether the interview is structured or unstructured, audio or video recording captures all discussion, including when participants meander off topic or disclose other information that may or may not be relevant to the research topic. Furthermore, Cohen et al. (2007) explains that the transcribed audio data generated from an interview then becomes the most crucial aspect of undertaking interview research. However, although audio and video recording is espoused as being the dominant form of collecting data from interviews, substantial discussion in the literature describes the cautions and issues that can arise from audio and video recording interviews with research participants.

Audio or video recording interview participants introduces a dynamic in the interaction that some authors caution can censor or inhibit a participant's ability to be honest or authentic in their responses (Al-Yateem, 2012; Speer & Hutchby, 2003). Furthermore, Oliver (2010) explains that the introduction of a recording device to an interview situation can cause intimidation to research participants. Other cautions outlined in the literature include censoring of responses by participants (Speer & Hutchby, 2003) and losing important contextual information, thus losing important aspects of the social interaction (Cohen et al., 2007). When considering the benefits and cautions outlined in the research literature on recording interview data, there are

considerable aspects of the discussion that are relevant to considering whether audio or video recording Indigenous participants who are participating in yarning as a methodology in the context of research. There are also additional layers due to the historical impact of colonisation and objectivist research that Indigenous peoples have been subject to (or subjects of).

One of the key benefits outlined in much of the interview research literature is the ability to capture all spoken words in an interview with research participants through video or audio recording. Audio (predominantly) and video recording, is advocated to the degree that when some methodology texts discuss interviewing, there is no separate section on how data is collected because it is assumed that data will be audio recorded. The implied assumption of audio or video recording appears to be mirrored in the yarning methodology literature (although there is much less scholarship to draw from). However, in the context of yarning methodology and Indigenist research, I argue that there needs to be critical discussion about the perceived benefits of capturing all spoken words during data collection.

By using yarning, and culturally familiar and safe way for Indigenous participants to share their knowledge, stories and experiences, it is creating an ideal shared space through which Indigenous participants may feel relaxed, secure and safe. This may be especially so if the yarning is being facilitated by an Indigenous researcher. All of these factors I believe are beneficial given the goals outlined in the two key Indigenous research ethical guidelines in Australia developed by Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2012); National Health & Medical Research Council (2003). Principles such as respect and cultural safety underpin the future of Indigenous research. Yet, the critical issue of ethical considerations in relation to audio or video recording Indigenous people in the research space is yet to be mentioned in the literature.

In using yarning in my project, the yarns included a range of topics that may have appeared off the course of the research question, but were in effect reflective of how Indigenous people express story ontologically. Had I used voice recording, I would have captured the accompanying story for each response; the sharing of experience related to our social connections; the many jokes and laughs we shared in between discussing the research questions and the topics that participants told me they feared discussing. I wholeheartedly agree with Dean (2010) and her assertion that

yarning does allow Indigenous people to exert significant control over the research process. However, if the data is to be audio or voice recorded, I believe that compromises the authority of participants to choose what they want recorded as part of the research.

One of the core principles of the Guideline for Ethical Research in Indigenous Australian Studies (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012) is self-determination. Although participants provide informed consent, I propose that if a researcher is using yarning methodology and audio or voice recording participants, the principle of self-determination is significantly compromised for two reasons. The first reason is that although participants may want to contribute to the research and participate in yarning with the researcher or group, they may for good reason not want to be audio recorded. Participants being wary of being audio recorded is not a new phenomenon (Oliver, 2010). However, wariness and caution from Indigenous participants may be connected to the deeply problematic ways in which knowledge has been produced about Indigenous peoples. Indigenous research guidelines exist because of the failure to recognise cultural difference and racialised assumptions that undermined Indigenous rights and knowledges up until recently (National Health & Medical Research Council, 2003). Scientific research ideals saw many Western researchers observe, surveil and objectify Indigenous peoples (Tuhiwai Smith, 2012). Therefore, there is historically situated discomfort and mistrust that an audio recorder or video recorder may cause in an Indigenous research setting.

The second reason is the lack of control or self-determination that participants are given when their yarning is audio or video recorded. Traditional use of audio recording means that data is usually recorded and transcribed (Cohen et al., 2007). Cross checking with each participant with a full transcription would be extremely difficult, given how much detail a transcription will entail. Through using other methods of data collection, such as story-boarding used in this study, it gives more authority and self determination to participants to decide in the moment what they would like recorded. As a researcher, there were times when participants would be yarning in depth about something that would have been very useful to capture as data. However, participants would decide to leave aspect out or not record them at all. I realised upon reflecting on this aspect of data collection that the need for participants

to authentically control what was being recorded was far more authentic and important than my need to answer my research question.

Another key concern discussed in interview recording literature is the censorship that can occur when participants are being recorded. Speer and Hutchby (2003) outline that participants who know they are being recorded often censor themselves and their responses, often to present themselves in a positive light. Furthermore, this censorship can compromise the data or understanding of the problem. In the context of Indigenous research, I see censorship as self-determination in action. In this study, the censorship that occurred ensure participants were always in control of their stories, knowledge and representation. Using yarning as a methodology will never create knowledge that is pure or truth (nor will any other method). Therefore, given the history and imperialistic nature of knowledge created about Indigenous participants, censorship in Indigenous research contexts is a way of ensuring Indigenous participants are in control of what is being recorded about them.

Oliver (2010) warns that the presence of recording devices in interview settings can cause intimidation. In this project, I had feedback from several participants that they felt relieved that they were not being audio recorded. Given the historical nature of what recording devices mean in the context of Indigenous research, I believe extension on existing yarning methodology research is needed to provide researchers with feasible alternatives. Excluding participants through using audio recording devices should be a real consideration for Indigenist researchers. Using audio recording devices should not be the catalyst of whether a participant agrees to be part of a research project or not. Therefore, it is vital that Indigenist researchers consider their use of audio recording and critically reflect on why they are using it and whether it is an appropriate method in collecting yarning data.

In conclusion, the current body of yarning methodology literature does not yet fully explore how yarning data is collected. It appears that the predominate way of collecting data is by audio recording, a similar method as that used by many qualitative researchers using interviews or focus groups. Through looking at the scholarship on recording interview data, it provided an opportunity to reflect on these issues and how they might be considered in the context of Indigenous researchers using yarning methodology. In the interview recording literature, capturing all aspects of participant responses through recording devices is considered one of the main positives. However,

while using yarning is positive because it provides a culturally safe for participants; but this presents issues when participants are being audio recorded due to the limited control they have about what aspects of their yarns are recorded for research purposes. Other cautions presented in interview recording literature such as censorship, may be discussed as an issue in interview recording literature, but I propose that censorship supports self-determination in an Indigenous research context. Inclusion of recording devices is also well noted in interview recording literature as intimidating. In the context of Indigenous research, I propose that there are historically situated issues that are deeply embedded in the wariness in many Indigenous communities that may exclude participants on the basis that they simply do not want to be recorded. Some participants in this study expressed that they were happy they were not being audio recorded, which prompted the inclusion of this section of my thesis.

6. Conclusions

The aim of this study originally was to centre the voices of Indigenous staff in flexi schools to gain an understanding about their roles and experiences in this context of schooling. Aside from my small Master's study, there are no previous studies that have been undertaken that explore Indigenous engagement or experiences in this growing sector of education. I was perplexed by this as there is an abundance of literature on Indigenous engagement (and disengagement) in mainstream settings; yet, flexi schools are enrolling very high numbers of Indigenous students and employing high numbers of Indigenous staff, and there appears to be limited acknowledgement of this in the literature (Shay & Heck, 2015). Therefore, the aim of this study was to gain an understanding of the experiences and roles of Indigenous staff in this setting to consider the implications of this in the broader Indigenous education agenda, Further, in gaining this understanding my hope is that flexi schools (and Indigenous staff working in flexi schools) can be recognised as making a significant contribution to Indigenous education.

As I wrote the research design and ethics application for this project, I started questioning the efficacy of the ethics guidelines that most researchers would use if researching Indigenous people. The 'Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research' developed by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the 'Guidelines of ethical research in Australian Indigenous Studies' authored by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) are the two key documents that I was encouraged to use (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012; National Health & Medical Research Council, 2003). However, there were two significant issues I encountered, which influenced the outcome of this study. The first was that these guidelines, while being useful in considering many important principles such as respect and reciprocity, were not written for those undertaking practice orientated Indigenous focused research in education settings. Practical solutions to the barriers I would face as an Aboriginal research in attempting to use Indigenist methodologies in highly institutionalised settings like schools, were just not present in these guidelines. For instance, how do Aboriginal researchers navigate access and

entry into school sites when researching topics that may be perceived as critical? How are Aboriginal researchers able to negotiate and discuss the research with participants when educational bureaucrats and leaders mediate their potential participation?

The second, was that I felt the guidelines spoke to a mostly non-Indigenous audience. The existence of the guidelines is critical due to the profusion of unethical, objectified research which saw non-Indigenous researchers undertaking research about Indigenous peoples that was exploitative, of benefit to the researcher only and reinforcing racialized ideas of intellectual inferiority (Rigney, 2006). However, now that there is a growing Indigenous research workforce in a variety of disciplines, there is a need for more resources and literature for emerging Indigenous researcher to draw from than what currently exists.

Theoretical scholarship on Indigenous research is now well established from a range of scholars from diverse Indigenous countries (Martin, 2003, 2012; Moreton-Robinson, 2013; Moreton-Robinson & Walter, 2009; Nakata, 2007a, 2007b; Rigney, 2001, 2006). Without this body of work and those who have walked before me, my study and how it is positioned would not be possible. However, I am proposing that it is also time to expand on this work and identify gaps and barriers in this scholarship that do not provide emerging Indigenous researchers with practical guidance when doing field work with our peoples and communities.

It was through the process of thinking deeply about methodological and ethical considerations of my practices as an Aboriginal researcher that I made the decision to record the practice of doing my research as well as reporting on the data from participants. Bold (2012) proposes that some of the most insightful research is that which reports on the whole process. The inclusion of my research reflections and analysis of these is my attempt at making an additional contribution to the methodological literature for Indigenous researchers in the discipline of education.

There are three research questions that were investigated:

- 1) How do Indigenous staff describe their experiences and roles working in flexi schooling contexts?
- 2) How do Indigenous staff believe constructions of race and issues of racism impact upon their roles with respect to pedagogy, curriculum and policy?

3) What Indigenist methodologies are necessary in undertaking ethical Indigenous education research with Indigenous participants?

I argue that through listening to the experiences of Indigenous staff, it is evident that they are playing a critical role in flexi schools that may be connected to the high numbers of Indigenous young people engaged in this context of schooling. Further, Indigenous staff articulated clearly that they bring a wealth of Indigenous knowledges and their connections when they undertake roles, although these are not outlined as a requirement of their professional positions. Moreover, unlike mainstream school settings, Indigenous or Aboriginal only appeared in the job title of one staff member in this study. While I conclude that the knowledge and connections that Indigenous staff bring is indeed a strength for the schools, more accountability and consideration needs to be given as to how Indigenous staff are appointed, remunerated, called upon to use this expertise and negotiating workplace conditions.

Issues of individual and systemic racism were outlined clearly by Indigenous staff in this study. Although this is no different from what is known about racism in mainstream school settings, the cautions around this that will be outlined in my conclusion are that flexi schools espouse notions of social justice and relationships. Therefore, flexi schools must ensure they don't become complacent in addressing issues of race and racism within their school sites.

Through using documentation of my experiences undertaking the research, I used autobiographical research reflections to identify gaps in the literature for myself and other Indigenous researchers undertaking research with our people and communities. I identified several key issues including the role of gate-keeping Indigenous researchers, navigating access to Indigenous participants in institutionalised settings, the implausibility of real consultation with participants prior to the study, the strengths and limitations of using yarning as a methodology in Indigenous research and collecting yarning data.

This following section will commence by reviewing the research design and theoretical framework of this study (section 6.1). I will then present my key findings on Indigenous staff experiences and roles in flexi schools in section 6.2. In section 6.3, I will provide my conclusions from my autobiographical research reflections. Finally,

in section 6.4 I will discuss the implications of my conclusions and identify areas for future research.

6.1 RESEARCH DESIGN AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Prior to commencing this project, I had many discussions with my family and community about the tensions that I felt about becoming a researcher. The idea that researchers are then positioned as ‘expert’ was deeply uncomfortable for me. I knew earlier on that I would need to design the research project in a way that was collaborative and positioned participants as partners over being participants. My identity as an Aboriginal woman helped to shape my conceptual and design choices in this study. Indigenous theories assisted in articulating my worldview and contradictions that exist in producing knowledge in a knowledge system that is often contradictory, conflicting and dismissive of my worldview and experiences.

I also wanted to engage with race theories to assist in understanding how race is constructed and operationalised for both me as the researcher and for Indigenous staff in schools. As race is so deeply embedded in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia (Moreton-Robinson, 2009b), including how race and racism are bound in the experiences of Indigenous peoples in Australia was important to ensure a more whole understanding of how we are positioned within the academy, schools and indeed the nation.

My theoretical framework included the merging of aspects from Indigenist Research Theory (IRT) and Critical Race Theory (CRT) to include concepts from both bodies of literature. I merged principles from the work of Rigney (2001), who proposes that Indigenist research should incorporate resistance as emancipatory imperative; privileging of Indigenous voice and political integrity. These elements worked alongside principles offered by Solórzano and Yosso (2002) including challenging the dominant ideology, centrality of experiential knowledge/counter stories, commitment to social justice, centrality and intersectionalities of race and interdisciplinary perspectives. Finally, the areas of focus offered by Ladson-Billings (1998) for research using CRT required a focus on examining how curriculum, instruction, assessment and funding marginalise students of colour.

The theoretical concepts from IRT and CRT informed the research design of this project. As counter stories needed to be central to understanding Indigenous staff

roles and experiences in flexi schools, the research design of using yarning as a methodology (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Dean, 2010) and story-boards (Stuart, 2012) as a method of collecting data ensured participants were driving the research process. Participants were given handouts of research yarns in simple language and could prioritise what they wanted to record in the workshops. The workshops were designed to be an open process (within the limitations imposed by schools) whereby sub-questions and topics were outlined for discussion based on the theoretic concepts underpinning this study. Through using story-boards over audio recording, participants were also able to control what was recorded of their stories and what they did not want recorded.

There were limitations that emerged in utilising this research design. Although I designed it based on the uniqueness of this study, there were practical limitations that arose when I undertook the fieldwork component of the research. The limitations will be discussed in more depth in section 6.3. But it must be outlined here that this study at no point offers to be generalisable. Moreover, participants' ability to control what was recorded was prioritised over my needs as the researcher to have masses of data to draw conclusions from. This has meant that topics for exploration as outlined in the theoretical concepts underpinning this study such as instruction and funding (Ladson-Billings, 1998) are not reflected in the data collected. However, I argue that the research design allowed participants to have more control over the research agenda. The lack of data on some research topics outlined in the workshops could be treated as data in and of itself.

6.2 CONCLUSIONS: INDIGENOUS STAFF EXPERIENCES AND ROLES AND INDIGENIST RESEARCH REFLECTIONS

Indigenous staff in this study are undertaking complex and important roles. In this sample of nineteen Indigenous staff across eight flexi school sites in Queensland, Western Australia and Victoria, all participants described their roles as educative in some capacity regardless of whether they were employed in a non-teaching role. This study was designed to include both teaching and non-teaching staff. While participants across both were represented in this sample, the majority of participants in this study were non-teaching staff in roles including youth worker, administration, student support, family liaison, canteen coordinator, teacher's aide, principal and Indigenous

liaison/support worker. One participant was employed as a teaching staff member. I will make four conclusions in this section on Indigenous staff experiences and roles.

The first conclusion is that Indigenous staff are attracted to environmental factors in flexi schools that resulted in them wanting to work in a flexi schooling context. This can now be connected with my earlier research that found Indigenous staff are represented in strong numbers in flexi schools (Shay, 2013; Shay & Heck, 2015). The high numbers of Indigenous students, the different approaches to mainstream schools used and the community environment were all reasons that Indigenous staff in this study provided for choosing to work in a flexi school. There is a clear contradiction to the literature on Indigenous staff representation in mainstream schools. The literature outlines emphatically that Indigenous staff (teaching, leadership and non-teaching) are critically under-represented (Funnell, 2013; Lampert & Burnett, 2012; McKenzie et al., 2011; Reid et al., 2009). Therefore, there is a clear contradiction that exists centred around (micro and macro) environmental factors of the school settings and why Indigenous staff appear to be choosing to undertake professional roles in a flexi school setting over a mainstream school setting.

Through listening to the voices and experiences of Indigenous staff, the second conclusion is that Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing are operationalised in all roles, irrespective of job titles. The centrality of relationships was described very clearly as a core aspect of the work Indigenous staff undertake in flexi schools, through family connections, community relationships, relationships with non-Indigenous colleagues and relationships with Indigenous and non-Indigenous young people. Indigenous participants in this study recognised that relationships for them are not in isolation and were consistent with principles outlined by Martin (2003) in that relationality is bound with how Indigenous people know; thus, the knowing comes from connections with country, kin and community. This rich knowledge and connectivity that Indigenous staff bring to their roles in flexi schools, especially considering the high numbers of Indigenous young people enrolled in this schooling context, must be valued in practical ways to ensure Indigenous staff are being supported and valued for the unique knowledges and skills that they bring to their professional roles.

The third conclusion is that issues of race and racism are present in flexi schools. Although some participants spoke positively about their experiences and

relationships with non-Indigenous colleagues in the school, participants provided many examples of direct and indirect, individual and systemic racism. The issue of complacency around addressing issues impacting on Indigenous staff such as racism is an important problem to raise due to the body of literature on flexi schools espousing their commitment to social justice, relationships, creating a community and being more student centred (Mills & McGregor, 2010; Morgan et al., 2015; K. Wilson et al., 2011). Race and issues of racism are often overlooked in education settings (Aveling, 2007). In a setting that is engaging high numbers of Indigenous students and staff (Shay, 2013; Shay & Heck, 2015), flexi schools have a responsibility to listen to the voices of Indigenous staff in this study.

The fourth conclusion is that Indigenous staff in this study observed an over-reliance on cultural activities and celebrations over embedding Indigenous knowledges in curriculum and classroom learning in flexi schools. Although participants in this study are predominantly non-teaching staff, they were often across issues involving Indigenous education in the school setting. Indigenous staff in this study recognised that Indigenous knowledges and perspectives are primarily left to event and celebrations, identifying a need for more embedding in classrooms and curriculum. The cautions with over-reliance on cultural celebrations and activities are that culture then becomes somewhat tokenistic and is linked to the CRT literature that outlines the covert forms of racism that can manifest as a result (Blackmore, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 2006). Indigenous staff identified this gap and outlined clearly that embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into curriculum into classrooms is something that needs to improve at their school sites.

6.3 CONCLUSIONS: DOING INDIGENIST RESEARCH IN EDUCATION SETTINGS

When I commenced my PhD, I was somewhat resistant to being labelled an ‘education researcher’ as I also had a discipline background of Indigenous Studies via a Bachelor’s degree and practice experience within the community services and education sectors. I realise the limitations that I impose on myself if I need to label the type of research I am doing and the type of researcher I am. However, it was not until an encounter with a senior Indigenous academic that I felt the need to articulate my discipline and focus on a research design that would ‘traditionally’ fit that discipline. During this encounter, I was questioned about whether I should instead take up a role

of advocacy rather than research as well as being told I am a ‘social researcher in an education context’. I am grateful for this encounter because it prompted me to think more specifically about the role of discipline specific literature and to consider whether if one is Indigenous, does this mean we can research anything Indigenous across any discipline? After much contemplation, I made the decision to label my research as Indigenist education research. I have merged my discipline and practitioner knowledges to incorporate the experiences that underpins the authenticity that I can claim within the education discipline. However, when searching the literature for Indigenist research theories and methodologies within education settings, I found that there was a gap and that there was an opportunity to document my experiences and write about them.

Using autoethnography as a reflective process to analyse my experiences as an Aboriginal education researcher was helpful in making several conclusions. As research historically has objectified and applied pseudo-scientific analyses of our people (Rigney, 2001), I was committed to doing research differently and in a way that honours my protocols and responsibilities as an Aboriginal person. Undertaking Indigenist research in the discipline of education was difficult because of the institutionalised context within which the discipline is situated. I felt compelled to document my experiences to identify gaps and draw conclusions of how the theoretical and methodological needs to further expand to address the very practical implications for Indigenist researchers undertaking research in the discipline of education. In this section, I will make three conclusions that I believe required further development to make more literature available for future Indigenist education researchers.

The first conclusion is that the two key research ethical guidelines (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012; National Health & Medical Research Council, 2003) that currently guide researchers doing research with Indigenous peoples are written for a broad audience thus do not cater for the specific issues and tensions that arise for Indigenous researchers. Moreover, one guideline was developed for health research and the other for transdisciplinary Indigenous Studies. These documents do not incorporate specific principles that consider the institutionalised structures of schools nor the issues that Indigenous researchers face in trying to undertake school based research.

There have been considerable efforts in the past decade to increase the number and support of Indigenous higher degree research (HDR) students, with the hope of growing the Indigenous research workforce (Australian Government, 2012). Furthermore, addressing issues such as appropriate supervision options for Indigenous students has been recognised as pivotal in addressing the critically low numbers of Indigenous HDR students and research workforce (Trudgett, 2011). Creating more literature and ethical frameworks that address concerns that Indigenous HDR students and researchers face is another critical component growing the numbers of Indigenous scholars.

The second conclusion is that gate-keeping of Indigenist education research requires critical discussion at a national level to consider the deeper implications of how research projects are approved or denied. Schools and education authorities are effectively gate-keepers of Indigenous education knowledge production; impacting on how Indigenous education issues are perceived, conceptualised and addressed in policy and practice. Educators and leaders have expressed their fear and lack of understanding in relation to Indigenous education (Ma Rhea, 2013). Therefore, serious questions must then be asked about how those who have a superficial or limited understanding about Indigenous education, peoples, cultures and communities could then make a sound decision about what research should be undertaken and what should be blocked. The gate-keeper is able to classify and define the ‘conditions of entry’ to Indigenous researchers (Murgatroyd et al., 2015); this is problematic due to how Indigenous people continue to be socially constructed. Moreover, it again disempowers Indigenous people from the decision-making process of whether the research might benefit them or whether they would like to participate in the study. It makes consulting with potential participants impossible and therefore contradicts the principles offered in ethics documents such as AIATSIS and NHMRC that identify consultation as being critical to ethical Indigenous research.

The third conclusion is that yarning as an Indigenist methodology requires further development to consider issues such as how data is collected. In section 5.2.4, I argued strongly that using yarning as a methodology is possible in education settings; however, the yarning literature currently does not offer alternatives to audio recording yarns to capture and later transcribe the data. The pervasive reliance on audio recording correlates with the literature on interviews and focus groups (Punch, 2009; Speer &

Hutchby, 2003). I critiqued the use of audio recording when using yarning methodology as I believe core principles of ethical Indigenous research (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012) (regardless of whether it is an Indigenous or non-Indigenous researcher) such as self-determination and cultural are significantly compromised.

Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) and Dean (2010) explain the axiological and ontological significance of using yarning with Indigenous participants in research, outlining that using yarning creates a culturally safe space and allows participants to use a way of communicating that is familiar and comfortable. However, I argue that researchers using yarning as a methodology need to consider alternatives to audio recording, such as using story-boards, for two reasons. The first is that through using yarning, participants may be lured into a false sense of comfort and forget they are being recorded. Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) distinguish that a feature of yarning is often circuitous in nature and therefore participants will often discuss a range of things that may be considered outside of the research topic. If the yarns are then recorded, I raise concerns about how ethical it is to use yarning as a form of connecting and making participants feel culturally safe and comfortable whilst at the same time audio recording all aspects of the yarns. The benefits of using yarning as a methodological framework and using story-boards as a method for collecting data because clear as participants were not only active contributors to the research process, they were analysing and moderating what data was collected during the data collection phase. The principle of self-determination was evident as participants were driving the research process.

The second issue I raised was whether the use of audio recording consequently excludes some Indigenous people from participating in the research. Participants in this study were emphatic about how relieved they were that they weren't being audio recorded. Moreover, due to being observed, judged and researched to the place of being labelled the most researched group on the planet, Indigenous people are likely to be wary of methods that reinforce western methods that are perceived as objectification, such as audio recording. Participant wariness in relation to audio-recording is well documented in western literature (Oliver, 2010). The impact of producing a voice recorded in research the involves Indigenous participants,

particularly in using an Indigenous methodology such as yarning, is something that requires further investigation.

6.4 IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This section will discuss the implications of this study to the flexi schooling sector and Indigenous education more broadly. The implications will consider policy and practice in Indigenous education, flexi schools and Indigenist research practices. Recommendations for future research will also form part of the discussion in this section.

The most prevalent way of the Australian Government measuring Indigenous education outcomes is through the reporting of ‘close the gap’ targets in a publication each year by the Prime Minister (Australian Government, 2016). The focus of these targets is on school attendance, literacy and numeracy outcomes and school completion rates. The reporting emphasises the context of mainstream schooling and thus measurability is centred around engagement with this form of schooling. However, there is now evidence to support that high number of Indigenous young people are engaging in flexi schooling contexts, as outlined in section 4.1. A major implication of this study generally is that flexi schools in the broader Indigenous education policy and literature appear to be overlooked. Yet, they are playing a significant role in facilitating educational re-engagement of Indigenous young people who may have been disenfranchised from mainstream schooling options (Shay & Heck, 2015).

Flexi schools are education spaces that Indigenous people are choosing to work in. Indigenous staff in this study outlined a range of environment factors contributing to their choice to work in this context that are connected with the literature on flexi schools of an emphasis on relationships (Lohmann, 2009; McGregor & Mills, 2012; Mills & McGregor, 2010; Morgan et al., 2015; Shay, 2016), sense of community (McKeown, 2011; Mills & McGregor, 2010; K. Wilson et al., 2011) and empowerment of young people (Baroutsis et al., 2016; McGregor & Mills, 2012; Mills & McGregor, 2010, 2016; Richardson & Griffin, 1994; Shay, 2016). The implications of this conclusion are that there is a contradiction in the literature on Indigenous staff numbers (teaching, non-teaching and leadership) in mainstream school settings (Funnell, 2013; McKenzie et al., 2011). There are opportunities for mainstream schools to consider the

environmental aspects of their schooling context and explore whether more of an emphasis on relationships, creating a sense of community and empowerment of young people are replicable or transferable to mainstream schooling contexts. Looking at what appears to attract Indigenous staff as opposed to what excludes Indigenous people from mainstream settings may be useful in contributing to the broader Indigenous education agenda of closing the educational gap.

The embeddedness of Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing in how Indigenous staff articulated their experiences in undertaking various roles in flexi schools in this study. Bringing these relationships and indeed a multitude of sophisticated Indigenous knowledges to flexi schools is what I concluded as being of great benefit to the schools. The implication of the benefit of the relationships and knowledges that Indigenous staff bring to flexi schools is that Indigenous staff then become at risk of being exploited, burnt out and not properly recognised for the additional knowledges and skills they bring to their professional work roles. As flexi schools are playing an important role in Indigenous education and Indigenous staff are making a significant contribution to this role, flexi schools must then consider how they are supporting Indigenous staff.

The mainstream literature on Indigenous people undertaking non-teaching educative roles assists in identifying where improvements can be made in better supporting the existing workforce and growing it for the future (Andersen et al., 2015; Buckskin et al., 1994; Gower et al., 2011). As there are no previous studies that explore the roles of Indigenous staff in flexi schooling contexts, this study provides evidence of the need for similar considerations to be made for the Indigenous workforce in flexi schools. I therefore recommend that issues such as: access to relevant professional development, valuing of connections and Indigenous knowledges through remuneration and negotiated work conditions and ensuring the schools providing a culturally safe work environment through systemic approaches should be prioritised as a matter of urgency in flexi schools. The high numbers of Indigenous enrolments provide further impetus for the prioritisation of these issues.

Indigenous staff in this study identified clearly that there are issues of direct, indirect, individual and systemic racism present in flexi schooling contexts. The implication of this is that as flexi schools espouse strong messages of social justice, care and support (McGregor et al., 2014; Mills & McGregor, 2016; Morgan et al.,

2014), there may be a false sense of the absence of such issues within this context. As flexi schools are engaging high numbers of Indigenous students and staff (Shay, 2013; Shay & Heck, 2015), it is critical that flexi schools engage with anti-racism policies and practices at every school site. As this research incorporated exploration of issues of race and racism as component of the study, I also recommend that flexi schools consider engaging with systemic tools that examine the impact of racism and specify areas of priority where issues of racism need to be addressed.

The pervasive practice of cultural celebrations and activities in relation to Indigenous cultures surfaced strongly in this study. Indigenous staff identified that although cultural celebrations and activities are positive, the absence of Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in curriculum and classroom presence was a concern. As embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives is now a cross-curriculum priority area within the national curriculum (ACARA, 2014), flexi schools should also be ensuring embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in curriculum and classrooms is prioritised. It is unknown whether flexi school models that participated in this study use the national curriculum. As the schools described themselves as changing educational provision to meet the needs of young people, it would be understandable if they were not using the one-size-fits-all approach that the national curriculum currently adopts. However, it was clear that there are high numbers of Indigenous students enrolled in the schools (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2016). Although I would never advocate that embedding Indigenous knowledges and perspectives into the curriculum just benefits Indigenous students, I do propose that the practice of embedding should be an urgent priority as 43.5% of students enrolled in the eight schools that participated in this study are Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander students.

Through my use of autobiographical research reflections, I was able to analyse my experiences to conclude that the two key ethical documents (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, 2012; National Health & Medical Research Council, 2003) for researcher undertaking studies focused on Indigenous peoples do not adequately address issues that can arise for Indigenous researchers. There are no specific guidelines or frameworks that exist for Indigenous researchers who want to undertake education discipline specific research. This is problematic because of the institutionalised nature of schools and the barriers that exist for

Indigenous researchers who want to apply Indigenist approaches. I assume resources specifically for Indigenous education researchers don't currently exist due to how under-represented we are in both academia and the research workforce (Australian Government, 2012). Moreover, finding a space to publish papers and resources would be difficult as the audience for such scholarship would be relatively low. However, I argue that if numbers are to grow, growing the scholarship and resources available to Indigenous researchers that fully explore that practical realities of undertaking research within our communities or with our people is vital in growing the Indigenous research workforce.

Gate-keeping of Indigenous research surfaced as being a significant issue. Gate-keeping Indigenous research is problematic as it re-produces cultural hegemony in how knowledge *about us* is constructed. Harrison (2007) identified that despite a plethora of studies about Indigenous 'disadvantage' in education, little progression was made in understanding the issues. Indigenous researchers play a critical role in conceptualising research problems that are based on our lived experiences as Indigenous people (Trudgett, 2011). Therefore, a national discussion is required about the role Indigenous education researchers can have in addressing educational problems that affect us. How research is negotiated and access is granted requires a different approach to standard education researchers. The system and actors for the system that gate-keep research is likely to serving the interests of the dominant culture. Research that critiques the system is therefore likely to be blocked or met with resistance. Thus, it is critical to consider alternative models to fairly assess research projects undertaken by Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander researchers.

Using yarning as a methodology was an important element of the research design in this project. The decision not to audio record yarning data resulted in limited data for me as the researcher to analyse. However, my resistance to recording yarns led to some deep reflection and analysis of the contradictions that audio-recording yarning had for me in applying principles such as cultural safety and self-determination. Yarning was a highly effective way of engaging in research discussions with Indigenous staff in this study. However, participants were clear that they were relieved not being audio-recorded. Development of yarning methodology I advocate must extend beyond relying on traditional methods used to capture data mainly in interview and focus group research (Punch, 2009). In this study, I used story-boards

(Stuart, 2012) to capture aspects of the yarns with participants. The story-board method appeared to work well within the context of this study and provides researchers a viable alternative to audio-recording whilst utilising Aboriginal methodologies such as yarning.

This study presents the experiences of Indigenous staff and provides some understanding of the roles Indigenous staff are undertaking in flexi schools. Further, through using autobiographical research reflections, I could offer insights about the process of undertaking the study using a non-traditional research design. The implications of the conclusion outlined above outline gaps in the literature for future research:

- The high number of Indigenous students enrolled in this sample of flexi schools provides evidence of an urgent national scan of enrolment data to identify the full extent of Indigenous engagement within flexi schools
- Further research exploring the connection between high enrolment numbers and the environment and approaches used in flexi schools may be of national significance to the Indigenous education agenda of improving educational outcomes
- A study that focuses on the experiences of Indigenous students within the flexi school context would be valuable in understanding the phenomenon of high enrolments numbers to consider the role of systemic exclusion from mainstream schools
- Further investigation of the impact of racism on Indigenous students both in mainstream and flexi school settings
- A study that explores the experiences of Indigenous education researchers and their experiences in accessing school sites and Indigenous participants within schools to contribute to developing scholarship and resources to grow the Indigenous education research workforce
- Exploring alternative ways of collecting data when using yarning as a methodology

Bibliography

- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. (2000). *Social Justice Report*. Retrieved from NSW:
- ABS. (2011). Population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders, 30 June 2011. <http://www.oesr.qld.gov.au/products/briefs/pop-atsi-qld-2011/pop-atsi-qld-2011.pdf>: Queensland Treasury and Trade.
- ABS. (2013). Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/3238.0.55.001>
- ABS. (2016). Schools Australia. Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4221.0>
- ACARA. (2014). Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority. Retrieved from <http://www.acara.edu.au/default.asp>
- ACARA. (2015). Australian Curriculum. Retrieved from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>
- AITSL. (2013). Australian Professional Standards for Teachers. Retrieved from <http://www.aitsl.edu.au/australian-professional-standards-for-teachers/standards/list>
- Al-Yateem, N. (2012). The effect of interview recording on quality of data obtained: A methodological reflection. *Nurse Researcher*, 19(4), 31-35.
- Andersen, C., Gower, L., & O'Dowd, M. (2015). *Aboriginal education workers in Tasmania becoming teachers*. Retrieved from <http://matsiti.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/UTAS-MATSITI-AEW-Report-July-2015.pdf>:
- Armstrong, S., & Buckley, S. (2011). *An investigation into the attendance and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students : research and theory about what works*. Paper presented at the Research conference 2011 : Indigenous education : pathways to success : conference proceedings. retrieved October 2013 from http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1120&context=research_conference
- Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority. (2016). My School. Retrieved from <https://www.myschool.edu.au/>
- Australian Education Union. (2014). I Give a Gonski. Retrieved from http://www.igivegonski.com.au/whats_gonski on October 10 2014
- Australian Government. (2012). Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Final Report. Retrieved from <http://docs.education.gov.au/system/files/doc/other/heaccessandoutcomesforaboriginalandtorresstraitislanderfinalreport.pdf>
- Australian Government. (2013a). *Closing the gap: Prime Minister's report 2013*. Canberra Retrieved from http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2013/00313-ctg-report_fa1.pdf.
- Australian Government. (2013b). Culture and Closing the Gap. Retrieved from http://iaha.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/000214_cultureclosinggap.pdf

- Australian Government. (2014a). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Analysis More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative* Retrieved from retrieved November 2014 from <http://matsiti.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/MATSITI-Data-Analysis-Report-2014.pdf>:
- Australian Government. (2014b). *Closing the Gap Prime Ministers Report 2014*. Retrieved from http://www.dpmc.gov.au/publications/docs/closing_the_gap_2014.pdf.
- Australian Government. (2015). *Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2015*. Retrieved from https://www.dpmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/Closing_the_Gap_2015_Report.pdf
- Australian Government. (2016). *Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2016*. Retrieved from closingthegap.dpmc.gov.au/assets/pdfs/closing_the_gap_report_2016.pdf
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. (2012). *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies*: retrieved January 6 2015 from <http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/files/research/GERAIS.pdf>.
- Aveling, N. (2002). Student Teachers' Resistance to Exploring Racism: Reflections on 'doing' border pedagogy. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Teacher Education*, 30(2), 119-130. doi:10.1080/13598660220135630
- Aveling, N. (2006). 'Hacking at our very roots': rearticulating White racial identity within the context of teacher education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 9(3), 261-274. doi:10.1080/13613320600807576
- Aveling, N. (2007). Anti-racism in Schools: A question of leadership? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 28(1), 69-85. doi:10.1080/01596300601073630
- Aveling, N. (2013). 'Don't talk about what you don't know': On (not) conducting research with/in Indigenous contexts. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(2), 203-214. doi:10.1080/17508487.2012.724021
- Barley, S. R., & Tolbert, P. S. (1997). Institutionalization and Structuration: Studying the Links between Action and Institution. *Organization Studies*, 18(1), 93-117. doi:10.1177/017084069701800106
- Baroutsis, A., Mills, M., McGregor, G., Riele, K., & Hayes, D. (2016). Student voice and the community forum: finding ways of 'being heard' at an alternative school for disenfranchised young people. *British Educational Research Journal*, 42(3), 438-453. doi:10.1002/berj.3214
- Behrendt, L., Cunneen, C., & Libesman, T. (2009). *Indigenous legal relations in Australia*. South Melbourne, Vic: Oxford University Press.
- Bell, D. (1987). *And We Will Not Be Saved: The Elusive Quest For Social Justice* New York: Basic Books.
- Berg, G. (2007). From structural dilemmas to institutional imperatives: a descriptive theory of the school as an institution and of school organizations. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 39(5), 577-596. doi:10.1080/00220270600880994
- Bessarab, D., & Ng'andu, B. (2010). Yarning about Yarning as a Legitimate Method in Indigenous Research. *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies*, 3(1), 37-50.
- Bhopal, K., & Preston, J. (2012). *Intersectionality and "Race" in Education*. New York: Routledge.
- Blackley, G. (2012). The necessity for individual responsibility to improve Indigenous education *Professional Learning Sabbaticals*.

http://www.sabbaticals.aitsl.edu.au/sites/www.sabbaticals.aitsl.edu.au/files/fild/final/graham_blackley_professional_learning_sabbatical_report.pdf:

AITSL.

- Blackmore, J. (2010). 'The Other Within': race/gender disruptions to the professional learning of white educational leaders. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 13(1), 45-61. doi:10.1080/13603120903242931
- Blake, T. (1998). Deported ... at the Sweet Will of the Government: The Removal of Aborigines to Reserves in Queensland 1897-1939. *Aboriginal History*, 22, [51]-61.
- Bodkin-Andrews, G., & Carlson, B. (2014). The legacy of racism and Indigenous Australian identity within education. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 1-24. doi:10.1080/13613324.2014.969224
- Bodkin-Andrews, G., Dillon, A., & Craven, R. (2010). Bangawarra'gumada-- Strengthening the Spirit: Causal Modelling of Academic Self-Concept and Patterns of Disengagement for Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australian Students. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, v39, p24-39.
- Bold, C. (2012). *Using Narrative in Research. Using Narrative in Research*. London: SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Bonilla-Silva, E. (1997). Rethinking Racism: Toward a Structural Interpretation. *American Sociological Review*, 62(3), 465-480. doi:10.2307/2657316
- Books, S. (1999). School Funding: Justice v. Equity. *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 32(3), 53-58. doi:10.1080/1066568990320306
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101. doi:10.1191/1478088706qp063oa
- Bresler, L. (2006). Embodied Narrative Inquiry: A Methodology of Connection. *Research Studies in Music Education*, 27(1), 21-43. doi:10.1177/1321103x060270010201
- Brough, M., Bond, C., Hunt, J., Jenkins, D., Shannon, C., & Schubert, L. (2006). Social capital meets identity: Aboriginality in an urban setting. *Journal of Sociology*, 42(4), 396-411. doi:10.1177/1440783306069996
- Buckskin, P. (2012). Engaging Indigenous students: the important relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their teachers. In K. Price (Ed.), *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education: an introduction for the teaching profession*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Buckskin, P., Davis, C., & Hignett, B. (1994). *Ara kuwaritjakutu project: towards a new way stages 1 & 2 : a research project into the working conditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education workers, report February 1994*. Canberra: Dept of Employment Education and Training.
- Bull, J. R. (2010). Research with Aboriginal Peoples: Authentic Relationships as a Precursor to Ethical Research. *Journal of Empirical Research on Human Research Ethics: An International Journal*, 5(4), 13-22. doi:10.1525/jer.2010.5.4.13
- Bullen, C. (2004). 'Doing' Indigenous Research: Reflections, Questions, and Challenges. *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal*, 28(2), 9-10.
- Burton, J. (2012). Opening Doors Through Partnerships *Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Childcare*.
<http://www.snaicc.org.au/uploads/rsfil/02804.pdf>.

- Cain, P., Domenico, T., Yi-Ping, T†. (2012). Second Chance at Education for Early School Leavers. *Melbourne Institute Working Paper No. 14/12*. Retrieved from <http://www.melbourneinstitute.com>
- Calmore, J. (1995). Critical Race Theory, Archie Shepp, and Fire Music: Securing an Authentic Intellectual Life in a Multicultural World. In K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller, & K. Thomas (Eds.), *CRITICAL RACE THEORY THE KEY WRITINGS THAT FORMED THE MOVEMENT* (pp. 315-327). New York: New York Press.
- Carlson, B. (2011). *The politics of identity: who counts as aboriginal today?* (PhD), UNSW, retrieved November 6 2014 from http://www.unsworks.unsw.edu.au/primo_library/libweb/action/dlDisplay.do?vid=UNSWORKS&docId=unsworks_10196.
- Cedric, D., Cassidy, D., Barber, U., Page, M., & Callinan, S. (2014). Cultural competence. *Educating Young Children*, 20(1), 11-13.
- Chang, S., & Kleiner, B. (2003). Common Racial Stereotypes. *Equal Opportunities International*, 22(3), 1-9. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/02610150310787388>
- Chong-Soon Lee, J. (1995). Navigating the Typology of Race. In K. Crenshaw, N. Gotanda, G. Peller, & K. Thomas (Eds.), *CRITICAL RACE THEORY THE KEY WRITINGS THAT FORMED THE MOVEMENT* (pp. 441-448). New York: The New Press.
- Clandinin, D. J. (2007). *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*. *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology*. SAGE Publications, Inc. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Clandinin, D. J., Pushor, D., & Orr, A. M. (2007). Navigating Sites for Narrative Inquiry. *Journal of Teacher Education*, 58(1), 21-35. doi:10.1177/0022487106296218
- COAG. (2009). *National partnership agreement on youth attainment and transitions*. Retrieved from Canberra:
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research Methods in Education* (6 ed.). USA and Canada: Routledge.
- Crenshaw, K. (1988). Race, Reform, and Retrenchment: Transformation and Legitimation in Antidiscrimination Law. *Harvard Law Review*, 101(7), 1331-1387. doi:10.2307/1341398
- Crenshaw, K., Gotanda, N., Peller, G., & Thomas, K. (1995). *CRITICAL RACE THEORY KEY WRITINGS THAT FORMED THE MOVEMENT*. New York: The New Press.
- Crotty, M. (1998). *The Foundations of Social Research*. French's Forest, NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Cunneen, C. (2001). *Aboriginal Communities and the Police*. Crows Nest NSW: Allen & Unwin.
- Curthoys, A. (1999). An Uneasy Conversation: multicultural and indigenous discourses. In G. Hage & R. Couch (Eds.), *The Future of Australian Multiculturalism* (pp. 277-293). Sydney: The University of Sydney.
- Davis, R. (2004). *Woven Histories : Torres Strait Islander identity, culture and history* Retrieved from <http://QUT.ebib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=272059>
- Dean, C. (2010). A yarnning place in narrative histories. *History of Education Review*, 39(2), 6-13. doi:doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1108/08198691201000005>
- Deed, C. G. (2008). Bending the school rules to re-engage students: implications for improving teaching practice. *Improving Schools*, 11(3), 205-212. doi:10.1177/1365480208097001

- Delgado, R. (1989). Storytelling for Oppositionists and Others: A Plea for Narrative. *Michigan Law Review*, 87(8), 2411-2441. doi:10.2307/1289308
- Delgado, R., Stefancic, J., & Liendo, E. (2012). *Critical Race Theory : An Introduction (2nd Edition)*. New York, NY, USA: New York University Press (NYU Press).
- Dixson, A. D., & Rousseau, C. K. (2005). And we are still not saved: critical race theory in education ten years later. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 7-27. doi:10.1080/1361332052000340971
- Dockett, S., Mason, T., & Perry, B. (2006). Successful Transition to School for Australian Aboriginal Children. *Childhood Education*, 82(3), 139-144.
- Donovan, V. (2008). The Administration of the 1987 Act. In Indigenous Working Group (Ed.), *The Reality of a Dark History* (pp. 127-171). Brisbane: Queensland Government.
- Dusseldorp Forum. (2014). Learning Choices Flexible and inclusive learning. Retrieved from <http://dusseldorp.org.au/priorities/alternative-learning/program-database/>
- Figueroa, P. (2012). *Education and the Social Construction of 'Race'* Retrieved from <http://QUT.ebib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=982037>
- Foley, D. (2003). Indigenous Epistemology and Indigenous Standpoint Theory. *Social Alternatives*, 22(1), 44-52.
- Ford, M. (2012). Achievement gaps in Australia: what NAPLAN reveals about education inequality in Australia. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 16(1), 80-102. doi:10.1080/13613324.2011.645570
- Fox, C. (2008). Postcolonial dilemmas in narrative research. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 38(3), 335-347. doi:10.1080/03057920802066634
- Fozdar, F., Wilding, R., Hawkins, M. (2008). *Race and Ethnic Relations*. South Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Fredericks, B., Adams, K., Finlay, S., Fletcher, G., Andy, S., Briggs, L., . . . Hall, R. (2011). Engaging the practice of Indigenous yarning in action research. *ALAR: Action Learning and Action Research Journal*, 17(2), 12-24.
- Funnell, R. (2013). Indigenous Education Workers: a special case of educational assistant. In R. Jorgensen, P. Sullivan, & P. Grootenboer (Eds.), *Pedagogies to enhance learning for indigenous students: evidence based practice* (Vol. 1, pp. 45-59). Singapore: Springer.
- Geia, L., Hayes, B., & Usher, K. (2013). Yarning/Aboriginal storytelling: towards an understanding of an Indigenous perspective and its implications for research practice. *Contemporary Nurse*, 46(1), 13.
- Gonski, D. M. (2011). *Review of funding for schooling: final report* (0642782229). Retrieved from retrieved October 15 2014 from http://d3n8a8pro7vhmx.cloudfront.net/aeu/pages/1/attachments/original/1393387838/Gonski_Final_Report_2012.pdf?1393387838:
- Goodwin, J. (2012). Indigenous culture : it's everybody's business. *Every Child*, 18(1), 14-15.
- Gower, G., Partington, G., Byrne, M., Galloway, A., Weissfner, N., Ferguson, N., & Kirov, E. (2011). *Review of the Aboriginal and Islander Education Officer Program*. Retrieved from retrieved, November, 2014 from <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/aboriginaleducation/detcms/aboriginal-education/aboriginal-education/docs/aieo-review.en?cat-id=8092822>:
- Grace, R., & Trudgett, M. (2012). It's not rocket science : the perspectives of Indigenous early childhood workers on supporting the engagement of

- Indigenous families in early childhood settings. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 37(2), 10-18.
- Graham, M. (2014). Aboriginal notions of relationality and positionalism: a reply to Weber. *Global Discourse*, 4(1), 17-22. doi:10.1080/23269995.2014.895931
- Gunstone, A. (2012). Indigenous education 1991-2000: Documents, outcomes and governments. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, The*, 41(2), 75-84.
- Haig-Brown, C., & Archibald, J. (1996). Transforming First Nations research with respect and power. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 9(3), 245-267. doi:10.1080/0951839960090302
- Harding, S. (2004). A socially relevant philosophy of science? Resources from standpoint theory's controversiality. *Hypatia*, 19(1), 25-47.
- Harris, M., Nakata, M., & Carlson, B. (Eds.). (2013). *The Politics of Identity: Emerging Indigeneity*. retrieved September 24 2014 from <http://epress.lib.uts.edu.au/research/bitstream/handle/10453/21913/Politics%20of%20Identity.pdf?download=1#page=28&zoom=auto,-265,411>: UTSePress.
- Harrison, N. (2007). Where Do We Look Now?: The Future of Research in Indigenous Australian Education. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, The*, 36, 1-5.
- Harrison, N., & Greenfield, M. (2011). Relationship to place: positioning Aboriginal knowledge and perspectives in classroom pedagogies. *Critical Studies in Education*, 52(1), 65-76. doi:10.1080/17508487.2011.536513
- Hart, V., Whatman, S., McLaughlin, J., & Sharma-Brymer, V. (2012). Pre-service teachers' pedagogical relationships and experiences of embedding Indigenous Australian knowledge in teaching practicum. *Compare: A Journal of Comparative and International Education*, 42(5), 703-723. doi:10.1080/03057925.2012.706480
- Heath, S., Charles, V., Crow, G., & Wiles, R. (2007). Informed Consent, Gatekeepers and Go-Betweens: Negotiating Consent in Child- and Youth-Orientated Institutions. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(3), 403-417.
- Helme, S., & Lamb, S. (2011). Closing the School Completion Gap for Indigenous Students. Resource Sheet No. 6. Retrieved from Retrieved November 2014 from <http://www.aihw.gov.au/uploadedFiles/ClosingTheGap/Content/Publications/2011/ctgc-rs06.pdf>
- Herbert, J., Anderson, L., Price, D., & Stehbens, C. (1999). *If they learn us right... A study of the Factors Affecting the Attendance, Suspension and Exclusion of Aboriginal students in Secondary Schools*. Retrieved from NSW:
- Holdsworth, R. (2011). Learning Choices National Scan Programs and Schools catering for young people at risk of not completing their education. Retrieved from retrieved, November, 2014 from http://www.learningchoices.org.au/assets//2011/07/learningchoices_nationalscan.pdf
- Holland, C. (2016). *Progress and Priorities Report 2016 Close the Gap*. Retrieved from Retrieved October 2016 from https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/.../Progress_priorities_report_CTG_2016_0.pdf:
- Hook, G. (2012). Towards a decolonising pedagogy: Understanding Australian indigenous studies through critical whiteness theory and film pedagogy. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, The*, 41(2), 110-119.

- Hughes, P., Khan, G., & Matthews, S. (2007). *Leaders : acting to improve outcomes for Indigenous students*. Paper presented at the The leadership challenge : improving learning in schools, conference proceedings.
http://www.acer.edu.au/documents/RC2007_ConfProceedings.pdf
- Hylton, K. (2012). Talk the talk, walk the walk: defining Critical Race Theory in research. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 15(1), 23-41.
 doi:10.1080/13613324.2012.638862
- Jakobi, A. P. (2011). Political Parties and the Institutionalization of Education: A Comparative Analysis of Party Manifestos. *Comparative Education Review*, 55(2), 189-209. doi:10.1086/657931
- Jones, R. (2004). Geolocation questions and coding index. Retrieved from http://www.educationcouncil.edu.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/Reports%20and%20publications/Publications/Measuring%20and%20reporting%20student%20performance/Geolocation%20Questions%20and%20Coding%20Index_Report.pdf.
- Jorgensen, R., Sullivan, P., & Grootenboer, P. (2013). *Pedagogies to enhance learning for indigenous students: evidence-based practice* (Vol. 1). Singapore: Springer.
- Kickett-Tucker, C. (2009). Moorn (Black)? Djardak (White)? How come I don't fit in Mum? Exploring the racial identity of Australian Aboriginal children and youth. *Health Sociology Review*, 18(1), 119-136.
- Klenowski, V. (2009). Australian Indigenous students: addressing equity issues in assessment. *Teaching Education*, 20(1), 77-93.
 doi:10.1080/10476210802681741
- Ladson-Billings, G. (1998). Just what is critical race theory and what's it doing in a nice field like education? *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 11(1), 7-24. doi:10.1080/095183998236863
- Ladson-Billings, G. (2005). The evolving role of critical race theory in educational scholarship. *Race Ethnicity and Education*, 8(1), 115-119.
 doi:10.1080/1361332052000341024
- Ladson-Billings, G., & Tate, W. (2006). Toward a critical race theory in education. In A. Dixson & C. Rousseau (Eds.), *Critical Race Theory in Education All god's children got a song* (pp. 11-31). USA: Routledge.
- Lampert, J., & Burnett, B. (2012). *Retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in initial teacher education : a review of the literature*. Paper presented at the Australian Teacher Education Association Annual Conference, Stamford Grand Hotel, Adelaide, SA. retrieved, November, 2014 from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/58067/>
- Lane, J. (1991). South Australia's Contribution to 1000 Teachers by 1990 - New Targets for the Year 2000? *Aboriginal Child at School*, 19(1), 21-26.
- Larkin, S. (2014). *Race matters : Indigenous employment in the Australian public service*. (PhD). Retrieved from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/66868/>
- Laycock, A., Walker, D., Harrison, N., & Brands, J. (2011). *researching Indigenous health: a practical guide for researchers*. Melbourne: The Lowitja Insitute.
- Liamputtong, P. (2009). Qualitative Data Analysis: Conceptual and Practical Considerations. *Health Promotion Journal of Australia: Official Journal of Australian Association of Health Promotion Professionals*, 20(2), 133-139.
- Lohmann, J. S. (2009). *Public alternative school practice: Creating spaces for reengagement and reconnection*. (3385027 Ed.D.), Harvard University, Ann Arbor. Retrieved from

- <http://gateway.library.qut.edu.au/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/304893322?accountid=13380> ProQuest Central; ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Full Text database.
- Lonsdale, M. (2013). Making a difference : improving outcomes for indigenous learners. Retrieved from http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1029&context=indigenous_education
- López, G. R. (2003). The (Racially Neutral) Politics of Education: A Critical Race Theory Perspective. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 39(1), 68-94. doi:10.1177/0013161x02239761
- Lopez, I. (2013). The social construction of race. In R. Delgado & J. Stefancic (Eds.), *Critical Race Theory The Cutting Edge* (Vol. 3, pp. 238-248). Philadelphia: Temple University Press.
- Luke, A., Cazden, C., Coopes, R., Klenowski, V., Ladwig, J., Lester, J., . . . Woods, A. (2013). *A Summative Evaluation of the Stronger Smarter Learning Communities Project : Vol 1 and Vol 2*. Queensland University of Technology. Brisbane, QLD.
- Ma Rhea, Z. (2013). *INDIGENOUS EDUCATION AND TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT: THE AUSTRALIAN PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR TEACHERS IN AUSTRALIA*. Retrieved November 2015 http://www.ieu.asn.au/media/71851/zane_ma_rheal.pdf
- Malin, M. (1994). Why is Life So Hard for Aboriginal Students in Urban Classrooms? *Aboriginal Child at School*, 22(2), 141-154.
- Martin, K. (2003). Ways of knowing, being and doing: A theoretical framework and methods for indigenous and indigenist re-search. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 27(76), 203-214.
- Martin, K. (2012). *Please knock before you enter Aboriginal regulations of Outsiders and the implications for researchers*. Teneriffe: Post Pressed.
- Mason, J. (2009). MindMatters, leadership and community partnerships. *Independent Education*, 39(1), 24-25.
- MATSITI. (2012). More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative. Retrieved from <http://matsiti.edu.au/>
- McConaghy, C. (2000). *Rethinking Indigenous Education Culturalism, Coloialism and the Politics of Knowing*. Queensland: Post Pressed.
- MCEETYA. (2008). *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young People*. Melbourne: Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs Retrieved from http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/_resources/national_declaration_on_the_educational_goals_for_young_australians.pdf.
- McGregor, G., & Mills, M. (2012). Alternative education sites and marginalised young people: 'I wish there were more schools like this one'. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 16(8), 843-862. doi:10.1080/13603116.2010.529467
- McGregor, G., Mills, M., te Riele, K., & Hayes, D. (2014). Excluded from school: getting a second chance at a 'meaningful' education. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1-18. doi:10.1080/13603116.2014.961684
- McKenzie, P., Rowley, G., Weldon, P., & Murphy, M. (2011). *STAFF IN AUSTRALIA'S SCHOOLS 2010: MAIN REPORT ON THE SURVEY*. Retrieved from Retrieved March 2016 from http://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1013&context=tll_misc

- McKeown, A. (2011). Young people speak: Experiences of alternative education. *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*(29), 68-75.
- Mellor, S., & Corrigan, M. (2004). *The Case for Change : A review of contemporary research in Indigenous education outcomes* Retrieved from <http://QUT.eblib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=242607>
- Memmi, A. (2014). *Racism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Merriam-Webster. (2016). Online Dictionary. Retrieved from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/gatekeeper>
- Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Thousand Oaks (CA): Sage Publications.
- Mills, M., & McGregor, G. (2010). *Re-Engaging Students in Education Success Factors in Alternative Schools*. Retrieved from http://www.learningchoices.org.au/assets//2011/07/yanq_report_final-art_press_compress.pdf
- Mills, M., & McGregor, G. (2016). Alternative Education: providing support to the disenfranchised. *International Journal of Child, Youth and Family Studies*, 7(2), 198-217. doi:DOI: 10.18357/ijcyfs72201615718
- Ministerial Council for Education, E. C., & Affairs, D. a. Y. (2010). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014.
- Moran, A. (2005). White Australia, Settler Nationalism and Aboriginal Assimilation. *Australian Journal of Politics & History*, 51(2), 168-193. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8497.2005.00369.x
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2003). Researching Whiteness: Some Reflections from an Indigenous Woman's Standpoint. *Hecate*, 29(2), 72-85.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2009a). imagining the good indigenous citizen: Race War and the Pathology of Patriarchal White Sovereignty. *Cultural Studies Review*, 15(2), 61-79.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2009b). Introduction: Critical Indigenous Theory. *Cultural Studies Review*, 15(2), 11-12.
- Moreton-Robinson, A. (2013). Towards an Australian Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory. *Australian Feminist Studies*, 28(78), 331-347. doi:10.1080/08164649.2013.876664
- Moreton-Robinson, A., Singh, D., Kolopenuk, J., Robinson, A., & Walter, M. (2012). *"Learning the Lessons? Pre-Service Teacher Preparation for Teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Students" A Report prepared for the Division of Indigenous Education and Training Futures – Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment, Indigenous Studies* Retrieved from Retrieved, October, 2014 from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/66277/>:
- Moreton-Robinson, A., & Walter, M. (2009). Indigenous methodologies in social research. *Social research methods*, 1-18.
- Morgan, A. (2013). *Different Ways of Being Educator: A Sociocultural Exploration of Educator Identity and Development in Practice, in a System of Non-traditional Flexi Schools*. (Doctor of Philosophy), Griffith University, retrieved, February, 2015 from http://www.youthplus.edu.au/images/docs/Different_Ways_of_Being_Educator_or_Ann_Morgan_PhD_Thesis.pdf.
- Morgan, A., Pendergast, D., Brown, R., & Heck, D. (2014). The art of holding complexity: a contextual influence on educator identity and development in

- practice in a system of alternative 'flexi' schools. *Reflective Practice*, 15(5), 579-591. doi:10.1080/14623943.2014.900020
- Morgan, A., Pendergast, D., Brown, R., & Heck, D. (2015). Relational ways of being an educator: trauma-informed practice supporting disenfranchised young people. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*. doi:10.1080/13603116.2015.1035344
- Murgatroyd, P., Karimi, L., Robinson, P., & Rada, J. (2015). On the use/misuse of health research gatekeeping powers in Australia: An underconsidered problem? *Asia Pacific Journal of Health Management*, 10(3), SI63-SI69.
- Nakata, M. (2007a). The Cultural Interface *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 36(Supplementary), 7-14. Retrieved from <http://search.informit.com.au.ezp01.library.qut.edu.au/documentSummary;dn=903053619367156;res=IELIND>
- Nakata, M. (2007b). *Disciplining the savages, saving the disciplines*. Canberra ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press.
- National Health & Medical Research Council. (2003). Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research. Retrieved from https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/_files_nhmrc/publications/attachments/e52.pdf
- O'Conner, P., & Kellerman, S. (2015). Grammarphobia. Retrieved from <http://www.grammarphobia.com/blog/2015/10/yarn.html>
- O'Leary, Z. (2010). *The essential guide to doing your research project*. Cornwall: Sage Publications.
- Obach, B. K. (1999). Demonstrating the social construction of race. *Teaching Sociology*, 27(3), 252.
- Oliver, P. (2010). *The student's guide to research ethics* (Vol. 2nd;2;). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Parker, L., & Lynn, M. (2002). What's Race Got to Do With It? Critical Race Theory's Conflicts With and Connections to Qualitative Research Methodology and Epistemology. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 7-22. doi:10.1177/107780040200800102
- Patton, W., Lee Hong, A., Lampert, J., Burnett, B., & Anderson, J. (2012). Report into the retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolled in initial teacher education. <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/57901>.
- Pennacchia, J., Thomson, P., Mills, M., & McGregor, G. (2016). Alternative programmes, alternative schools and social justice. *Critical Studies in Education*, 57(1), 1-5. doi:10.1080/17508487.2015.1132972
- Phillips, J. (2011). *Resisting contradictions : non-Indigenous pre-service teacher responses to critical Indigenous studies*. Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane. Retrieved from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/46071/>
- Phillips, J. (2012a). Indigenous Education in Australia. In S. Carrington & J. Macarthur (Eds.), *Teaching in Inclusive School Communities* (pp. 139-160). Milton: John Wiley & Sons Australia, Ltd.
- Phillips, J. (2012b). Indigenous knowledge perspectives: making space in the Australian centre. In J. Phillips & J. Lampert (Eds.), *Introductory Indigenous Studies in Education* (2nd edition ed.). Frenchs Forest NSW: Pearson.
- Phillips, J., & Lampert, J. (2012). *Introductory Indigenous Studies in Education* (2nd ed.). Frenchs Forest NSW: Pearson.
- Plater, S. (2013). 'For the Life of Me, I Can't See Why Those Students were Let Go on So Long': Educating the Educators, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-

- Style. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 41(02), 156-161. doi:10.1017/jie.2012.24
- Poroch, N. C. (2012). Kurunpa: keeping spirit on country. *Health Sociology Review*, 21, 383+.
- Price, K. (2012a). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in the classroom. In K. Price (Ed.), *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education : an introduction for the teaching profession*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Price, K. (2012b). A brief history of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in Australia *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education : an introduction for the teaching profession*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Punch, K. (2009). *Introduction to Research Methods in Education*. Hampshire: Sage Publications Inc.
- Purdie, N., & Buckley, S. (2010). School attendance and retention of Indigenous Australian students 2013(3 September). Retrieved from http://www.aihw.gov.au/closingthegap/documents/issues_papers/ihw/33/12176.pdf
- Purdie, N., Tripcony, P., Boulton-Lewis, G., Fanshawe, J., & Gunstone, A. (2000). Positive self-identity for Indigenous students and its relationship with school outcomes (Vol. 2013): Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs.
- Queensland Government. (2014). Department of Education, Training and Employment. Retrieved from <http://education.qld.gov.au/schools/about/behaviour.html>
- Radich, J. (2012). Cultural competence : working towards Reconciliation. *Every Child*, 18(2), 22-24.
- Rahman, K. (2010). Addressing the Foundations for Improved Indigenous Secondary Student Outcomes: A South Australian Qualitative Study. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 39(1), 65-76.
- Ramirez, F. O., & Boli, J. (1987). The Political Construction of Mass Schooling: European Origins and Worldwide Institutionalization. *Sociology of Education*, 60(1), 2-17.
- Rattansi, A. (2007). *Racism : A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford, GBR: Oxford University Press, UK.
- Raywid, M. A. (1994). Alternative schools: The state of the art. *Educational Leadership*, 52(1), 26.
- Reid, J.-A., Santoro, N., Crawford, L., & Simpson, L. (2009). Talking teacher education : factors impacting on teacher education for Indigenous people. *Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 38, 42-54.
- Richardson, M. D., & Griffin, B. L. (1994). Alternative Schools: Research Implications For Principals. *NASSP Bulletin*, 78(566), 105-111. doi:10.1177/019263659407856614
- Rigney, L. (2001). A first perspective of Indigenous Australian participation in science : framing Indigenous research towards Indigenous Australian intellectual sovereignty. *Kauria Higher Education Journal*(7), 1-13.
- Rigney, L. (2006). Indigenist research and Aboriginal Australia. In N. Goduka & J. Kunnie (Eds.), *Indigenous people's wisdoms and power: Affirming our knowledges through narrative* (pp. 32-50). London: Ashgate Publishing.
- Riley, D. (2007). The Paradox of Positivism. *Social Science History*, 31(1), 115-126. doi:10.1215/01455532-2006-017

- Russell, D. (1999). The Importance of Identity in the Retention and Attainment of Aboriginal Students at Secondary School: Some Research Findings. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 27(1), 10-19.
- Sanghera, G. S., & Thapar-Björkert, S. (2008). Methodological dilemmas: gatekeepers and positionality in Bradford. *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 31(3), 543-562. doi:10.1080/01419870701491952
- Santoro, N., & Allard, A. (2005). (Re)Examining identities: Working with diversity in the pre-service teaching experience. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 21(7), 863-873. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.tate.2005.05.015>
- Santoro, N., Reid, J., Crawford, L., & Simpson, L. (2011). Teaching Indigenous Children: Listening To and Learning from Indigenous Teachers. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 36(10). doi:10.14221/ajte.2011v36n10.2
- Sarra, C. (2007a). Engaging with Aboriginal Communities to Address Social Disadvantage. *Developing Practice: The Child, Youth and Family Work Journal*(19), 9-11.
- Sarra, C. (2007b). Stronger, Smarter, Sarra. *Teacher: The National Education Magazine*, 32-34, 36-38, 40-41.
- Sarra, C. (2011). *Strong and Smart – Towards a Pedagogy for Emancipation: Education for first peoples*. Oxon: Routledge
- Sarra, G. (2011). Indigenous studies in all schools. *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 15(6), 611-625. doi:10.1080/13603110903265040
- Schwab, R. (2012). Indigenous early school leavers: Failure, risk and high-stakes testing. *Australian Aboriginal Studies*(1), 3-18.
- Shay, M. (2013). *Practices of alternative schools in Queensland in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to remain engaged in education*. (Master of Education), University of the Sunshine Coast, retrieved, January, 2015 from <http://eprints.qut.edu.au/71023/>.
- Shay, M. (2015). The perceptions that shape us: strengthening Indigenous young people's cultural identity. In T. Ferfolja, Jones-Diaz, C. & Ullman, J. (Ed.), *Understanding sociological theory and pedagogical practices* (pp. 93-105). Melbourne: Cambridge University Press.
- Shay, M. (2016). Re-imagining Indigenous Education Through Flexi Schooling. In D. Bland (Ed.), *Imagination for Inclusion* (pp. 116-127). Oxon: Routledge.
- Shay, M., & Heck, D. (2013). Developing shared practice to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student retention in teacher education. *Journal of Indigenous Australian Issues*, 16(4), 42-57.
- Shay, M., & Heck, D. (2015). Alternative Education Engaging Indigenous Young People: Flexi Schooling in Queensland. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education, FirstView*, 1-11. doi:10.1017/jie.2015.8
- Shoemaker, P. J., & Vos, T. P. (2009). *Gatekeeping theory* (Vol. 1). GB: Routledge Ltd.
- Silverman, D. (2006). *Interpreting qualitative data: methods for analyzing talk, text and interaction* (Vol. 3rd). Thousand Oaks;London;: Sage.
- Silverman, D. (2007). *A Very Short, Fairly Interesting and Reasonably Cheap Book about Qualitative Research* Retrieved from <http://QUT.ebib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=585422>
- Silverman, D. (2009). *Doing Qualitative Research* Retrieved from <http://QUT.ebib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=459252>
- Silverman, D. (2013). What Counts as Qualitative Research? Some Cautionary Comments. *Qualitative Sociology Review*, 9(2).

- Smallwood, G. (2011). *Human rights and first Australians' well being*. (Doctor of Philosophy), James Cook University, retrieved January 16 2015 from <http://eprints.jcu.edu.au/20193>.
- Solorzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2001). From racial stereotyping and deficit discourse toward a critical race theory in teacher education. *Multicultural Education*, 9(1), 2-8.
- Solórzano, D. G., & Yosso, T. J. (2002). Critical Race Methodology: Counter-Storytelling as an Analytical Framework for Education Research. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 8(1), 23-44. doi:10.1177/107780040200800103
- Speer, S. A., & Hutchby, I. (2003). From Ethics to Analytics: Aspects of Participants' Orientations to the Presence and Relevance of Recording Devices. *Sociology*, 37(2), 315-337. doi:10.1177/0038038503037002006
- Stefancic, J., & Delgado, R. (2013). *Critical Race Theory : The Cutting Edge* Retrieved from <http://QUT.ebib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=1210896>
- Stuart, K. (2012). Narratives and activity theory as reflective tools in action research. *Educational Action Research*, 20(3), 439-453. doi:10.1080/09650792.2012.697663
- te Riele, K. (2007). Educational alternatives for marginalised youth. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 34(3), 53-68. doi:10.1007/BF03216865
- te Riele, K. (2012a). Challenging the logic behind government policies for school completion. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 44(3), 237-252. doi:10.1080/00220620.2012.683394
- te Riele, K. (2012b). *Learning Choices: A map for the future*. Retrieved from Retrieved, April, 2013, from http://www.ntyan.com.au/images/uploads/news_docs/20120427_LearningChoices_Map-for-the-Future_final.pdf:
- te Riele, K. (2014). *Putting the Jigsaw Together: Flexible Learning Programs in Australian Final Report*. Retrieved from retrieved, October, 2014 from <http://dusseldorp.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/Victoria-Institutue-1-7-MB2.pdf>:
- Tomaselli, K., Dyll, L., & Francis, M. (2014). "Self" and "Other": Auto-Reflexive and Indigenous Ethnography. In N. Denzin, Y. Lincoln, & L. Tuhiwai Smith (Eds.), *Handbook of Critical and Indigenous Methodologies* (pp. 347-372). Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Townsend-Cross, M. (2011). 'Indigenous Education and Indigenous Studies in the Australian Academy: assimilationism, critical pedagogy, dominant culture learners and Indigenous knowledges'. In G. Dei (Ed.), *Indigenous Philosophies and Critical Education* (pp. pp. 68-79). NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Trudgett, M. (2011). Western places, academic spaces and Indigenous faces: supervising Indigenous Australian postgraduate students. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 16(4), 389-399. doi:DOI: 10.1080/13562517.2011.560376
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies*. Dunedin, NZ, London, New York: Zed Books.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2005). Building a Research Agenda for Indigenous Epistemologies and Education. *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 36(1), 93-95.
- Tuhiwai Smith, L. (2012). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (2 ed.). London: Zed Books.

- Vadeboncoeur, J. A. (2009). Spaces of Difference: The Contradictions of Alternative Educational Programs. *Educational Studies*, 45(3), 280-299.
doi:10.1080/00131940902910974
- Vass, G. (2013). 'So, What is Wrong with Indigenous Education?' Perspective, Position and Power Beyond a Deficit Discourse. *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*, 41(02), 85-96. doi:10.1017/jie.2012.25
- Walker, S., Eketone, A., & Gibbs, A. (2006). An exploration of kaupapa Maori research, its principles, processes and applications. *International Journal of Social Research Methodology*, 9(4), 331-344.
doi:10.1080/13645570600916049
- Wanat, C. L. (2008). Getting Past the Gatekeepers: Differences Between Access and Cooperation in Public School Research. *Field Methods*, 20(2), 191-208.
doi:10.1177/1525822X07313811
- Wanganeen, E., & Sinclair, K. (2012). Beyond murals and flagpoles. *Every Child*, 18(4), 16-17.
- Wilkinson, J. (2009). Reaching their potential : what's working with Indigenous students. *Teacher*(202), 52-55.
- Wilson, E. (2005). Hidden agendas: the rhetoric of benevolence in Aboriginal policy in Queensland, 1900-1950. *Journal of Australian Studies*, 85, 49-56.
- Wilson, K., Stemp, K., & McGinty, S. (2011). Re-engaging young people with education and training: What are the alternatives? *Youth Studies Australia*, 30(4), 32-39.
- Wingard, B. (2010). A Conversation with Lateral Violence. *International Journal of Narrative Therapy & Community Work*, 2010(1), 13-17.
- Winkler, M. (2010). Cavendish Road SHS : the path to success. *Principal Matters*(85), 8,10-11.
- Winkler, M. (2012). Hidden treasures : recognising the value of Indigenous educators. *Education Horizons*, 12(2), 20-21.
- Yunkaporta, T. (2009). *Aboriginal pedagogies at the cultural interface*. Townsville Qld: James Cook University, 2009. James Cook University, Townsville Qld. Retrieved from <http://eprints.jcu.edu.au/10974/>
- Yunkaporta, T., & McGinty, S. (2009). Reclaiming aboriginal knowledge at the cultural interface. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 36(2), 55-72.
doi:10.1007/bf03216899
- Zamudio, M., Russell, C., Rios, F., & Bridgeman, J. L. (2011). *Critical Race Theory Matters: Education and Ideology* Retrieved from <http://QUT.ebib.com.au/patron/FullRecord.aspx?p=592906>