Educational praxis in various Australian Indigenous higher education contexts

by

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### Abbreviations and Glossary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AEA</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Assistant</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AECG</td>
<td>Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (acronym used for state wide representation in Victoria and New South Wales)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASSPA</td>
<td>Aboriginal Student Support Parent Advisory committee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATAS</td>
<td>Aboriginal Tertiary Assistance Scheme (later known as ITAS)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATSI</td>
<td>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (not a preferred acronym, in fact disused by many Indigenous organisations and teaching centres, in use at the fourth research site, Sub Urban).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridging</td>
<td>a course where learners are required to complete units of study prior to engaging in diploma or degree studies (similar to TAC)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CDEP</td>
<td>Community Development Employment Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEETYA</td>
<td>Federal government Department of Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (previously DEET and later DETYA and DEST)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEST</td>
<td>Federal government Department of Education, Science and Training (previously known as DEETYA and earlier as DEET)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enclave</td>
<td>administrative and academic support unit for Indigenous students within a University structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITAS</td>
<td>Indigenous Tertiary Assistance Scheme</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Koorie (Koori)</td>
<td>the term used to describe Aboriginal persons in south – eastern Australia, mainly Victoria and parts of New South Wales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LAECG</td>
<td>Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (title used for regional representation in Victoria and New South Wales)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mainstream</td>
<td>the dominant sphere of education provision in Universities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Murri</td>
<td>a term used to describe contemporary persons of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent in northern New South Wales and most non-traditional peoples of Queensland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NAEC</td>
<td>National Aboriginal Education Committee was the representative body established in the mid 1970s.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAC</td>
<td>Tertiary Access Course (pre-degree entry course)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TSI</td>
<td>Torres Strait Islander person (usually written in the unpopular acronym ATSI)</td>
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Abstract

My thesis is a critical report upon the discourses that have an impact upon the role and work practices of a non-Indigenous educator within Indigenous higher education contexts.

The thesis explores my role and praxis through autobiographical writing and the examination of different workplace situations. This serves to uncover the processes by which one learns about decentring or letting go of the Anglo-Irish-Australian cultural baggage, and becoming conscious of a shift in my pedagogical practices concerning knowledge and personal power.

The study utilises lived experience in phenomenology terms, as well as a form of narrative inquiry known as the portrayal approach. This approach builds upon a central narrative, as a core portrayal in each research text. The research texts are four separate chapters, presenting four slices of life in Indigenous education environments.

The research engages the qualitative methods of narrative inquiry, with an interrogation of memory as a tool for autoethnography. Significant or critical incidents are encompassed in the central narrative portrayals of each research chapter. The portrayals reveal the dilemmas embedded in the everyday subtleties of interaction and the situatedness of self. Generative themes emerge from the narrative portrayals, from which related literature reviews are then generated for each research text. Essentially these themes reveal the influences upon my action, providing meaning and critique of my praxis.

The findings of this study reveal the nature of competing influences that have shaped my role and educational praxis, as a non-Indigenous educator. Aspects of workplace culture that enrich the experience of cross-cultural work are also illuminated. In summary, I have learnt significantly about my role through this process of intensive critical reflection and autobiographical analysis.
Chapter One: Introduction

*Experience is mysterious, for it is not entirely clear how we come to understand what we do and what is happening to us.*
*(Liang cited in Gronn, 1983, p.46)*

1.1 Background

The focus of my research is the role of the non-Indigenous educator in Australian Indigenous higher education. There have been many non-Indigenous (whitefellas) that have been and are highly respected for their work in Indigenous workplaces (Smith & Maskell, 2001). Yet little is written to critically examine the role of the educator, the way situations occur and an analysis of the non-Indigenous response. In this thesis I turn a reflexive gaze upon my work practices to analyse and illuminate the role of the non-Indigenous educator.

Recognising a concern for the employment and role of non-Aboriginal lecturers in Indigenous higher education environments, I seek to confront the dilemmas of a whitefella in Indigenous contexts. The Indigenisation of the workplaces is an important shift towards a potential exclusion of non-Indigenous educators. This shift has the valid aim of making workplaces culturally safe and to strengthen the Indigenous control of the business of Indigenous education. Yet for non-Indigenous educators, such as myself, there is a need to negotiate or navigate a future direction that begins outside, and anticipates further work beyond Indigenous tertiary education (Smith & Maskell, 2001).

For many years I avoided writing about Aboriginal education. My Indigenous mentors and supervisors (Directors or Coordinators of programs) had instilled in me the attitude that we whitefellas had undertaken enough research on Aboriginal people. Understanding that mindset I focussed my previous research (for Masters degree) on a study in distance education. There were some parallels with Aboriginal education, as many Indigenous students live at a distance from their campus and study in mixed mode or residential blocks.
Osborne (1999) also has given expression to an appreciation of the dilemma faced by those working ‘on the border’ concerning Indigenous education research. The ‘border’ is an adequate description of the position held by the white educator, trying to work at a cultural interface without being assimilationist or claiming some culturally-based expertise (see also Giroux, 1992). Osborne problematises the career path of the non-Indigenous person doing doctoral studies in the area of Indigenous knowledge. This space is indeed problematic, and similarly, helps me to explain my own avoidance hitherto of a research focus within Indigenous education. ¹

This thesis is a highly introspective self-journey about my role through selected experiences within Indigenous environments. This autobiographical exploration required and enabled an interrogation of my memory, of my roles and of the pragmatic shifts that occurred while working in the contexts under study. There is much that I have learnt through working with Indigenous students and staff, and such experiences have influenced my workplace and pedagogical practices. In part this research is an exercise in mapping the learning trajectory that occurs for non-Indigenous (predominantly white Anglo-or European Australian) educators in cross-cultural settings. However, my main interest is to reflect, to turn a critical gaze upon my actions and my roles, and to understand the confrontations experienced ‘on the border’ for myself as a non-Indigenous educator, and for others.

After teaching predominantly in Indigenous environments, I seek here to give something back to the people and places where I have learnt and taught. In this thesis the workplaces I examine are mostly environments where there is now a majority of Indigenous educators, thus representing a decided shift from those that hitherto were predominantly formed by Anglo or European Australians. This thesis will assist non-Indigenous educators in avoiding the barriers that can be unintentionally constructed in their teaching and learning relationships with tertiary Indigenous students and colleagues (Cavanagh & Maskell, 2005).

¹ My first thoughts for a doctoral thesis topic were to extend my interest in distance education, so in the mid 1990s I began theorising a study with distance education staff at the University of Havana. A few years later having taken up work in Cambodia, I began work on a thesis that examined teacher education in an Australian NGO context in Cambodia. Neither of the above topics were carried through to completion.
As a non-Indigenous educator, the current research question has been sharpened over the years, to focus upon locating and understanding the discourses shaping my praxis and roles. For a number of years I have theorised about the processes or outcomes of interactions between staff and Indigenous students. They can be characterised in terms of a paternalistic / empowering dualism. What I mean is this: white educators were generally, and probably unintentionally, either engaged with Indigenous learners by re-assimilating them through an uncritical enculturation into western knowledge systems of thought or interacting pedagogically in culturally appropriate and empowering ways allowing learners to chart an authentic Indigenous course through their higher education experience. My critical concern led me to conclude that some forms of advocacy or assistance (student support) could be paternalistic, taking away student’s agency and responsibility in their tertiary experience. This questioning has led to analysing the constructions of the academic self and the role of the academic in the university context (Maskell, 2004).

As an Anglo-Irish-Australian male, with university education, I can very easily be considered part of the patriarchal structures of the university system. However, my life history suggests this is not the case. I left school after completing Year Eleven, and spent eight years working prior to gaining a tertiary qualification. Most of my working life since graduating has been within the Indigenous higher education sector. With such a life history, I do not readily conform to the expectations that are usually ascribed to a university academic.

Being an educator in Indigenous contexts has enabled me to learn how to be part of the struggles for power initiated by the marginalised, and to listen to previously oppressed voices. These interactions created strong relational bonds between most staff and students, and through shared struggle developed close friendships in those working relationships. These experiences often meant resisting normal systemic structures, and finding a way around the bureaucratic conventions of the university systems.
This thesis seeks to illuminate the influences upon my actions as an educator. It explores the meaning of the work that I do, and the interpretative patterns of my life as an educator. With only a few years experience as a secondary school teacher, my teaching has been moulded by Indigenous adults in tertiary settings. This teaching took place in small groups, and enabled more sustained interaction than was possible in my earlier secondary classroom experiences. This format established the sharing of personal power, and Indigenous students have emphasised to me that this negotiated learning space was indeed culturally appropriate. This pedagogical form became a conscious dialogical approach by which relationships were established with learners, to such an extent that to work in formations that inhibit such open, 'circular space' made me progressively uncomfortable in my teaching.

Hence, my conscious ways of working, my praxis, was ‘knowledge that is forged and produced in the tension between practice and theory’ (Freire, 1996, p.85 cited in Apple, 1999, p.8). This tension within praxis is also influenced by critical social theory and the traditions of hermeneutics and phenomenology.

My working with Indigenous tertiary education located me firmly in the competing discourses of the paternalistic approach of ‘mercenaries, misfits or missionaries’ (whitefellas) - a common way of referring to the way non-Aboriginals made an impact upon Aboriginal peoples from the late 1970s and early 1980s. The origin of the reference is unknown. The following description serves to clarify this:

Paternalism is still embedded – even in the minds of some Aboriginal people – and until governments deal with the underlying issues, archetyping and stereotyping will persist. In the mindset of this us mob/you mob dichotomy, humour and wit often prevail, forcefully demonstrated by Melbourne activist Gary Foley’s quip that ‘white women who enter Aboriginal affairs are either mercenaries, misfits, missionaries or morons!’ Robin Ryan once interviewed an Elder whose reply cleverly interrogated her whiteness: ‘What’s your talent? What’s your belief system? And what’s the most important thing in life to you?’ Having gained the upper hand, the Elder generously shared with Robin some of

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2 Interpretation as is expressed by the hermeneutic concept verstehen (from Dilthey, in Crotty, 1998).
3 This format, seated in a circular tutorial format, was later referred to as a learning circle.
the knowledge he had acquired as a ‘professor’ by the standards of his own culture (Patten and Ryan, 2001, p.7.)

Aside from Foley's gendered comment, my dilemma remains. Which of the above labels apply to the ‘do-gooders’, including myself, who work as directed by Indigenous supervisors, for the ‘common good’ of Indigenous higher education projects?

My ideology and beliefs situate my person as left wing, a unionist and progressive, these labels originating from my life in the 1970s, and largely unreconstructed. Against these ideological origins, I now assess my actions and responses to the critical incidents that this thesis recounts. The thesis explores the discourses around my positioning, interrogating my experience and my interpretation of aspects of workplace culture, and questioning the possible paternalism in my intent at each workplace.

1.2. Thesis structure
Structurally, the thesis begins with this introduction followed by a chapter concerned with methodology. The structure has an unusual form, since the literature review is embedded into the four research text chapters. The thesis uses a layered narrative inquiry referred to as the portrayal approach (as outlined by Piantanida and Garman, 1999). The writing is a form of auto-ethnography, presenting each research text as four layers within a chapter. These layers begin with a description of the context. The second layer being the core narrative which retells a critical situation, whose portrayal then provides the data set to be interpreted in the fourth layer of the written account. The third layer reflects on the implications in the specific workplace from the narrative, presenting possible outcomes affecting the actors in that portrayal. The fourth and final layer explores literature relevant to the research data from the narrative of the second layer, the portrayal.

The study presents these layers as four cycles of knowledge generation which together ‘interrogate’ a specific critical situation and, also together, constitute the research texts of the thesis. The four research texts are contained in the four

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4 Herb Patten, the co-author is himself a Koori.
chapters that make up the evidentiary body of the thesis. Hence, the thesis structure can be summarised as follows:

- this introduction and background chapter;
- a methodology chapter;
- four chapters (the research texts each consisting of a layering of four parts: a context /description, a narrative, a set of implications drawn from the narrative and a literature review connecting to the overall thesis);  
- a discussion of findings; and,
- a concluding chapter.

1.3 Structures of the workplaces

Structurally, each of the workplaces in this study had their own distinctive characteristics, either in the discipline being taught, the provision or delivery of the course curriculum or the degree of Indigenous control over the knowledge imparted. For example, one workplace integrated teaching and support as a School within a Faculty structure while another workplace was part of a Centre and provided a Tertiary Access Course at three distant sites. These various contexts are presented as ways of knowing my learning journey, the journey of a non-Indigenous educator working within Indigenous workplaces in the university sector. The general term educator is used to describe my work although the nature of my employment took different forms in each workplace; e.g., as Lecturer, Co-ordinator, or as Learning Support Lecturer.

The curriculum implementation also varied as two sites were involved in teacher education, one in health education and one offered an access course as an initial entry point to the university studies. The provision of courses also varied as three of the four sites taught a course which required residential block attendance, while the Tertiary Access Course was taught in a ‘mainstream’ on-campus semester, with classes over a twelve week timeframe. The residential or block-teaching approach to educational provision was generally referred to as ‘community-based’, as learners were able to live in their home community for

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5 The above layered approach is detailed fully in the methodology chapter.
most of the year. (For Federal Government Abstudy funding purposes, the students in these courses were classified by DEST as studying ‘Away from Base’).

The term workplace is used interchangeably with workspace and cultural interface instead of the more lengthy phrase ‘Indigenous higher education environment’. The term cultural interface was used by Torres Strait Islander academic Martin Nakata (in Hickling-Hudson et al, 2004, p.27) to refer to the intersection of Western and Indigenous domains. The term is adopted to describe the relational context, or space, between the educator and the Indigenous student or staff member.⁶ As each Indigenous workplace was organised slightly differently within the different university structures, so too the cultural interface, and with that my work practices, were similarly adjusted as I took up the differing roles in each workspace. These variations required shifts in my professional positioning and praxis at different institutions. In hindsight this moulding of myself did not happen consciously. I may well have resisted or unknowingly worked in ways that were not in the spirit of the educational structure at any particular cultural interface.

The shifts of self positioning and personal contestations associated with decentring or decolonising approaches occur through workplace relationships. In their report on Indigenous Inclusion in Curriculum, Arnold et al (1998, p.14) made a clear statement that non-Indigenous researchers are “called upon to undergo a process of cultural decentring”. As stated by Atkinson:

One does not become decentred without becoming involved in cross-cultural interaction in which one’s social security, demeanour, self-assurance, and let it be said, manipulative power ... is put at risk. If non-Koori researchers are not prepared to embark on this form of learning with its attendant potential for some social embarrassment ... then their involvement in Koori research must be questioned. (Atkinson in Arnold, et al, 1998, p.14)

This concept of decentring is important in positioning oneself as a facilitator of learning, actively and consciously de-centring. In the de-centring action, the

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⁶ Further discussion of the approaches to these cultural interfaces, these intersections, is taken up in the Clifton Research Text (Chapter Four) exploring the term cultural brokerage.
educator will engage in what becomes to be, in hindsight, an act of intellectual and/or cultural risk taking, resulting in both an unanticipated response and, an acute insight into one’s taken-for-granted cultural predisposition and proclivities. Whilst becoming decentred is important, of parallel importance is the ability to engage with humour, as frequently displayed by Indigenous staff and students managing recurring dramas in daily life. It is not surprising that being able to tell a joke or laugh at misfortune are important de-stressing activities in the intensity of the workplace. For non-Indigenous teachers appreciating the place of humour is also a central socialising factor.

In response to Arnold (above), this writing attempts to confront and contest my ‘centred-ness’ and to question whitefella power alongside the contexts of Indigenous academics and students. As a participant, teaching in the rich shared space of Indigenous higher education, I consciously and unconsciously developed relationships with learners and lecturers. The emphasis on relating to each other created strong bonds and friendships. The sharing was partial, as some colleagues became more involved in work relationships and some less engaged due to life stresses outside the workplace. The learning was reciprocal in nature, and I found that reciprocity was a prominent feature of Indigenous workplaces.

There are the various factors which affect student learning which also have to be considered in any examination of the non-Indigenous educator role. Significant research by Bin-Sallick (1989; Bin-Sallick et al; 1994) and Bourke et al (1996) have provided detailed analyses of factors affecting Aboriginal learners in tertiary settings. Daniel-DiGregorio, Farrington and Page (2000) set out various factors that influence Indigenous students when they study in block mode programs. Cultural matters, newness and the cumulative effects of individual stressors are important, but they give special emphasis to their vulnerability in these terms:

*Our students bring incredible determination to their learning experiences; however, that determination is sometimes short-circuited by frustrating learning experiences which made the students vulnerable to doubts about*
their own ability to succeed in the program... (Daniel-DiGregorio, Farrington & Page, 2000, p.304).

This observation alerts educators to their role as supportive facilitators; that is, those who work with learners, anticipating the frustrations, and working together through the textual jargon to ensure a successful teaching and learning environment. This thesis attempts to understand the influential discourses at work in the learning environment, the possible barriers linked to the factors identified by Daniel-DiGregorio et al, as impacting on students’ study. Such understanding will be gained through the exploration of organisational and cultural learning from working as an educator (i.e. lecturer and/or administrator). These concerns provide a critical space for my research interests in understanding the extent of unintended paternalism in pedagogical practices.

By the term pedagogy I mean more than a way of teaching, referring to pedagogy as ‘the art of educating’, as stated by Iram Siraj-Blatchford (1994, p.24). My meaning extends pedagogy to praxis, as a way of administering and implementing programs beyond the act of teaching. Within the term of ‘empowering pedagogical practices’ I include broader matters for ensuring learning; e.g., systems of advocacy or support for learners in tertiary life.

Block residential teaching contexts are the common cultural interface for many students and educators in Indigenous higher education. Block attendance programs are presented in the contexts of Research Texts One, Three and Four. These contexts situate the learners on campus for periods of up to two weeks at a time, interspersed with longer community-based study/work blocks. Initially many students may be unfamiliar with the support structures, both those provided by an Indigenous Support Unit and the ‘mainstream’ academic skills support, and also learners are often physically separated from the mainstream services simply because of time and organisational restraints. Block attendance programs usually mean each day is full with six hours (or more) of class contact time for students. Often there is little time for administrative issues and student services except during initial orientation to the institution. Naturally learners

7 Aside from naming students as ‘ours’, and claiming ownership, the ideas conveyed are relevant for many learners in community-based programs.
tend to find the more culturally-appropriate space of the Indigenous Support Unit less threatening than the mainstream non-Indigenous university teaching and learning spaces (as evidenced in research by Bourke et al: 1996).

The tensions relating to my agency, position and role were experienced as an undercurrent. But it was wider than simply my personal issue. The reality in many institutions is that non-Indigenous staff form a continuing part of the cultural interface. And the Indigenisation of workplaces has taken place during my almost twenty years involvement with the Indigenous higher education sector. This process is contentious and can be contradictory for non-Indigenous educators like myself who are simultaneously seeking to contribute to the process of Indigenous access and equity and, let it be said, higher education transformation, through which one keeps one's job while also working to make oneself redundant by supporting the Indigenisation of one’s workplace! For many years I have recognised that Indigenous units should have a dominance of Indigenous staff, and supported the implementation of Indigenising employment strategies. The consequent exclusion of non-Indigenous staff is an appropriate way to strengthen Indigenous knowledge in tertiary institutions.

The relationship of Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff in knowledge production in Indigenous higher education, often learning to work together productively and sometimes not, is learnt through experience. Since I am a non-Indigenous educator, I can be viewed as a member of the dominant culture in institutional and discipline specific knowledges, and hence can easily be positioned as a representative of the western colonising order and therefore viewed as an outsider, intruder or, irrespective of whether the staff Indigenisation process has been successful or not, one of the cultural and political minority in an Indigenous learning environment.

In such Indigenous educational workplaces it is important to understand the ongoing tension that arises from the positioning of staff with respect to their specialist knowledge. This then is necessarily juxtaposed with respect for Indigenous cultures and knowledges, and also with respect for the Indigenous
educators and learners who represent their own cultural knowledge. Indigenous learners bring ‘respected’ cultural knowledge to the classroom. In so doing, the cultural paradigm that is dominant in the institution may be subverted, or at least complemented, by viewpoints that serve to problematise the very knowledge that is presented by universities as received truths in order to empower learners and/or subvert established hegemonic practices of the institution.

This tension of role, duties or function, can cause significant hesitation for non-Indigenous educators engaged with Indigenous learners, particularly when whitefellas are ignorant of the nuances of differing Indigenous cultures or variations of lived experiences. As educators, we can know other ‘ways of knowing’, but maintaining conscious understanding of the perspectives of others is difficult, particularly in the context of an intense residential block teaching experience. Of interest to me is knowing the ways that educators are ‘orientated’ to productively engage the tensions inherent at the cultural interface under such circumstances. Will the practices of educators be reconciled within Indigenous workplaces? Do educators impact upon learners to re-assimilate (or re-colonise) by their teaching praxis? Will educators gain in their knowledge by the relational dialogue with Indigenous students? These types of questions pose ethical and practical challenges that are central to my thesis.

My objective is to illuminate my experience in Indigenous higher education workplaces through research based on:

- memories of experiences to understand my praxis;
- the discourses shaping the orientation of educators to Indigenous learners;
- my reflective journey as an educator challenging the ideological beliefs that have been confronted by me in the workplace in the process of teaching and learning within Indigenous education;
- ways that organisations seek to improve practices; and
- an understanding of the complexity that occurs for non-Indigenous educators in the institutional frameworks of Indigenous higher education workplaces.

The importance of educators critically and honestly (authentically) appraising their workplace and the dilemmas engaged in daily practice cannot be
overstated (as emphasised throughout the research texts, and impressed upon me by reading Shor, 1987). In an attempt to understand the institutional relationships from within Indigenous centres to ‘outer’ university structures, Arthur Smith and I wrote a paper titled, *Reconciling resistance and preconceptions about academic environments: roles and responsibilities of non-Indigenous educators in Indigenous higher education contexts*. The paper (Smith & Maskell, 2001) attempted to map out the terrain from our experiences, and we prepared a model at that time to indicate the Shared Spaces and ‘voice’ across and between varying world views and cultural contexts.

The central circle reflects the experience (of the shared collective knowledge) that western knowledge was dominant in many Indigenous education centres. On reflection, the text on that central circle should have emphasised the reality ‘but predominantly non-Indigenous with a lack of Indigenous knowledges and epistemologies due to the dominance of the western construction of University education’. In order to function productively within a framework of collaboration and constructively critical partnership with Indigenous colleagues, we hypothesised that non-Indigenous staff, in particular, ought to:

1. Be respectful and trusting of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural differences and their implications in the context of bicultural communications, collaboration and dialogue.
2. Develop ways of recognising and coming to terms with individual political, economic and other forms of 'cultural baggage' that shape perceptions of what is, and what conceivably ought to be, or could be.

3. Develop empathy and, to whatever extent is possible, capacity to 'walk in someone else’s shoes'.

4. Relinquish any access that you might have to unchallengeable, negative authoritarian power and, whenever appropriate and ethically/ morally defensible, become empowered by giving power away.

5. To whatever extent is possible and appropriate, become an implement of Indigenous ‘voice’ and perspective.

6. Work within an Indigenous framework while maintaining your own cultural integrity/ identity, learning along the way to become a dependable, accessible, critical friend and ally.

7. Engage in two-way mentoring: ‘go there’, listen, hear, try to understand and act in collaboration with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues, but primarily in the interests of what is given to you as the main Indigenous agenda and purpose.

8. Be receptive to Indigenous knowledge that is given and respect cultural protocols for understanding and incorporation of such knowledge into constructive action.

9. Work on deconstructing and critically understanding both ‘mainstream’ and Indigenous class, power, and status relationships; learn to know the field.

10. Provide a ‘bridge’ and essential, interpretive communication link between Indigenous and ‘mainstream’ cultural perceptions and expectations within the university.

11. Contribute to resolution of destructive, imposed levels of conflict.

12. Be broadly aware of Indigenous politics but do not seek involvement unless specifically asked to participate.

13. Be aware of the history and impact of colonialism and neo-colonial oppression, dispossession, racism and genocide in Australia.


15. Be prepared to value and maintain partnership arrangements between Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues in teaching and research; especially in cases involving 'Indigenous business' where Indigenous colleagues should normally be the senior partner. (Smith & Maskell, 2001, pp.5-6).

In the context of this thesis, these guidelines remain relevant and appropriate as institutional advice to guide non-Indigenous staff to develop sustainable practices that will enable them become purposeful participants in Indigenous education. Although the above model and summary points are instructive, I
believe the lived experience explored in this thesis is necessary to understand
the sense of one’s role.

1.3.1. Overview of the research texts

The discussion developed in this thesis recounts and interrogates my
experiences and interests, as I have sought an understanding of the discourses at
work affecting my praxis. Four slices of workplace life are presented, and titled
as Research Texts, each exploring my role and the ways that I acted and learnt
through my experiences. These Research Texts do not research or evaluate
Indigenous knowledge. On the contrary, my research focus is unapologetically
personal, presenting my experiences as a non-Indigenous educator active in
cross-cultural settings. The research gaze of my thesis, through my
introspection, is turned towards the non-Indigenous domain of the cultural
interface across which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people interact in
Indigenous higher education workplaces.

My praxis may influence and intersect at the workplace in many ways leading
to:

- understanding my cultural and ideological self;
- accepting micro-political realities that reach beyond my own self
  interest;
- developing and recognising connectedness with community;
- facilitating institutional and organisational learning;
- critically appraising support strategies for learners; and
- shifting my pedagogical approaches.

These intersections are at the border of Indigenous and non-Indigenous praxis
and the consequent collaborative cultural interface that informs the workplace.
Such intersections bring partial understanding of Indigenous knowledge and
engagement beyond the individual to less self-centred communitarian
perspectives (Henry, 1990). Knowledge generated and learnt with the
influences from an Indigenous presence needs to be recognised as such, and not
merely labelled as a residue emerging from non-Indigenous thinking. 8 Put
simply, a recognition of the voice of learners is also highly influential upon
educators in the learning environment, and hence any hard-and-fast distinction

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8 Although I do not suggest that this tension creates a binary division between black learners and white educators.
between university and adult education pedagogy is blurred (Knowles, 1980; Foley, 2000). The shifting discourses around pedagogical approaches emerged for me and impacted on my learning in the late 1980s and through the 1990s as Indigenous teacher education brought the life experience of the learner into the centre of the models of student centred and negotiated teaching practice being advocated (Boomer, 1982). This was well before many other university ‘disciplines’ began to become ‘learner-centred’. 9

An intellectual challenge exists here for me, to introspectively recognise the learning and meanings that were gained at each cultural interface. Some readers at this point may expect me to consider how I should give due consideration to the possibility of domain separation within my workplace knowledge. To respond briefly, the concept of domain separation has been appropriated and adapted from Bernstein’s classification and ‘structuration’ of knowledge (Atkinson, 1985, p.132), and applied to the separation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge in the expressive and symbolic language of ‘Two-Way’ or ‘Both Ways’ education. This thesis does not explore ‘two-way’ or ‘both ways’ learning (Harris, 1990) nor ‘two-way enquiry learning’ (Hooley, 2002), recognising that there are profound problems involved when such binary or dichotomy-inherent constructions are imposed upon Indigenous higher education by non-Indigenous theorists. My experiences have lead me to value student generated and constructed knowledge syntheses that can be claimed by them and Indigenous others to be culturally located within the Indigenous life-space.

This research is also a reflection on the knowledge relationships that emerged to inform my praxis. Central to my praxis was the relationships with Indigenous students and staff, and part of this developing praxis was the educational engagement with Indigenous communities, the connectedness of practitioners identifying with those they serve. Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics (Hughes, 1987; Foley, 1996; Osborne, 1999; Rigney et al, 2003; Garth Boomer is recognised as promoting learner-centred approaches through his work in Negotiating the Curriculum (Boomer, 1982; later republished by Boomer, Lester, Onore & Cook, 1992).
Phillips and Lampert, 2005) emphasise the importance of working with Indigenous communities as a way of explaining why education and health programs aimed at the individual alone often fail to provide significant change in Indigenous educational and wellbeing outcomes. Several authors have written on the importance of relationships between staff and students in Indigenous higher education as a means of enhancing the successful University experience of students. Bin-Sallick (1990; 2001), Moore, Willis and Crotty (1996), Ellis (1998) and Slade and Morgan (1999) each emphasise ways in which Indigenous students can gain from a quality relationship with an institution's staff and students.

I have not been able to locate written accounts that problematise the role of the non-Indigenous staff in the delivery of quality involvement with the cultural interfaces.

There is little by way of critical analyses of the realities of working in Indigenous higher education as a university academic. As already argued, the role of whitefella academics is contentious and, when combined with the Indigenous employment strategies over the past two decades for identified Indigenous positions in universities, the place of non-Indigenous academics in this relatively recent context becomes a valid area for research. A partial enculturation occurs for the non-Indigenous educator through working in Indigenous higher education, yet almost daily the subtleties of knowledge and interaction revealed glimpses of my own misunderstanding. Recognising this cycle of learning fed my interest to work through this by writing about it. Recurring concerns demand cyclical attention, and some of the recurring questions that arose for me were:

- How can I work to better support learners?
- How can I describe the discourses that shape the ways staff work?
- Is the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in tertiary education an individual, collegial or institutional responsibility?

My personal narratives are retold here using pseudonyms with only myself as narrator being identifiable. The narrative portrayals aim for anonymity although colleagues from the common workplaces could recognise the representation of the contexts.
1.4. Aims of the Research Texts

The Four Research Texts aim to:

• highlight challenges to my assumptions about my role;
• explore the emerging understandings from each workplace situation.
• capture critical situations and experiences;
• indicate the plausibility of my embodied knowledges from which to shape a deeper understanding of both discourses about Indigenous higher education and my emerging praxis; and
• convey a sense of my growth and learning in each role.

The Four Research Texts illustrate aspects of my role and praxis - i.e. action, learning and meaning-construction - as an Anglo-Irish-Australian educator from the recalled experiences from when I worked with Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators. My interest in such contemplative research was inspired by the emancipatory work of Freire (1970, 1971, 1978) and the theorising of critical educational research by Carr & Kemmis (1983), especially their interpretation of Habermas. Of significance is the critical social science presented by Fay (1987), the reflective practitioner writing by Boud & Walker (1991) and Brookfield (1995) as well as the critical reflexive writing of Shacklock & Smyth (1998). Fitzclarence (1998) informs me that the inclusion of educational autobiographical writing emerges from the ideas of Aronwitz and Giroux (1985). I also sought to write through this thesis in the manner of one engaged in researching my lived experience, recognizing the influential traditions of the methods of phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Van Manen, 1990), and educational researchers using those methods (Willis, 1998; Ehrich, 2003; Aspland, 2003).

The four research texts explore my work, the intentions I have formed to support Indigenous education situated in workplaces that differ from the ‘mainstream’ academic institution. The following table (1.5) represents a graphic view of the research texts, with an outline of the contexts matched with the layers of analysis through the four portrayals. The next section (1.6) presents a partial educational autobiography to map my shift from ignorance of contemporary Indigenous presence (as a child in the 1960s) and my life's trajectory through school years to my working in Indigenous higher education.
My autobiography gives a sense of the institutional diversity and the types of learning that are in the foreground of my interests as captured in this thesis.
## 1.5. Table of Research Texts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Texts</th>
<th>Yarrabool</th>
<th>Clifton</th>
<th>Tumbarumba</th>
<th>Sub Urban</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Level of Portrayal</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text One:</strong> Listening to Community</td>
<td>Urban Campus</td>
<td>Rural campus</td>
<td>Urban campus</td>
<td>Urban campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text Two:</strong> Experiencing dissent</td>
<td>Koori learners</td>
<td>Murri and TSI learners</td>
<td>Koori learners</td>
<td>Koori learners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text Three:</strong> Learning to support students</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>On Campus/ in prison</td>
<td>Academic Support/</td>
<td>Lecturer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Text Four:</strong> In search of space</td>
<td>Community-based</td>
<td>Tertiary Access Course</td>
<td>ATAS Coordinator</td>
<td>Residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Description of:</strong> context</td>
<td>Teacher education</td>
<td>Residential</td>
<td>Community-based</td>
<td>Community-based</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>role of self provision/delivery:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>area of teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Second the narrative with critical incident</strong></td>
<td>Day at the beach</td>
<td>Night at the flicks</td>
<td>Looking in the fishbowl</td>
<td>Being sent off</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>community members producing local knowledge</strong></td>
<td>community members</td>
<td>interpersonal conflicts</td>
<td>managing tutors and tutoring relationships</td>
<td>Inner urban and teaching off campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>learning about community and engaging local knowledge</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Third Lessons learnt and implications</strong></td>
<td>learning about trust and artefacts of the institution</td>
<td>learning of ownership and differing perceptions of academic support</td>
<td>learning of reactions to place and race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fourth links to the overall inquiry and literature review</strong></td>
<td>links to Indigenous control, learners as teachers; learning connectedness Belongingness or connectedness; curriculum relevance;</td>
<td>links to role as cultural broker, recognising organisational cultural mismatch, resistance and voice,</td>
<td>links to academic support, perspective of educators on equity and compensatory practices, degree of engagement with community, place of whiteness, power and privilege, learners as teachers, recognising the empowering or post-colonial</td>
<td>administrative matters in search of room and space links to recurring marginalisation, ideological confrontation as minimal Indigenous voice within the School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1.6. Biographical background: education and employment

As a background to the four Research texts, I present this biographical section thereby trying to situate myself in workplaces that provide the collegial and geographical contexts of the thesis. This background provides an insight into my childhood, early adulthood and how I became involved in Indigenous education. Prior to university study I had worked in a range of employment from fitter of window awnings and blinds, to furniture mover, forest and foundry worker to trainee diesel engineman on the Victorian railways, as well as clerical work for an oil refinery.

Firstly let me situate my personal upbringing in suburban Melbourne and later, more formatively, in urban Geelong. My paternal grandfather had been a blacksmith in the fairly remote mining town of Broken Hill in New South Wales, where my father began his schooling. In the mid 1940s the family moved to Caulfield near a racecourse as grandfather had a few good horses from the country to race. Around 1952 grandfather built stables in Mordialloc across the paddock from the Epsom racecourse. My father built the first family home on land adjacent to my grandfather's house in front of the stables and a training track. My mother grew up in the Melbourne suburb of Oakleigh.

Although Broken Hill would have had an Aboriginal population, my father did not convey any recollection of knowing Aboriginal people. In 1967 the referendum for changing Federal laws to be inclusive of Aboriginal people received over 90% approval, yet as a ten year old, I do not recall any discussion at home or at school of this major Australian cultural and political event.

I was born at the Mordialloc-Aspendale hospital, my family did not know of the Aboriginal origins of that suburban name. Our family moved to Geelong.

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10 Quite likely some of the jockeys my dad knew were Aboriginal, but no specific knowledge nor racial remarks are remembered from those years.

11 A corruption of two words Murdi and Yallock has a meaning of ‘flat water near the sea, or swampy water meeting the sea’. (City of Kinston website, from The History of Mordialloc, 1926). Later as primary school aged children in Geelong, my two brothers, my sister and I (two more siblings arrived later), contrived the explanation of place names for a mock newspaper story (e.g. Geelong and the possible meaning of the name) playing with the possible interpretation to construct Aboriginal meanings.
when I was six, then back to Mentone (near Mordialloc) for four years and then back to Geelong again. I recall as a seven year old befriending the newly arrived Spanish migrants next door as their boy, Francisco, was about my age. When we returned to Geelong my family befriended the Polish family next door but did not recognise the other neighbour who was descended from Aboriginal families of the region. There was a silence in my life about Aboriginal Australia. As a teenager I had some awareness of social justice causes; e.g., fasting for a day for the starving people of Bangladesh.

My brother and I talked about going to Indonesia to learn about a different culture, a common early 1970’s response to being a member of a middle/working class family. At age 16, I recall hitch-hiking 3000km to North Queensland and, when looking for somewhere to sleep, being confronted by an old Aboriginal man who yelled abuse at my friend and me. This frightened us somewhat, so much so that we quickly took off, not looking back.

At age 19, I studied Bahasa Indonesia, and spent three months travelling and learning about Balinese and Javanese cultures. Still, I knew virtually nothing about contemporary Aboriginal life. Returning to Australia, I landed in Darwin and I hitch-hiked south. I was given a lift by two Aboriginal stockmen. They asked me to write to Mr Whitlam about the poor wages and conditions they were suffering on the station where they were employed. These were the first people clearly identified to me as Aboriginal people that I recall talking with, and they asked me to drive for most of the journey as they were tired from family business in Darwin.

A few years later, I began an arts degree, and attended classes at Deakin University on the Waurn Ponds campus. In one unit, Religious Experience, I recall seeing a dark skinned student who fitted my then physical stereotype of an Aboriginal man, but we did not meet. I moved to North Queensland and continued as a full time off campus student. In Townsville I studied my Bachelor of Education on campus at James Cook University. I met many Aboriginal people in the community, but for my assignment for social education I presented a very traditional western view of how to study
Aboriginal society. I had lived with contemporary Aboriginal people, met at political and community functions, but I did not have a grounding in the lived experience of contemporary Aboriginal life.

My work as a formal and qualified teacher began in 1986, at a Catholic boys secondary school in Townsville in North Queensland. Here I had a few Aboriginal and Islander students in my year nine English class. One day, one of these students asked me to talk with his uncle who lived across the road. I am not sure of the context, but the uncle taught me how to play didgeridoo and, in some meetings we had later, he explained to me that he had tried to study at university, in fact at Deakin University, but the Commerce students gave him a hard time and he had left. Coincidently, from what he told me we concluded that we had indeed attended the same lectures in that Religious Experience unit of the Arts degree.

Teaching at this Catholic boys school was my first experience with the nexus of learning and Indigenous culture. This context also provides an introduction to the Research Texts and how the material they disclose came into my life. Social justice was central to the school ethos at that time, and particularly in the Social Science curriculum. My memory is that the Social Science department meetings discussed the feasibility of working across cultural groups, particularly involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders who were a significant population in the region (approximately 10 per cent at that time). North Queensland was indeed the site for a clash of cultures, especially for myself having lived my first twenty years in urban southern Victoria (Melbourne and Geelong are approximately 3000 kilometres south of Townsville). From a position of almost total ignorance about the contemporary Indigenous ‘other’, I found myself becoming involved in Indigenous social and political activities. Becoming an involved community member meant attending political meetings, visiting Palm Island, being in the crowd of Garbutt Magpies Australian Rules football supporters and becoming friends with active Indigenous university students who shared some commonality with me in their educational aspirations and political activism.
Learning at the community level involved socialising and meeting many North Queensland community members. Getting to hear first hand Indigenous oral histories about community life and recent atrocities on Palm Island was more informative than studying a textbook. Faced with regular negative stereotypes in the local media, I could not ignore displays of ignorance by non-Indigenous people maintaining their prejudice. I could not ignore the reality in which northern rural cities were immersed. And so, I listened to the stories and life histories of Aboriginal people. Becoming active and political seemed necessary, if not inevitable, for me.

After several years in Townsville, I moved to Sydney, and initially continued teaching in secondary schools. It was here, after connecting with members of the New South Wales Koori community at the inner city Tranby Aboriginal College, I was fortunate to obtain a half-time position in a course for Aboriginal Education Assistants at the University of Sydney. This was the beginning of my tertiary involvement in Indigenous contexts. And so, here follows a listing of the six Indigenous tertiary environments that constitute my professional experience in higher education.

1. My first employment as a lecturer in a tertiary setting was at the University of Sydney in the Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs) program. The significance of this employment meant that I was mentored by Koori, and non-Koori academic staff from the Faculty of Education. Many of the AEAs were from coastal and rural NSW, as well as from the suburbs of Sydney. In this position, I was excited to be part of such a program and highly motivated to learn how to teach differently. I learnt to listen to learners more holistically than in school settings and I tried to work closely with Aboriginal aspirations and made some mistakes. It was a part time position for only one year, so I kept applying to other institutions unsure of the future.

2. When I gained a position with the South Australian College of Advanced Education (SACAE), I recall the coordinator saying: “we train up you

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12 ‘Koori (or Koorie) is the name Aborigines of Victoria and southern NSW use to refer to themselves’.
whitefellas and then you move on, so we have to train up more whitefellas”. This comment stays with me giving a purpose in undertaking this research writing which will give something back and extend a pedagogical dialogue to other educators at the cultural interface.

At the end of that year I accepted a position in the Anangu Teacher Education Program for Aboriginal people in Central Australia: the Arrente, Western Arrente, Luritja and Warlpiri nations. This type of program was located in many remote communities across South Australia and the Northern Territory. In my work, the students were mostly from the town camps of Alice Springs. Some students were virtually ‘fringe-dwellers’ of the town, and some students lived in the towns suburbs. Based at Yipirinya School, an Independent Aboriginal School, this teacher education program had a Joint Management Committee consisting of staff from the SACAE and the Aboriginal School Council. A few years earlier, the struggling School had sought institutional support from Australian academics to provide teacher training for Aboriginal teachers after the School had received negative responses to its development from the Northern Territory Minister for Education. The probability of an Independent Indigenous School had “a snowflakes chance in hell” according to the Minister at that time (personal conversation: 1990). 13

As an independent community-controlled School, the processes of curriculum negotiation for teacher education and responsiveness to community needs was complex. Being the On-Site lecturer was a daily reflective process of learning and unlearning all those things which had once seemed so certain. The program implementation was full time and consisted of learning modules or workshops studied intensively over a number of days. This module or workshop approach to curriculum was considered beneficial to both the learners and the teacher educators as progression through the course was deemed more achievable under this regime. This approach allowed flexibility for both the learners and the programming of staff to implement modules in

13. These early experiences are not included as Research Texts, but outlined here for contextual information that indicate the kinds of relevant experience that are brought to the writing of this thesis.
other communities although, paradoxically, the modules were developed back in Adelaide.

3. My third tertiary employment was at a campus referred to in this thesis as Yarrabool. This Victorian Koori Teacher program operated community-based courses using the block residential or intensive model. The teacher education program was initially operated as part of the Faculty of Education at a Victorian university. In the 1990s this residential program entailed a different cohort of students being taught each fortnight (approximate duration of residential block), in a rotation of three blocks (first, second and third year). This model meant educators could be highly engaged with learners for four intensive weeks, virtually liaising or teaching every weekday. For myself, I found this time to be extremely demanding. After four years at Yarrabool I was looking to change, and to exit working in Aboriginal higher education.

Taking leave (without pay) in 1995 I spent three months on Palm Island as a consultant to develop an Employment and Training Strategy with the local Indigenous community. This was a very different kind of experience from teaching as most of my time on Palm Island was spent consulting with the Bwycolman community. The evenings were very quiet and, so while there, I was able to complete my M.Ed thesis, a bonus of living in a remote community in a room without television! Following this, I returned to my position at Yarrabool, and a year later I took further leave to work in Cambodia for Save the Children on a USAID funded Teacher Training project.

4. After arriving in Cambodia and working for a month I was unexpectedly telephoned and asked to take an interview for the position as Coordinator for an Indigenous higher education facility of a university in northern Queensland. This was a position I had applied for many months earlier and I thought I was unsuccessful. Reluctantly, I accepted the position and, after a few months, I moved back to Australia to take up the position. I felt some compromise of my integrity in leaving the work in Cambodia. My sense of guilt was diminished when some months later, following a political coup, the funding (by USAID) was withdrawn, which meant that that national education project ceased
operations. However, moving to a regional university in North Queensland meant there was in fact little time for wondering on what might have happened if I had continued in that overseas experience.

In my two years as Coordinator at the Clifton Campus, the Tertiary Access Course was full-time with staff travelling each week to a Correctional Centre and another remote community in order to fulfil teaching duties. The main campus at Reeftown housed the main Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educational centre where the teaching of various programs took place. Staff relationships appeared somewhat fractured as the University hierarchy managing the Indigenous facility had changed. The University’s Indigenous Director, having been on sick leave, departed from the University prior to my arrival.

5. After my two year contract, I was invited to take a short term (six months) contract in a role at the New South Wales institution I refer to in this thesis as Tumbarumba. My position was that of Student Support lecturer. I departed my position as Co-ordinator at Clifton and began at my sixth Indigenous workplace. Staff working at Tumbarumba Aboriginal Health had heard from a family member (a student with family studying at Clifton) that I was working up north. The Indigenous grapevine was working as usual (the staff member being Indigenous and a former student I had taught at Yarrabool).

The Tumbarumba School of Indigenous Health Studies provided health education programs for Indigenous (and also non-Indigenous) learners using the residential block model. My role was to support learners, and later to teach in the Diploma of Indigenous Health Studies. I also became the Aboriginal Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ATAS) coordinator. The allocation of ATAS support entailed assessing student needs and matching tutors who would be located in the students’ communities and on campus. After four years of employment my contract was completed and I departed as required to allow for the ongoing process of Indigenisation. Indigenous employment policies were being implemented, although mostly only in the Indigenous unit, rather than across the range of possible university appointments.
At that time I was unemployed for the first time since I began teaching in 1986. I gained sessional (part-time) teaching in the School of Education at the University of Western Sydney (UWS). This was the first time I had taught with mainstream non-Indigenous Australian university students. I was a bit wary, and very uncertain and found the enormous lecture hall foreign in pedagogical terms. This was quite different from the empowering pedagogy of working in a circle of learners in small rooms with Aboriginal students. UWS had just dismantled and restructured its own Indigenous education units and my teaching was totally in the mainstream for the first time during my employment in higher education. After three semester contracts at UWS, I gained sessional teaching at the another University in its School of Education. Within a few weeks this changed to a full time load with both Indigenous residential teaching and mainstream teacher education students. Clearly my experience with Aboriginal teachers enabled this improvement in my employment prospects and opportunities.

6. The next employment at the Sub Urban School of Education was predicated on my extensive work in Indigenous residential block programs. I was appointed as a sessional lecturer to work in the residential teacher education program. This workplace differs from all the above as the School of Education operates the course and the Indigenous Unit is a Support Centre for students. A few years later I was asked to Coordinate the Primary Indigenous programs. In a way this was my coming full circle and, although ironic and self-effacing, a number of Indigenous students congratulated me on becoming the Coordinator. The above detail of work environments is important for the reader to recognise since these experiences outside the matters specifically elaborated upon in the research texts have also decisively influenced the meanings and practices that are elaborated within the content of this thesis. Despite everything that the above tale of my journey implies, this thesis does not attempt to provide a comprehensive coverage of the trials and tribulations, nor the excitement and the joy of the rich life in Indigenous higher education contexts.
1.7 Common organisational structures in Indigenous Higher Education

1.7.1 Block mode or Residential program as a structure

A central aspect of many Indigenous higher education programs is the use of block mode or residential learning, also referred to as mixed mode to indicate a distance education or flexible online learning component. Block attendance programs are presented in the contexts discussed in Research Texts One, Three and Four. These contexts situate the learners on campus for two or more intensive weeks of lectures and study each semester. One outcome of the compressed time frame of these models is that the students in these programs are often unfamiliar with the mainstream support structures available within the universities. Technically, students could access increased support, both mainstream and that provided by an Indigenous Support Unit, although learners are typically unable to access on-campus services due to the organisational and administrative arrangements, including time restraints, associated with the implementation of block programs. These programs leave minimal time for students to access services, except during initial orientation to the institution. Research by Bourke et al (1996) showed that retention rates for Indigenous learners tend to improve in more culturally-appropriate Indigenous environments as these are less threatening than mainstream environments. The complexity of course structure and pedagogy is explored in the relevant Research Texts and the corresponding literature that is then linked to the inquiry.

1.7.2. Community based-ness

Some Indigenous programs of study are sub-titled ‘community-based’. The term has various layers of meanings. Firstly, community-based means that the students are able to live in their home community, attending residential blocks as required on campus each semester. Community-based also indicates that the knowledge being privileged incorporates the perspectives from Indigenous communities. In pedagogical terms, this means the community perspective is brought to the teaching and learning experience, informing the curriculum with

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14 NB: Community-based programs may include a distance or flexible learning component, however the main difference is the relationship to the students' local community.
knowledge from lived experience (the community knowledge informing learning beyond merely individual ideas). In pedagogical terms community-based teaching and learning means engaging community knowledge in the classroom through negotiation in and around the intended curriculum as accredited by the university. The institutions that emphasised community-based knowledge enabled my praxis to be informed by many students and staff, and community members. This perspective sharing could significantly shift the intended direction and meaning of the studies, as students challenged my knowledge position and, in turn, my praxis.

Being community-based also meant that educators (myself and others) made visits to Indigenous communities, mainly to support learners. A significant outcome of being invited into a community is being able to gain insights or knowledge of matters that are unlikely to be written in texts or journal articles. For example, interactions with community members sometimes provided access to oral histories mediated by elders who have the authority to decide who may be told their stories.

1.7.3. Enclaves in Indigenous higher education

An enclave is an Indigenous support entity that provides administrative and tutorial support to Indigenous students who are studying at a university. The enclave does not usually have control of a degree course, but may have Indigenous academic staff teaching in courses belonging to a university faculty. Two of the Research Texts present workplaces that are examples of enclaves.

On enclave programs, Reid refers to Deidre Jordan:

In 1986, the NAEC emphasised that enclave programs had a defined set of essential elements including special entry provision, academic assistance, separate facilities and the requirement that this should involve a standard teacher education course (NAEC, 1986, 15). An enclave is, therefore, distinct from a group program – which is specifically designed for Aboriginal students only. Enclave support programs had good

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15 An exception to the community-based model is the RATEP model, implemented since 1990 at James Cook University. This program is a very different model, using technology to deliver the program into the remote communities of Queensland and the Torres Strait (York & Henderson, 2003).
outcomes increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers from 72 in 1979 to 220 in 1982 across Australia (Reid, 2004, pp.86-7)

The intention of the NAEC was to ensure enclaves enabled Aboriginal worldviews to become integral to teacher education programs (Reid, 2004, p.87). Enclaves are recognised within many universities as Indigenous Support Units, staffed mainly by Indigenous administrative staff. These enclaves do not have a significant role in teaching Indigenous students enrolled in degree courses. Hence the process by which an Indigenous worldview is given recognition within the degree courses of universities is problematic if such ontology is to be part of the expectation of the Indigenous Support Unit. The enclave and its purpose differs significantly from Indigenous teaching institutes within universities.16 Contrasting views of Indigenous academics to enclaves are discussed further in the fourth level portrayal of Chapter Six, at the Sub Urban School of Education.

1.8. The thesis objectives and research questions

1.8.1. The objectives of the thesis:

1. To interrogate my experiences in order to understand my praxis in Indigenous contexts;
2. To reflect on the discursive knowledge relationships and connectedness of self with Indigenous colleagues and students in four professional contexts;
3. To explore my experiences through portrayals in order to illuminate a range of contestations and tensions in being within Indigenous tertiary education;
4. To provide evidence of understanding engagement in the workspace; the micro-social and micro-political aspects of workspace interests.

1.8.2. The research questions

Guiding the research and memory data collection were the following research questions:

1. What have I learnt in my roles in Indigenous higher education contexts?
2. Does the autobiographical approach provide a coherent source of knowledge based on my experience?

16 The enclave examples that occur in the Research Texts Text 2 and 4 are critiqued in the relevant chapters, and provide contrasting experiences of Indigenous teaching institutes (located in Research Texts 1 and 3).
3. Does the application of the narrative inquiry method adequately bring into relation the contexts and analysis of the narratives?

4. Do the research texts critically reflect upon my role and the shifts in my praxis?

5. How have discourses in differing contexts affected my roles?

The above objectives and questions form the major interests of my research exploration. In reconceptualising critical theory, the aim is to show my personal engagement through the analysis of workspace interactions with Indigenous academics and students. This critical engagement, as a whitefella positioned with colonising privilege located in Indigenous environments, enabled me to be further employed in other Indigenous environments. The above critical ideas challenge and engage my research agenda.

1.9. Significance of the study

In embarking upon this research I anticipate providing a legacy of critical reflection for the many non-Indigenous educators that share the experience of working within Indigenous education contexts. I hope this is an engaging account for educators who want also to reflect upon their role with similar intentions of seeking paths and strategies through the barriers of higher education - to appreciate the shared struggle with institutional structures in the context of Indigenous education.

As stated earlier, few academics have written about the role of non-Indigenous educator in the (Indigenous) higher education sector. Catherine McConaghy provides a unique analysis of the Indigenous education tertiary sector as a context that is:

>a highly contested terrain ... claims and counter claims ... to transform the lives of Indigenous people ... a number of traditions .. as a paternalistic form of welfarism; assimilationism, which seeks to institutionalise colonial mimicry; cultural relativism, which promotes cultural sensitivity and tolerance; and radicalism, which seeks to invert colonial power relations... despite shifts in approach to Indigenous education a number of core assumptions remain intact across each of these competing traditions. … common assumptions as a form of culturalism. (McConaghy; 2000, p.xi).

Alerted to the concerns of the traditions outlined by McConaghy, my thesis attempts to recognise the paternalism, the assimilationism and the radical
approaches in the contexts explored. Further my writing shares the concerns for the manner in which non-Indigenous academics approach the Indigenous workspace and the ensuing construction of ‘culturalism’ as a fixed concept. In a contrasting way my writing seeks to confront aspects of culturalism, as I seek to critically examine the dynamics of my roles as positioned in relation to the discourses impacting upon the contexts under study.

Peter Gale (1997) also provides an important analysis on the representation of Indigenous education and the place of non-Indigenous educators. He researched attitudes of tertiary educators engaged in Indigenous education. Gale suggested that many non-Indigenous educators act as ‘professional gatekeepers’ excluding many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from becoming accredited within the profession (1997, p.195). Such findings indicate a common barrier in the pursuit of professional achievement, reflecting a particular mindset by some non-Indigenous educators. Gales’ research emphasises that issues of standards are central to the conflicting opinions and philosophical differences held by educators. “The role of maintaining academic standards is also constituted by ethnocentric, stereotyped representations of Aboriginality” (1997, p.196). This viewpoint, that Gale claims many educators hold, that a person’s Aboriginality indicates a need for compensatory learning is both confronting and paternalistic. If an educator is going to make headway in countering such ideologically grounded views then the questioning of one's own role, given that I have been shaped by the same general ideological traditions of a colonising nation, requires deep and critical reflection.

Taking a lead from Gale and McConaghy, my writing documents an exploration of self and purpose, and questions the taken-for-granted assimilative practices of higher education as a form of public education. There is also significance in this thesis as a study of whiteness and the impact upon cross-cultural educational work (Morton-Robinson, 2004; Fine et al, 1997). Further, the research is framed by critical, phenomenological and postcolonial theories, to reflect upon my lived experience in Indigenous environments.
This thesis is significant as a culmination of twenty years in the relationally rich, life-enhancing cultural interfaces that have enabled me to confront the roles played by whitefellas as educators. The thesis encounters some of the multi-layered struggles that face many Indigenous learners in university life but does not attempt to essentialise or stereotype ‘the other’. One limitation of this representation is the lack of Indigenous student voice in the thesis, but then, this research has not been designed as either participatory or action research.

Considerable research over the years has focussed on structural barriers to the success of Indigenous learners, and has considered to a lesser extent the micro-social aspects of workplace interests (Bin-Sallick et al, 1994; Bourke et al, 1996; Daniel-DiGregorio et al, 2000; Farrington et al, 2001). However, this study explores my actions and roles amongst the discourses and the consequent influences shaping the cultural interface. The study presents institutional and community informed experiences in an educationally “other” sphere (as in different from mainstream or dominant western cultural sphere). These experiences bring differing dimensions to the historical and micro-social realities of Australian higher education with a particular focus upon Indigenous educational programs.

1.10. Influences upon academic practices
Central to framing this study is the locating and understanding of discourses or influences exerted within the particular workplaces under investigation. One prominent discourse in Indigenous contexts is the determination to bring inclusive perspectives of Indigenous culture to curricula and teaching (McConnochie & Tucker, 1990; CEO, 1995; Williams, 1996). My work with Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues (Williams, 2007) evidenced such an emphasis and sensitivity to students’ lived experience as contemporary forms of cultural practices and, through such sensitivity, encourage shifts in teaching practices with Indigenous adults.

The challenge has been to locate and critically understand the influences and attitudes or beliefs that affected my academic praxis and administrative decision-making. This thesis explores the complexities and the discourses for a
non-Indigenous educator engaging this institutional framework. Unlike ethnography that might relocate ‘the life of the Indigenous’, my writing seeks to explore the ‘other side’, the life of the non-Indigenous educator who has gained knowledge through embracing the rich tertiary learning and teaching environments within the organisation arrangements established by universities to promote the course completion and graduation of Indigenous students. My role and associated professional learning in these environments was to facilitate a negotiated space with the learners by seeking examples of the community experience of learners in order to contextualise (and strengthen) their relationship to the required outcomes in the various course units of study being undertaken. Collaborative learning (not to be confused with two-way learning) occurs with both staff and learners as teachers in this form of negotiation. This is not unique to Indigenous education (Boomer, 1982), but the emergent construction of knowledge can produce powerful lessons for the educator as learner. My intention in this thesis is to capture the spirit, content and outcomes of these learning encounters.

The next chapter looks more closely at the methodologies I have adopted in order to illuminate these personal and professional encounters.
Chapter Two: Methodology

Social theorists bring to their subjects their own preoccupations and commitments... a sense of their own distinctiveness; at the same time social theorists, if they are sympathetic and self-conscious, will find themselves changing in the process of appropriating other lives, strengthened in certain of their beliefs and values, altered in others (Fay, 1987, pp. 172-3).

This chapter outlines the methods that have been utilised to arrive at the 'cognitive outcomes' this thesis is designed to document. The overarching methodology used in this thesis is narrative inquiry. The four research texts are constructed using the methods of auto-ethnography, lived experience, memory work and phenomenology. The architecture of each research text is provided by four portrayals, each text creating separate chapters. Each inquiry is centred on a key narrative, based on a critical incident, as a core aspect of each research text.

Further on in this chapter, an explanation is given of the relationship of these research texts to disciplinary literature, and this involves an engagement with critical and postcolonial theories as well as the use of poetic devices as meaningful expressions of my identity and positioning.

2.1. Narrative Inquiry

The qualitative approach adopted for this thesis originates from the genre of Narrative Inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) and narrative knowing (Polkinghorne, 1988) utilising the method referred to as portrayal writing (as theorised by Piantanida and Garman, 1999). The work of Mary Beattie (1995a; 1995b and 2001) is informative in locating an approach to narrative inquiry that emphasises collaboration, collegiality and conversation as a means of professional learning in the context of self and community. Further to this, Peter Willis Inviting Learning (1998) was inspirational in providing a representative model of how this portrayal method might emerge. Willis presents examples of his life experience working with Indigenous adult and community education. He artfully employs the metaphor of the art gallery and so the texts become a series of panels for the reader to view.
Clandinin and Connelly (2000) believe that narrative inquiry presents a three dimensional space for the researcher. This space consists of three constructs: the personal and social dimension, temporality (past, present and future dimensions) and the context of place or situatedness. My narratives of workplace learning are also analysed using these three constructs or narrative tools. The interpretation of the narratives in my writing create bridges connecting at various points with my learning trajectory. Subsequently, these understandings serve to present challenging complexities to my reflection (inward, outward, backward and forward aspects), which then becomes an ongoing developmental feature of my narrative inquiry.

Clandinin and Connelly (2000) also emphasise the historical relationship between the writing by Dewey and the nature of narrative inquiry. The concept of continuity, the notion that experiences grow from other experiences, and lead to other experiences, relates to the above narrative ‘tools’. The following quote connects with my interests to explore workspaces:

Dewey’s (1938) notion of ‘situation’ and ‘experience’ makes it possible to imagine a teacher not so much as a maker of curriculum but as part of it and to imagine a place for context and culture. Dewey’s notion of interaction and temporality (both past and future) contained in Dewey’s notion of continuity... (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p.38).

The non-Indigenous educator is also situated and interacts temporarily within the context and culture of the Indigenous education environment. The temporality of the educator’s situation and notions of continuity of workspace are contentious aspects. The temporality of workspace interaction is explored throughout the research texts, particularly in the contexts of the narrative portrayals.

Clandinin and Connelly use the term wakefulness, or ongoing reflection, to express the central feature of narrative inquiry. This reflective consciousness has been a central concept in the application of critical theory to my research and in the writing this thesis. This commonality and strength of purpose indicates a close thread of interpretation that emerges as the methods of inquiry and theoretical intention are closely aligned. I see ‘reflective consciousness’ as a re-creation of praxis, utilized by some educators possibly
to blur the origins of the term from Freire “in analysis of dialogue being equal to action and reflection”, (Freire, 1971, p. 60).\textsuperscript{17}

My narrative intent emerges from the philosophical approaches and interests of Dilthey (in Crotty, 1998), Habermas (in Carr & Kemmis, 1983) and the interpretations applied by Fay (1987). As Fay stated:

\textit{\ldots one can never fix a life in a definitive story because as new causal outcomes resulting from this life occur, the narrative of this life will change.\ldots This is directly relevant to the notion of transparency as conceived by critical social science\ldots such a science is committed to the view that human history is open-ended because its direction is a function of the choices of those who make it\ldots But it is just this open-endedness which makes the narratives in a critical theory of peoples’ lives necessarily incomplete} (1987, p.167).

This critical assessment also applies to my narratives that are similarly incomplete; the fragments of my life being brought together in the Research Texts provide an illustration of the complexities at those specific workspaces. Fay speaks of ‘anticipatory narratives’ and that any narrative “must be inherently fragmentary and tentative” (1987, p.167). The dichotomy of presenting an individualist viewpoint on collective educational endeavour is also reflective of this fragmentary and tentative re-presentation.

This method embodies ongoing reflection as a way of developing and engaging with the research. As stated above, the narrative inquiry methodology presents a conceptual framework to interpret the authentic voice of myself as the educator’s life experience. The next section explores the Portrayal approach as presented by Piantanida and Garman (1999), that is, the framework for writing each chapter, which are the Research Texts, within a narrative inquiry method.

2.2. The Portrayal approach to present the narrative inquiry
The Portrayal approach (as outlined by Piantanida and Garman, 1999) creates a structure for the layered writing and interpretation of the thesis. Each Research Text emerges from differing workplaces, bringing differing contexts, situations and complexities to the study.

\textsuperscript{17}praxis - noun meaning ‘translating an idea into action’; as listed in word.net (accessed on 20th April 2007)
My structure adapts the method as follows: firstly, an opening portrayal of each workspace situation is presented in order to gain a description of the context. In the second portrayal, the narrative of a critical incident is retold by myself. The third portrayal focuses on the implications and lessons learnt from the narrative experience. The fourth presents the literature, based on the themes generated from the narrative in portrayal two, enabling links to be established between the experience recounted in this thesis and the way the disciplinary literature contributes to that account. The inquiry is linked across the fourth level of analysis to create the concluding synthesis of the thesis.

The four chapters constituting the body of the thesis, are comprised of four Research Texts, each a chapter made up of the four portrayal levels. These Texts present studies of my lived experience in four workspaces. Each Text has a contextual introduction to the work environment. There is a core narrative, the essence of the phenomenon which explores a conscious act within a specific situation. The third portrayal provides an analysis of the learning gained through the specific situation, and the fourth portrayal relates the themes of the situation from the narrative to explore the relevant literature.

2.3. Assessing the Portrayal method of narrative inquiry

I have reflected upon each set of portrayals by carefully considering each of the following questions that Piantanida and Garman (1999) outline for assessing the portrayal method. They provide the criteria by which I have been able to assure myself that the qualities embedded in the research texts remain open to scrutiny during the writing process:

*Integrity (as in architecture): is the work structurally sound? Is the research rationale identifiable in an inquiry tradition? Using proper voice?*

*Verite’ (verisimilitude): Is it consistent with accepted knowledge in the field? Or if it departs, does it address why? Does it fit within the discourse? ....*

*Rigour: is there sufficient depth of intellect, rather than superficial or simplistic reasoning? Are conclusions carefully crafted from data? Does the researcher avoid solipsistic reasoning? Was reflection systematic?*

*Utility: is inquiry useful/professionally relevant? Does it contribute to established bodies of discourse? .... scholarly audience? Is it educative?*
Vitality: is inquiry meaningful? Does it have a sense of vibrancy, intensity and excitement of discovery? Do metaphors communicate powerfully?

Aesthetics: is it enriching to anticipate and experience? Does it give insight into my educational self? Are connections revealed in provocative, evocative…moving ways? Does work challenge…unsettle?

Ethics: is there evidence that privacy and dignity have been afforded all participants? Is enquiry conduct careful and honest? Are views…accurate?

(an abbreviated extract from Piantanida & Garman, 1999, p.148)

The above criteria provide a guiding set of ideas parallel to the critical theory stance that I have engaged. To further clarify the term verisimilitude: “To borrow from Bruner (1986) means that the phenomenon and context under study have been rendered with sufficient detail so that they are recognizable as truly conceivable experience” (Piantanida and Garman, 1999, p.134).

The criteria of aesthetic qualities and the appreciation of such depends upon interpretation by the reader. They too create part of the author’s apprehension in the writing of the narrative. Bruner takes this further and asserts that the audience and social context are essential ingredients in constructing writing, in stating: “A life as lived is what actually happened… A life as told, a life history, is a narrative, influenced by the cultural conventions of telling, by the audience, and by the social context.. (Bruner 1984, cited in Glesne;1999, p.178)”.

Corrine Glesne presents ideas from Eisner to consider further ways of representation:

Eisner (1997, p.8) discusses five reasons for choosing alternative forms of representation:
1. a sense of empathy for research participants;
2. providing a sense of particularity and authenticity;
3. generating insight and attention to complexity;
4. increasing the kinds of questions that researchers can ask as they think within new mediums and
5. making better use of the variety in researchers’ representational abilities (Glesne, 1999, p.180).
The above five reasons can also be viewed as conditions that align with the portrayal format, and the phenomenological approach. Glesne also emphasises the re-presentational value of poetic transcription for interpretative clarity. Similarly, I have judged that the inclusion of two poetic forms, one at the beginning and one at the end of each third portrayal, provide an alternative representation of the impact of the narrative upon my personal understanding.

2.4. Critical incidents in the thesis structure
In preparing for this research and for its documentation meant exploring my memory to settle on appropriate and significant material that could be pertinent for the core narrative in each chapter. The narrative portrayals are used to describe vividly the critical incidents from my workspace experiences.

Over the years I kept diaries with varying degrees of detail. I made a careful review of these diaries, although sometimes these were less informative than the A4 notepads I used daily at each workplace. After the workplace tensions at Clifton, detailed in Research Text Two (Chapter Four), I began keeping more detailed notes of the actions taken each day. Every day I wrote down reminders of the urgent student requests, telephone conversations, staff interactions, day to day teaching and learning notes, critical issues to consider in future planning meetings. All this material was used as an aide to memory. This material assisted in recreating the narratives and my perspectives on the implications of the situations deemed significant to my thesis structure. After completing the process of analysis and synthesis of this written record, I accept the narrative portrayals as appropriate frames for critical incidents. The narratives are retold using pseudonyms and only myself being identified. 18

Mezirow (in Boud & Walker, 1991), Brookfield (1995) and Tripp (1993) all provide similar methods of developing a critical incident, emphasising that practitioners learn from their teaching practice. As Tripp states:

Many people, and teachers are no exception, are actually very interested in knowing more about how they operate, for that knowledge increases their power and effectiveness. Critical incidents can be very important in that process because they provide a means of enabling teachers to be

18 And interesting to note the importance I have placed upon recording ‘literarily’ my story.
more aware of the nature of their professional values and associated problematics, to question their own practice, and to concretise their generally abstract notions of values such as social justice... (1993, p.5). Examples of critical incidents, as presented by Dawn Francis (1997), emphasise the importance of learning both the form of questioning necessary to critical theorizing and the communication skills needed for negotiation and challenge in a community of inquirers. Francis emphasised that:

Identifying social justice and a cultural and biographical location of self in incident analysis is limited to the very constructions we are attempting to understand. As a professional woman without children I cannot ‘know’ parenting and its part in the discourse we engage in as my students who are parents do. I can not know racism as Aboriginal students do (1997, p.170).

Francis suggests that critical incidents allow issues to be raised and create doubt (also noted by John Van Maanen, 1995). This is yet another dimension of the view that all knowing we construct is partial. At best educators could collectively analyse socially constructed understandings, and raise to a more conscious level the embodied values that underpin what we can know of working together. One set of socially constructed understandings relevant to my research informs the evolving practices that resist the pressures of re-assimilation (back to formal or standard academic practices). Aspects of academic practices will be explored through critical incidents to indicate that this is a shift in practice that transcends pedagogy and should not result in renewed forms of paternalism.

2.5. Methods of inquiry: autoethnography, life history, memory work and phenomenology

The investigation at the heart of this thesis emerges substantively from qualitative research, especially using the methods of autoethnography, through the extensive interrogation of my memory. As I developed an understanding of autoethnography (Ellis and Bochner, 1997 and Bochner and Ellis, 1996 in Denzin and Lincoln, 1997) and life history, I realised the central role these methods play for my representations, the Research Texts and the overall thesis narrative. These qualitative conceptual tools connect to hermeneutic traditions, phenomenological and critically reflexive methodologies:
The research uses the above qualitative research methods in the following ways:

- autoethnographic studies of self working cross-culturally to provide rich descriptions in particular contexts;
- critical research upon my reflective practice and patterns that emerge through the web of my life experience;
- hermeneutics and phenomenology enable a conceptual emphasise grounded in life experiences;
- my life history is retold using a stream of consciousness approach, expressed in the narratives, and unconstrained by formal academic writing.

The techniques of research are:

- Data recollection requiring extensive memory work;
- an autobiographical form of narrative inquiry;
- interpretative practices;
- perspectives from critical, phenomenological and postcolonial theories.

Crotty reminds me that phenomenology ‘requires us to place our usual understandings in abeyance and have a fresh look at things’ (1998, p.80). Phenomenology is further described by Merleau-Ponty (in Ehrich, 2003) as requiring the elements of: description, suspension of taken-for-granted assumptions, the essence of experience, and the significance of the idea. The methods employed in constructing the narrative of this thesis have a similar phenomenological structure. The first portrayal that describes the context of the research text. The essence of the experience is the core narrative of the research text. The third level presents the implications of the narrative upon the work environment, and equates to the phenomenological reduction or the suspension of taken-for-granted assumptions. This is also referred to as the bracketing of ideas, and by Husserl as epoche (Ehrich 2003, p.49), as a technique to ensure that theoretical prejudices do not contaminate the description of the experience. The significant meaning of the idea, the intentionality, is evident as the interpretation of such meaning from the narrative as these are related to literature at the fourth level of my thesis.

In Max van Manens’ terms (1995), the phenomenologist locates the pedagogical meaning in the act being viewed, the critical incident. In my portrayals, the situation being scrutinised is related to a teaching experience, but may not be a specific analysis of my own teaching, but rather of my course
of action in that situation. The phenomena central to the research are the critical incidents encompassed in each narrative portrayal. These emerge from my autobiographical accounts of my lived experiences. To express this learning I knew that phenomenology was the area of philosophy that would make sense as a theoretical tool. I recognised the importance of shifting my gaze from biography, ethnography to autobiography and memory work.

‘Lived experience’ was a term I became aware of when working with a Koorie teacher education program almost twenty years ago. Before that time I had formally studied traditional cultures as part of a Graduate Diploma of Arts (Aboriginal studies), and had some experience of contemporary and traditional Indigenous cultures. The term ‘lived experience’ enabled a better understanding or realisation of contemporary Koorie life as authentic Indigenous culture. Schratz and Walker (1995) also influenced my understanding of the power of personal experience, and the place of action in a practical research theory.

Phenomenological theorist Max van Manen (1995) emphasises the telling of lived experience and the seeking of the essence of consciousness. However, the intensity of residential Indigenous programs meant that consciousness was acted upon instantly, not always enabling the reflection and presence of mind associated with a deliberate and self scrutinising consciousness. My representation of life history, or lived experience was also influenced by the writing of Hatch & Wisnieski (1995) and Miller (2001). Bullough and Pinnegar (2001) use the term self-study research to express the autobiographical form of practitioner research in education. My adopted process embodies the above aspects and terms, and generally defaults to ‘lived experience’ in the thesis.

The second level of portrayal, the narratives, contain critical incidents that I retell using a stream of consciousness of the experience in a workplace, and each presents a learning of the role of the non-Indigenous educator. The process of writing this thesis has meant a letting go of layers of emotional and interpersonal micro-political baggage that had accumulated in my memory.
The personal politics invested in the workspaces cannot be overstated, although I will concede that I perhaps understate the micro-political realities. Argyris (1993) presented the term ‘wicked problems’ to express the embarrassing or threatening ‘hot’ situations that occur in educational administration. Such phrases are appealing, even tempting for their playfulness, but that terminology is not utilised.

I chose to use qualitative methods to understand my learning from the specific situations at cultural interfaces. This space is a complex, multilayered continuum of experience: action, contestation, dialogue, learning and meaning. In researching such experiences, no claims are made that my memory work is other than subjective. My memory is interrogated in each of the Research Texts, exploring interpretations of action, and subsequent learning and meaning. In fact the subjective/objective dualism is transcended by the research methodology adopted here.

The anticipated complexities of this autoethnographic research also had to include consideration of the cultural sensitivities and methodological issues as an insider participant/researcher in each context. Understanding that each workspace - where practitioner interaction takes place - is a differing cross-cultural space, makes it important to emphasise as such an understanding provides a buffer against stereotyping all Indigenous tertiary workspaces as the same, or even perhaps as ‘basically similar’. The developing connectedness between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and staff is a professional relationship that often emerges from engaging in local community actions that tend to blur the distinction between the professional and the personal.

2.6. Literature review in the thesis structure
The fourth level of portrayal examines the generative themes from the analysis of the narrative in relationship to a review of the literature. Within the fourth portrayal level, the literature linkages may also relate to earlier Research Texts, providing a linking of themes at this level of analysis. For example the experiences of resistance and voice are briefly explored in Text Two as they relate more substantially to a similar theme explored in Text Three. In practice such links to research strengthen the rigour and verisimilitude (Piantanida and
Garman 1999, p.148) of the thesis. The research literature is presented in the Research Texts where the particular theme is prominent, hence the literature is located to support the most relevant Research Text.

2.7. Engaging critical and postcolonial theories
The two frameworks of critical and postcolonial theories inform my construction and analysis of the narratives. This engagement with critical theory and postcolonial theoretical constructs is evidenced in these explorations of the ‘whiteness’ of self as educator. As an overarching principle, critical social science operates upon the thesis as a confrontation and cross-examination of my ideological position.

In the first chapter I have mentioned the critical focus on my praxis, and its origins with my study of Freire. The consideration of praxis leads me to gain an understanding of a theoretical way by which my reflexive situatedness in educational work can be accounted for. Stephen Kemmis (1999) explains the approach taken by his colleagues to comprehend their practice in critical research. He stated that he and his colleagues could not properly understand the practice:

...1. unless we understood the way another person practicing looked to us; 2. if we didn’t see it as a pattern; 3. if we didn’t see it as guided by the intentions and meanings and significances for the individual; 4. if we didn’t see it as taking place in the social framework and structure which gives it wider significance; and 5. ... if we did not see it as evolving, shifting and changing, reproducing and transforming through time (Kemmis interviewed in Deakin University Faculty of Education Methodologies Study Guide, 1998, p. 67).

In his Radford lecture Kemmis refers to Habermas as guiding the critical social science research methodology.

But one of the key features of his argument is his critique of the philosophy of the subject. He argues that truth resides not in the mind of individual cognitive subjects (though both objectivism and subjectivism had presupposed that it did) but in the eternal conversation of people who interrupt what they are doing to ask "Is it comprehensible?" "Is it true (in the sense of accurate)?" "Is it morally right (appropriate)?" "Is it truthfully (i.e.; sincerely) stated?" That is, communicative action erupts whenever people stop their goal-oriented action to question whether it is right and proper to be doing what they were doing under current circumstances and in the light of consequences that will echo through the
Kemmis presents the aims for a critical social science that supports my interpretation of the critical orientation I have adopted here. In viewing the theory of *knowledge-constitutive interests*, I interpret from Kemmis that this thesis based in hermeneutic traditions is guided by the practical interest, educating the non-Indigenous educator to *see more wisely, and to act more prudently* (Kemmis, 2000, p.3). The third area of interest advanced by Habermas, as set out by Kemmis, is to advance the cause of critical theory *guided by an emancipatory interest*. Whilst I have similar intent, this research is only emancipatory in operating upon the position of crisis for the non-Indigenous i.e. only to reflect the crisis of my position in intercultural interfaces. My critical intent is to confront my ideological beliefs (and my praxis) as a way of interrogating the 'left progressive' position which I too unashamedly adopt at the cultural interface.

Similar to the critical orientation, postcolonial theory is presented to confront my role as a ‘white’ educator in Indigenous workspaces. The question arises: how do ‘white’ educators shift their perspective and relationship within institutions that have nurtured their ‘normal’ practices? My beginning assumption was that if practices are critical and conscious of knowledge and power structures, then an educator (myself) may work within a university with a resistance perspective, and embody a shift from ‘colonialist’ practices. (That I could maintain integrity of my ideological position, which is left and sometimes radical, in working for Indigenous rights).

Leela Gandhi in examining Postcolonialism and the new humanities states:

*If the postcolonial intellectual has a political vocation, then it inheres, as we have been arguing, in a commitment to facilitate a democratic dialogue between the Western and non-Western academies, and in so doing, to think of a way out of the epistemological violence of the colonial encounter. But equally, this commitment comes with an infrequently heeded obligation of humility* (Gandhi, 1998, p.63).

The above stated commitment resonates with my praxis, in relation to the virtues of 'humility' and also of 'obligation'. Obligations, or reciprocity of relationships, that rest upon non-Indigenous educators in relation to Indigenous
learners, may be either embraced or negated. And that means epistemological matters are also encountered in the Research Texts, when consideration is given to any institutional form of ‘the epistemological violence of the colonial encounter’ (as stated by Gandhi).

Evaluating the post-colonial is a recurring topic in considering the position of the non-Indigenous educator in the Indigenous higher education environment. The contentious matter being that assessing any place as ‘post’ colonial is highly problematic. Does such a place exist in an educational institution? Linda Tuhiwai Smith Decolonising Methodologies (2000) brings into focus the issue of reversing the colonised mindset of learning that many Indigenous people experience. With similar intent, this thesis provides a basis for non-Indigenous dialogue when open to the critique of Indigenous scholars. My hope is that the thesis provides a text that is engaging, challenging and productive for such a purpose; i.e., an attempt to produce a critical tool applicable to a post-colonialist purpose.

As outlined in Chapter One, my personal ideological beliefs align with a critical inquiry orientation. This ideology emerges from my life history prior to higher education and from working in Indigenous education. My ideological views inform my ethics, values and moral positions in teaching. And the Research Texts reveal the extent to which discourses and certain positions are embraced by my cultural situatedness. Achieving a self-critical interpretation of these positions (i.e. the educators’ cultural and ideological beliefs) guides the contextual layer of description in the Research Texts (Portrayal One of each text).

In retrospect critical perspectives intersect significantly with my personal narrative. There is indeed a dialectical approach which demands consideration of subjective, objective as well as individual and community perspectives. Through this auto-biographical narrative inquiry, the thesis intends to create a dialogue with a critical confrontation of praxis. The reflexive turn to past, present and future also links to the manner in which many Indigenous
educators frame knowledge and learning, and also indicates that critical social science is compatible with narrative inquiry as a framework for understanding.

Critical social science provides the ideological framework that intersects with the portrayals to evaluate and interpret the narratives and their implications from the Research Texts. The combination of perspectives, critical and postcolonial, places my research firmly in a tradition of working at the borders of reflective praxis (not, as yet, emancipatory except in the case of my self knowledge).

This thesis maps the learning trajectory that occurs for me and, by implication, a particular segment of non-Indigenous (predominantly Anglo-or European Australian) educators in cross-cultural settings (referred to as workspaces). The thesis explores my tracking back and forth on a reflective journey to tell of action, learning and meaning in these environments. Through this process the thesis will present the way that I gain knowledge and learn to act meaningfully.

2.8. Poetic devices in the thesis
2.8.1 Using metaphors for conveying meaning

Carefully crafted pieces of poetry are included to enable an alternative expression of my identity positions in each research text. The metaphors interspersed in my writing are placed to emphasise meaning, while they are established in the texts as literary devices within qualitative effects (Gubrium and Holstein, 1997). Similarly, for developing a narrative inquiry approach the use of metaphor is an expressive way of engaging the reader with a picture. I consider that metaphor both develops and distracts from my meaning as I interrupt texts with occasional localised metaphors. Care is exercised to craft meaningful metaphors able to transmit understanding to the reader.

Although the workspaces are varied geographically, across states and territories, I have avoided the most obvious (and perhaps logical) metaphor - that of the journey. After writing of experiences over a fifteen year span, the journey seems circular, even spiral (sometimes an upward and others a
downward direction) as I recognise and relearn anew with each workspace. However, the learning circle or spiral is a commonplace metaphor for many forms of teaching. There is less rigidity in this metaphor, and reflects the engaging pedagogical tension that exists for the educator as different forms of relating is experienced.

The metaphor of the spiders’ web draws me in, the web is very complex, artistic, convincing, enticing even mesmerizing as presented by Lisa Ehrich (2003) as she explains her application of the method with phenomenological research. Peter Willis (1998) skilfully uses the metaphor of an art gallery and its curator, to represent the relationship of the portrayals to the thesis. I considered emulating his format, treating each narrative as a view, or an installation. Willis’s use of poetic representation was influential, and is adopted in my thesis to support the third level of portrayal of each Research Text presented. Viewing each portrayal as an installation is tempting as a vehicle for representation. However, my use of metaphors is fragmented and varied, in contrast to the prominence of metaphor that Indigenous story tellers and educators skilfully incorporate in their knowledge production. My use of metaphor is mainly located in the poetised response in each of the research texts (as part of the third level portrayal). The garden can convey the importance of reciprocal relationship, caring and tending, connecting regularly and appreciating the environment, the ambience, the presence of nature. Although I prefer a less contained garden, I do not want an out of control environment, nor a hostile learning space. This metaphor could verge on unintended and unwarranted notions of the civilised and untamed, trimmed and neat versus natural and unhindered. This metaphor if applied and used critically to interpret my narratives could reveal re-colonising tendencies in my practices and workspaces! Therefore, I hasten slowly to retell the experiences, to structure the Research Texts and the portrayals, as well as consider engaging metaphors where appropriate. After considering the substance of the thesis I know that terms such as: threads/entanglements, ‘knottily engaged with’ resonate strongly as appropriate metaphor. Lisa Ehrich’s metaphor of the spider’s web explains her phenomenological method. As she states:
... the spider in this scenario is none other than the phenomenologist, who spins the phenomenological web. Unlike arachnids who weave webs in order to catch prey, the phenomenologist as spider weaves a web so that he or she can understand the structures of lived experience. An important quest ... is to weave a web that uncovers meaning structures (2003, p.44).

Such clarity of purpose I intend to emulate, as Michael Crotty shows the richness of metaphor used by Merleau-Ponty to emphasise a suspicion of our culturally derived meanings to give new insights:

Merleau-Ponty tells us (1962, p. xiv) that ‘in order to see the world and grasp it as paradoxical, we must break with our familiar acceptance of it’. Once phenomenology ‘slackens the intentional threads which attach us to the world’ we experience the upsurge and can ‘watch the forms of transcendence fly up like sparks from a fire’... Our phenomenological endeavour to break with inherited understandings ‘awakens a wild-flowing world and mind’ (Crotty, 1998, p.80).

Crotty and Merleau-Ponty eloquently provided images to illuminate their phenomenological intent. This thesis brings the experience of sparks as well as wild flowering vistas in my garden.

2.8.2. The use of irony

Each of the second portrayals is subtitled to give a sense of irony. The purpose being to create a typically alternative Australian (or perhaps Indigenous to this land) label for describing the situation being examined. A day at the beach, in the Yarrabool Narrative, an ironic sub title signifying enjoyment, relaxation and being away from real work. The phrase is a foil to the actual learning that ensued, about a massacre site, previously unrecognised by non-Indigenous historians.

For the Clifton text I considered some tangible allusion to the dense rainforest as a jungle or unknown territory (coordinating the access course in hostile environs due to disharmony amongst staff). My eventual choice was the phrase: A night at the flicks, another event with an expectation of pleasure. The flicks being the cinema, a normally enjoyable space, became a site of questioned motives, suspicions about intent and purpose.

The place of metaphor rather than irony is emphasised in the sub title of the Tumbarumba portrayal as looking into the fishbowl. This represents being
under close inspection, although not especially ironic the fishbowl conveys surveillance.

In the Sub Urban research text the narrative title is ‘in search of space’. Here the irony of attempting to locate a space to teach, that the students accept through negotiation. Room allocation for classes were at a building a few kilometres from the main campus, the administrative authority not anticipating the reaction to this action.

2.8.3. The use of poetry to disrupt the text

As I have indicated, each Research Text contains two poetic responses. One a metaphoric piece at the beginning of the third portrayal, as a brief reflective piece towards the end of the third portrayal. These are disruptive inasmuch as they break up the writing, and provide an alternative view of the research context and narrative devices. A second poem gives a more complete reflective summary of my thoughts on the workspace, and the context of the narrative.

2.9. Methodology and Indigenist Research

This thesis does not present a discussion on research ethics for Indigenous participants as this is not within the warrant of my research. This thesis does not explore Indigenous viewpoints or knowledge per se, but the working relationship between myself and Indigenous colleagues as staff or students.

2.10. Limitations of memory work

The portrayal approach demands a significant amount of memory work at the level of narrative portrayal. The rigour of the writing has meant layers of redrafting, sometimes many months apart. This means the essence of ideas or the original intention may shift in the writing process. A noticeable change was in seeking to let go of the angst of situations or untangle a view of the reality for myself at that particular time. As stated earlier, I have left out much of the good times, but I have also omitted much of the stressful times, times of euphoria, and times of deep sadness. 19

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19 Attending a joyous celebration at a recent end of course party for residential student, many students embraced and hugged each other, myself included. when I took my leave early in the evening. And so another memory stirs. A year earlier, a graduating student, Debbie had cried on my shoulder about some girl group jealousy issue affecting her
As mentioned earlier, the process for the selection of the narrative pieces was a difficult task, those chosen are situations that expressed different dilemmas of engagement at each workspace selected for the research texts. Herein I present my theorising on practises: the actions taken, the learning gained and the meaning in historical perspective.

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studies. She was knifed (and murdered) by her white boyfriend. Of this sad news I had been oblivious until that tearful evening at Graduation.
Chapter Three: Yarrabool and beyond
First Research Text: Listening to community
3.1. Portrayal One: phenomenon and context.

The Yarrabool Koorie Teacher Education program operated community-based courses using the block residential or intensive model. The teacher education program was initially under the auspices of the Faculty of Education of a Victorian university. The Yarrabool program had established a strong Indigenous epistemological influence or cultural impact within the courses, enabling students to maintain and enhance their Koorie identity and knowledge. As the Indigenous tertiary environment provided authentic academic teaching, the workspace was a strong cultural site also for staff. In these matters of epistemology, Yarrabool was a unique place overcoming the western institutional dominance of the university.

This residential program in the early 1990s entailed a different cohort of students being taught each fortnight (the approximate duration for the residential block), in a rotation of three blocks (first, second and third year students) each semester. This account seeks to describe these occasions which, for me, were extremely demanding in emotional and physical terms and tended toward personal dis-orientation.

Underlying my work at the Yarrabool site was a strong Indigenous rights agenda driven by the head of the programs, Karen. Her energy and community connectedness provided a significant background to understanding my role in that narrative. Each year when interviewing new applicants, Karen would be able to link up applicants to her knowledge of families, from the various Aboriginal nations that were shifted one hundred years earlier, to live on reserves around the state. Uncannily, Karen knew most Koorie family names, and which reserve people were originally came from. I developed a great respect for her knowledge of the Aboriginal communities. The interview process ensured that applicants were met personally, and almost every Indigenous applicant was introduced to the program through their aunts, uncles, brothers or sisters that were already in the course.
The focus of this text concerns the relationship between community spaces, learners and educators. The community spaces were the sites of learning for both Indigenous learners and non-Indigenous educators. This text seeks to illuminate an example of learning about a community context and the role of oral histories in a particular community (referred to as Coastland). At that time the Coastland activity was entirely community-driven, and was not in receipt of any research funding. Moreover, it was not then a part of my own writing or research.

My teaching for the Teacher Education course focused upon the educational experiences of students in order to locate the ‘hidden curriculum’, and to identify the social practices of schooling. The pedagogy adopted at Yarrabool turned away from distinct lectures and tutorials to a roundtable or workshop format facilitated by the lecturer. This format encouraged the learners to discuss their memories of education, to reflect upon their experiences and bring community experience to the learning tasks. Myself, as lecturer, acted as a guide to assist learners to interpret their life experiences as valid examples of educational practice. I worked as a facilitator, adapting the roundtable format to allow the ideas of students to be engaged and explored, to develop reflection upon contexts and allow perspectives to emerge in the Freirean tradition of "educational empowerment".

Learners constructed their educational auto-biographies, thereby providing a focus for their sharing of educational experiences. The shared perspectives enabled me, qua educator, to empathise with the students’ experiences. I regularly found the auto-biographies of learners to be confronting, irrespective of whether it was from learning the unwritten stories of individuals, families or their particular communities. And the learners did not easily give up such knowledge to allow it to be scrutinised by outsiders.

This cultural interface was characterised by a day-to-day situation of extreme tension with most staff frantically trying to do what needed to be done. There was an implicit expectation that the teaching staff would be available for students at all times throughout the residential. My role as a Lecturer in
education included being responsible for the general support of first year learners. (The photograph on my farewell plaque pictures me with the telephone virtually attached to my ear, an indication of the high level of telephone-based support we provided students living at a distance from the campus between residencies).

The DEST guidelines and the corresponding funding regulations for block-residential courses meant that the students were only on campus for a prescribed number of days each semester, approximately three blocks of visits of ten days each. A day might begin with driving the bus to the hostel, picking up students, discussing life matters, catching up on news from communities, returning to campus, teaching, sitting alongside learners as they talked through ideas for assignments, discussing their ideas and encouraging their responses.

In my role I worked with Koorie students who were studying to be primary or secondary teachers. One of the Units of study required various assignment tasks that encouraged Koori learners to engage in reflection on their experiences and memories of schooling. The empowerment motif in this unit of study was designed to encourage learners:

- to reflect on their own educational experiences, and
- to draw on those experiences, and
- to engage in educational policy matters.

But for me simply being located in that workspace meant I went beyond the teaching activities to hearing about the passing of relatives, health concerns about family members or general worries about other learners from the same community. Being connected to the community in this way meant considering perspectives and implications for any particular community project or relationship with local schools, or issues of sustainable farming or discussing new legislation in relation to Indigenous affairs. There were also unusual examples where necessary social support was required from me and other staff; for example, the urgent requests to help students shift out of their rental accommodation. This workspace gave me, and other staff, the sense of being connected to students’ lives, and the broader community outside the university. (This connectedness was unique in the range of Indigenous tertiary
environments explored in this thesis).

The course was described as ‘community-based’ (as has been explained in the Introduction). In the Yarrabool context the concept of a 'community-based' course also indicated that the knowledge being privileged was the perspective from the Indigenous community. This meant the students’ community perspectives were brought to the classroom, informing the curriculum with knowledge from lived experiences (the community knowledge also providing a context for understanding individual ideas). One of the effects of engaging community knowledge in the classroom was the resulting negotiation of curriculum.

Initially, I experienced tensions when, by attending to the learners, I found myself shifting from my curriculum assumptions and my intended teaching. However, such praxis became embraced. I initially expected that the exposition of theoretical material could be constrained or reordered as discussion shifted to the lived experiences of learners. Previous experience had alerted me to the way such residential blocks required a compression of material to fit the time available.

Being community-based also meant that the lecturing staff made visits to various Victorian Aboriginal communities, mainly to support learners. And for me, there was a very significant outcome from these community visits. I became aware of matters that were unlikely to be written in texts or journal articles and in particular got to know the dynamics of families and their relationships with educational structures and organisations.

Now, from this workspace, I came to understand the significant contribution made by the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) across the State in these communities. This is the umbrella organisation for the many local Aboriginal education consultative committees throughout Victoria. Knowing there were close links between the local

Indigenous leadership group and the VAEAI organisation reaffirmed the cultural significance of the tertiary place.

In the following narrative, I contrast two situations. The first is that faced by myself, as the visiting educator learning about a significant site. The second situation, described by Shaun's Story, against which the first is juxtaposed, concerns a young man who is not accepted as Aboriginal by the local community. These two contrasting situations illustrate examples of the role of the ‘outside’ non-Indigenous educator positioned in relation to community knowledge.

The narrative details a visit made to meet with Aboriginal community members, two of whom were students enrolled in the teacher education program. The substance of the visit related to a major assignment, a community-based research task, that was related to curriculum development and design undertaken by Koorie educators in their local school.

The narrative begins with Denise (a Koorie lecturer) and myself travelling to the community in the south west of Victoria.

3.2. Portrayal Two: a drive in the country and a day at the beach

Denise arrived early and we drove into a crisp autumn day. I was grateful to rest and be the passenger, through the landscape of lush pastures, fenced with old stone walls constructed by the descendants of convicts (and others) more than a century earlier. Rocks from lava flows, forming stony rises on the rolling hilly landscape. Thinking this could be a peaceful and relaxing drive, as we observed cows returning from diary in misty moist paddocks.

On the journey to Coastland, Denise and I discussed many issues, I did not have a preconceived notion of how our two day visit could link community knowledge with school curriculum. We sat quietly for some time, the travelling providing a pattern to engage my thoughts. Years of hitch-hiking taught me that being a passenger on a long journey allows considerable reflection on issues about which previously I may not have had time for
detailed thought.

My mind wandered, reflecting on a recent student saga that had developed from a difficult day into a community meeting up at Riverland, that had an even more difficult endpoint. Karen, the Coordinator, was a little alarmed after the interviews for the new first year intake. As one late applicant, Shaun, could not be linked to the families in the region where he lived.

Shaun was a first year student attending his first block residential. Some issues arose in relation to his identity, he was very upset as some students (Koories) said he was not a Koorie. Being of fairly big frame, Shaun began throwing his weight around. He yelled and screamed that he was a Koorie and that others had no idea about him or who his family were.

That was part of the problem – no one could advise or confirm who his family members were. On being told that he would not be accepted in the incoming cohort Shaun had an emotional upheaval in the student common room, and had yelled about what injustice he had faced by the discrimination of his own people. He was very angry, very upset. I was asked to liaise as I was in the role of first year coordinator. The community did not support his claim to be Indigenous; a meeting a few days earlier had re-affirmed their decision.

Shaun was very upset when I was asked to talk with him about the situation. He screamed abuse at Karen, the Coordinator, everyone evacuated the building as he threatened to harm others, and eventually himself. I talked with Shaun for some time, perhaps an hour. Shaun calmed, and I offered to find out about his options for continuing study. Others returned to the building and, taking their belongings, left for the day.

Denise asked “So how did it go with Shaun?”

[I thought back to the community meeting deciding the fate of Shaun, and the circumstances leading up to that meeting. I recounted to Denise the events up to that point. Shaun had wanted to take his concerns to a higher authority, he]
wanted to be accepted and continue his studies. A meeting was arranged with the Dean of the Faculty. Shaun was able to express his criticism and ‘stressors’ to the Dean, again I was asked to be present. Afterwards I drove Shaun to his accommodation in the institutional bus. The two of us in the vast space made for an awkward resonance of our voices. Shaun was quite upset with the outcomes of his trials. His options were limited and not to his liking. The next day I took Shaun to the railway station and he travelled back to his community.

A few weeks later I was asked to visit the community to attend a meeting being held at a local tertiary education centre. A number of community members were present. I was present as an observer, to take the message from the community back to the university. I felt uneasy in this role, I had no say in the matter being assessed. My stomach ached with an unnatural anxiety, like a feeling of emptiness not hunger. The meeting resolved that Shaun was not recognised as Aboriginal, and a brief statement was written, signed and forwarded to the University. This meant that Shaun could not access ABSTUDY support, so he could only study by being on-campus in the ‘mainstream’ program. The block residential course was not available to him.

“You know Denise, the meeting told Shaun that no-one knew his family. No-one could support his claim to Aboriginality. It didn’t feel good being there”.

We sat silent as Denise negotiated some traffic; then she said “Well, that’s how it is, he’s a whitefella wanting to be Koorie. He’s not the first and he won’t be the last.”

I replied: “Hmmm. Yes that’s the situation I have to accept, I’m just too naïve”.

Around lunchtime we arrived at the coastal township. Like the main streets of most rural towns, these were wide and the slow pace allowed a contemplation that was often foregone in busier city centres. While growing up in Victorian cities and suburbs I had not noticed the seemingly imperceptible growth and movement of community organisations from the periphery to the centre. I had
not personally experienced the tension of local community taking sides on issues of knowledge or history, or even simply matters of acceptance and access or participation in community life. The Koorie community had been developing within the wider community, almost invisibly, and over time becoming prominent and vocal. Yet here in this regional city, the local Koorie community met in the downtown spaces.

On the edge of the shopping precinct, we located the meeting room in the Education Department offices. There the local Koorie educators Miriam, Sandra and Charles met us. The three had various levels of involvement at local primary and secondary schools. All three were representatives of the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG). I had met Sandra and Charles earlier when they had visited the University campus, so introductions were a brief and friendly acknowledgement of our previous acquaintance. Meeting people on their home turf usually meant they were more relaxed, than on campus.

They briefed us on their project and their progress. These educators of the Koorie community were planning to bring aspects of their oral traditions into the educational space of secondary school. I reflected privately, wondering why we, as university staff, had been invited into this space, and not the teachers from the local schools. Issues like Koorie experience and connectedness – the Indigenous educators had similar lived experiences, and the non-Indigenous educators like me had been ‘trained-up’ with how to listen to Koories. I learnt to appreciate the way I was allowed to be trusted with others’ knowledge, to understand that I may be told something – but to respect the place of certain knowledge; or I may be present and engage a conversation – but that did not mean I had authority to talk about the subject, or to represent the views of others.

The Koorie educators had spread ‘butchers paper’ over a large table. They were writing ideas on the local environment and the oral traditions of local families and how they might integrate this knowledge into the school curriculum. They created a map of the region, their own interpretation of the
landscape and areas of importance.

In the afternoon we went for a short drive to the east of the town centre. We arrived at a place where a creek meandered through the headland to meet the sea. Here we were told of the massacre at this site of forebears, perhaps great grandparents, a little over a hundred years earlier. Charles vividly described the scene, the beach where families had camped, and the direction the local ‘landowners’ and police had come to carry out their retribution. Scores were gruesomely killed on the sandy beach, many buried up to their necks in the sand, and their heads belted until the neck was broken, or the head decapitated from the body. No police records were kept of this event. The gravity of the place, the sense of significance weighed heavily upon me, and no doubt upon the others too. Quite likely neither the local, nor the ‘official’ historians documented these massacres.

We drove back to the meeting room in relative silence, briefly talking and pondering how such history can be acknowledged and signposted. Someone alluded to the antagonistic attitude held by some locals, recalling a renaming of a nearby mountain range with the historically important Aboriginal title. The response was not an expression of apathy, but a protective and reactionary response of a small town, as well as public commentators. A place where the population wants to ‘move on’, discuss progress, new employment possibilities with the further development of the power generation to supply the smelter or building better port facilities for future live sheep exports. In the local histories I had read at that time most local historians had focussed on the incoming ‘settler and squatter’ histories of the early and mid 1800s. In considering the knowledge we were discussing I wondered at the future conflict that might arise, when the children retold what they had learned to their parents.

Back at the meeting room we talked about ways to make local authorities give greater recognition of important Aboriginal sites, with naming and signposting of places of significance, like the beach where the massacre had taken place one hundred years before. We talked about the implications that had emerged from renaming the nearby mountain range, and how that had resulted in a
major publicity fiasco for the State Government. A state-wide backlash became part of the daily tension which faced local Koories. (In that instance a decision was possibly forced onto the wider community instead of an appropriate consultative process). At the meeting room we briefly discussed protocols for inclusion of Koorie knowledge and oral history into school curricula. Together we planned and discussed the possible curriculum purposes, the relationship between the Koorie experience and the school program.

3.3. Portrayal Three: implications and lessons learnt

Implications of listening to Silenced histories, Silenced histories of Koorie nations in Victoria. Experience impresses reciprocal responsibilities, learning my lessons - identity and personal narrative, reconciliation and self-determination.

Influential upon my ideological and personal self, Important but did I recognise it at that time? But the history texts would do so later, recognise realities presented to me on that day, at the beach.

Contestation of knowledge then, in the workspace, an example of knowledge holders struggling to be recognised, my response understated, the importance and significance of the day, beyond my immediate comprehension.

A metaphoric journey, driving down the road, to an unmarked graveyard, we did not know, but felt this place. I could only imagine, the local guides, their families and ancestors, passing on their knowledge.

On another journey, to find an identity, Shaun not known to be local, but there was no connection, no matter how loud that one voice, no one knew his family.

The above recounted experiences both confronted and enhanced my understanding of community knowledge. It meant that I had become part of the
process by which community members were establishing a discourse of Koorie presence in local classrooms. This community history research was partly a response to university studies, as a curriculum assignment. Yet much more was at stake here in terms of the emergence of local knowledge - it was contested knowledge, confronting the families of settlers, and their settler histories. The research was encouraged by their school, and was to become part of the local school curriculum materials.

The research of these Koorie educators became a conduit for elders to retell their history, and for learning excursions to sites of cultural, historical and local significance. Here were strategies that showed staff and community collaboration with rigour in the way of legitimating the knowledge of the learners. This experience also indicated a form of honesty from the Indigenous centre, working to support the initiatives of students without linking this engagement to research activity that may be viewed as exploitative by the community.

3.3.1. Listening to the silenced Koorie nations

From the narrative of my Coastland experiences (3.2 above), I learnt about the local generation of local knowledge that was of value for the whole community. Although I had thought of my role in terms of the well-wishing and legitimising bystander, there was still more for me to reflect upon and recognise from these series of events concerning my role. From gaining an insight into local Koorie history, it seems I was being strengthened by the experience unconsciously, and I took on this knowledge in a way that enabled me to later argue against those critics of the contemporary revisionist historians.

The implications of this initiative by the Coastland Koorie community to engage local schools with oral tradition is part of a re-establishment of a Koorie voice in local education. This was my first engagement with this Aboriginal community as they reached out to bring local knowledge of sites to the school. Another lesson I was to learn was that there was a significant shift in attitudes occurring within a number of Aboriginal communities in Victoria,
and this meant they would work with their local schools. This was truly a renaissance of Koorie nations and their pride, given the generally negative experiences of previous decades from missions and reserves. For Denise and myself, this meant recognition and a confirmation of the purpose of our work, since, as recipients of this knowledge, we now had reciprocal responsibilities for the trust extended to us by Charles, Miriam and Sandra. The community had entrusted their knowledge to the local school, the tertiary educational institution and the instruments of government.

This was surprising for me, as I came to realise that in recent history many aspects of Koorie cultural knowledge had been forced underground. By looking back and recognising the impact of invasion and the removal to reserves, I could understand why many Koorie families had developed such a significant distrust of authority figures. And teachers were a large part of that distrust, part of the education authority invested in local schools. Now, these were the teachers who these Koorie community members were preparing to engage with their history.

This highlighted for me the impact of mission managers (whose wives were often the teachers) telling Koorie families to give up their languages and traditions; and consequently impacted greatly upon Koorie families lived experience. Such measures as the Exemption Certificates (from 1940s to 1960s) were designed to separate families and to diminish family relationships so that persons could legally become non-Aboriginal (Fletcher, 1989 p.187-8).

As the community members (students) shared their knowledge, this also obligated me and Denise (as representatives of Yarrabool) to respect the knowledge. The presence of such mature age community elders, as Miriam, Sandra and Charles, created a connection for community knowledge to be embraced by university structures. An implication from this experience (see narrative 3.2) was a reinforced awareness of my reciprocal responsibility, a matter emphasised through working with Koories.

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21 A recent publication and film series *The First Australians* by SBS (2008) provides vivid accounts of such historical life experience of Victorian Aboriginal nations, particularly the Kulin and the Wurrundjeri.
At the Yarrabool workspace any thoughts or reflection was definitely ‘in action’ and the learners were a prominent part of exchanging the understanding of their ‘lived oppression’. Yet in the ‘Day at the Beach’, the Coastland community members -who were also students at Yarrabool - brought their experience and knowledge to the learning environment, and enriched the learning of the group and the teaching staff. The Coastland narrative is an example of Koorie educators taking self-determined steps, in dialogue with university staff, about bringing cultural knowledge to the local school curriculum. A lesson from the narrative (3.2) is that contested histories emerged from the differing knowledge positions of local Koories and the non-Indigenous residents. I recognise this as an empowering action for both the Coastland Koorie community and myself as a University lecturer. I also recognise that these situations about community knowledge contrast sharply with Shaun's situation, his determination being thwarted by the Riverland community.

Clearly Shaun and his family were not connected to the traditions of the community. The Riverland community knowledge based on lived experiences passed down through oral traditions did not register the existence of Shaun’s family within that community’s history nor in the oral histories of any other local Koorie community history across Victoria nor in adjacent NSW based Koorie communities. This is an important point given the strength that Koorie communities give to kinship as a bonding network of relationships across families. These oral histories have the same claim for veracity/authenticity as the Coastland oral history of the beach massacre – to think otherwise could be used to cast a doubt over the believability of all Koorie historical claims (22).

The difference with Shaun perhaps is that he attempted to unravel community historical claims using his own stand alone claims and emotional outbursts, not ancestral evidence, and the community, through meetings of Elders and with the support of the University, prevailed.

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22 The Hindmarsh Island is an example of disputed knowledge claims, where Ngarrindjeri scholar, Doreen Kartinyeri, was challenged and the traditional owners views dismissed. This indicates how traditions can become unravelled by certain interpretations taking away from community traditions.
The classrooms of my childhood had no such recognition of Indigenous traditions, so with my non-Indigenous peers we would have only minimal knowledge of the Koorie nations of Victoria. ‘The only Aboriginal people must be those traditional full blood ones’ was the racially ignorant and prejudicial idea reinforcing the silence. My lack of knowledge meant an assumption, and ignorant acceptance, that there were no Aboriginals from Victoria, and as a school age boy I only learnt of a few prominent footballers (e.g. Graham ‘Polly’ Farmer in the late 1960s playing for the local Geelong team) that must have come from interstate, from the west or north where real Aboriginal people lived.

3.3.2 Linking community to university

Another implication from the narrative above is the increasing respect of the university for the emerging Indigenous knowledge structures. In 1990, the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated (VAEAI) and the Victorian Ministry of Education signed a partnership, which was a significant step towards engaging Koorie communities with the organisational structures of the State school system in Victoria. This partnership began to establish regional support for Koorie educators, and legitimacy and recognition of community members and elders. This shift in relationship was strengthened by supportive institutional initiatives, like the establishment of the Koorie Intern program at the Koorie Teacher Education Program (later known as the Institute of Koorie Education at Deakin University). The resulting discourse from such supportive initiatives of government gave further support to the institutional initiatives of the late 1980s that recognised the important place of Aboriginal community members within the academy.²³

At this time (around 1993) the State government closed or amalgamated between 230 and 280 schools (Marginson, 1994, p.141), presumably as part of the economic strategy of ‘seeking excellence in education’. This rhetoric justified the closure or amalgamation of schools with low enrolments. One could speculate that many of these smaller schools could have had significant Koorie enrolments, creating greater forms of exclusion. In fact there were

²³ I had no knowledge of VAEAI or the partnership above before I returned to Victoria in 1991.
specific examples, like Panmure, not far from Coastland, with a high proportion of Koorie students, as well as Koorie staff, that were closed. This situation is ironically reminiscent of the reserve school policy back in the 1950s, when small schools on reserves were maintained to ensure virtual segregation of Koorie children.

One outcome of the State Government’s school rationalisation program was that the gains that had been made, from increased community trust and knowledge sharing, rapidly diminished. After the rationalisation program, the Victorian Department of Education enabled the establishment of Koorie Open Door Education (KODE) schools. Whilst there was an Open Door (for embracing learning), there was a corresponding closing door in the face of community members who had worked as Koorie educators. Many Koorie educators completed degrees at university to become teachers, and were faced with unemployment. Of course, this move to rationalise the number of schools was not just an issue for Koorie teachers and community. Many of the teachers and others in the broader Victorian community were stunned and shocked, or angry at the reduction of services which also meant a massive reduction in the employment of teachers, ancillary staff and cleaners. Indeed, the closure of schools in the early 1990s meant unemployment for thousands of teachers and school-based cleaners at that time. Besides, the Koorie educators had already been expressing their reticence about confiding openly with school teachers, since community members lacked confidence concerning the integration of cultural knowledge with school knowledge. Such reforms did not help.

3.3.3 Shifting identity and confronting praxis

The story of Shaun provides a good example of how identity issues become intensely controversial. This reflection upon Shaun was presented within the narrative to give a context of the tension and possible angst that might emerge in community consultation. It documents a young man’s distress when his identity was rejected by the local Koorie community and the Yarrabool Indigenous centre. This experience presented significant complexity about identity matters. My reason for linking these two aspects of the narrative is that there is significant research evidence (HREOC, 1997) that suggests that the
physical and emotional expression of stolen generations in current times may be directly attributable to events of the past.  

The focus on identity, and in the case of Shaun, provides a possible link to the trauma suffered by the sons and daughters of those Aboriginal people taken away, or placed in institutions such as orphanages. Shaun could not submit forms for ABSTUDY (government) assistance as these required a signatory to state knowledge of his Indigeneity. University staff could not verify Shaun’s application form, and Shaun was unable to obtain a signature from a community member.

Consequently, his application for the program could not be validated. One option was that he could apply to enrol in the mainstream program. Shaun claimed a community as his home, but the community did not claim him. Karen, the Coordinator, suggested that I, as the first year student advisor, and also as a non-Indigenous staff member, counsel Shaun about his options. (I did not think much about the fact that Shaun was classified as a whitefella and as I was a whitefella also. This may have been a factor in Karen’s decision to ‘put me on the case’ – whitefella-to-whitefella business). Karen, the coordinator, quite appropriately, took an impartial position due to having family in the same community.

These then were two contrasting community experiences which reflect how I had to position myself as a respectful and legitimising observer in (the situation described in) the Coastland narrative. My role had been to observe the community process and protocols (as outlined) in the Riverland narrative. In hindsight, I wonder why we could not obtain a statement from Shaun’s parent, and I have no recollection of the reason for that which may have been given at the time. And so, I simply accepted the community decision; Shaun was a whitefella, who thought he belonged with the Koorie mob. There are surely more ‘Shauns’ out in the community, but for me, the process of having to accept the community decision, was a learning experience.

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24 There was no evidence from Shaun, but I am suggesting this may have explained his claim.
The Coastland narrative presents a day in the life of the community, as well as my reflection on the complexity of the situation with Shaun. At that time the community visits seemed different from what I expected of university work, the nature of community-based education being virtually new for me, particularly in the ways Yarrabool engaged its community. (Yet I did not have adequate knowledge of the ways lecturers worked in universities to know what was typical for a lecturer’s community connectedness).

Such days brought mixed emotions. On the one hand there was a new feeling of privilege, but on the other there was the resentment that arose when advice to travel was given with rather short notice. But when one was 'off campus', these days felt like a luxury, an escape from the unending busyness of teaching and telephoning students who lived some considerable distance from the campus.

I recall visiting a community homework centre to assist in setting up stand alone computers as a means of giving support for learning. Such action, at first, seemed out of the ordinary for a university educator, but became accepted as a daily chore, a typical way of working with community members who were also students. (Many years later these events would be termed community engagement and fully anticipated as part of staff responsibility). Here was a busy-ness beyond the teaching, research and administrative functions that were unfamiliar in university employment.

3.3.4. Reconciliation and self determination

The narrative (3.2) recounts events which occurred close to the time when the Federal Government initiated the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR). The experiences set out here in this research report, are indeed examples of reconciliation and self-determination. Firstly, we can identify a reconciling between the Coastland Koorie community Elders and the local non-Aboriginal community. Positioned and entrusted with local knowledge meant greater understanding, and engagement of other non-Indigenous learners with a reconciliatory focus. The self-determination of the Riverland
community positioned me in relation to the (events recounted in the) Coastland narrative.

The Coastland narrative indicates a strong determination by Koorie educators to reclaim matters of cultural and historical significance. As an example of reconciliation, many communities recognised the importance of acknowledging historical realities; e.g., like language renewal, recognition of burial grounds, or ceremonial places. Being privileged in the community knowledge, being trusted to listen, I felt a responsibility to be respectful and recognise the custodianship of the knowledge by local elders. This presence also strengthened trust, since community visits also developed my awareness and respect for community protocols. The 'elevated distance' of the university educator’s privileged position is, in some ways, lessened by the actual action of engaging with communities. Such connectedness enabled collaboration, and the diminution of power differentials amongst academics and community members. The Koorie educators were in control of their knowledge space. In the Coastland narrative (3.2) whiteness had minimal significance, and this contrasted with the Riverland narrative where whiteness played a significant role for both me and Shaun.

Since I had been brought into the community context as a useful outsider, I became a co-opted assistant in the project of Indigenous self-determination. The recruitment of people to work from marginalised positions is a recurrent theme that becomes obvious in the narrative. The learners portrayed in the narrative present knowledge and bring me, the non-Indigenous educator, into community-based knowledge. Partly this is about learning oral history, and also recognising significant historical and educational local knowledge, and viewing the learners with respect for their skills. Certainly, this attitude to knowledge was present in the Yarrabool workspace and the narrative in Portrayal Two above indicates one way that Koorie learners/educators teach University lecturers about their community context.

3.3.5. Lessons learnt – a poetic reflection

Demountable classrooms, like a rabbit warren,
on campus edge, borderline fringe access, inside frantic,
discussions congesting every space,  
block release means hectic schedules,  
time compressed, tensions intensified,  
occasional space for community visits.

Learning to work differently,  
aware of self alongside learners,  
sharing learning and seeing,  
community knowledge establishing,  
within the university domain,  
becoming [partly] trusted and being here.

Invited to participate,  
presentations and community actions,  
to engage and advise on proposals and projects,  
respecting intellectual property.

Remaining anonymous,  
cautious publications,  
privileging the experience,  
considering learner focus.

Conscious of community concerns,  
Koorie voices struggling to gain prominence,  
beyond tolerance within institutions,  
being almost powerless to change,  
aspects of oppression.

Warmth and friendship,  
of both learners and Indigenous colleagues,  
connectedness and perspective sharing,  
learning about my own home/land relationship.

Partial teamwork, workspace intense,  
momentum increases exponentially,  
enjoyable but all consuming time,  
letting go hard to achieve.

No time for meetings,  
another group of students on block every fortnight,  
no time for reflection or regrets,  
a brief celebration for graduation,  
recognition to those present, past and future,  
the generations building upon achievements,  
and overcoming pain and loss,  
emotions prominent when you stop to think, and thank.
The workspace, sometimes joyous, sometimes despairing, an emotional roller-coaster for staff and students, seeking more than equity issues for learners, compromising as educators for a greater good.

Gardening as therapy
energy towards digging and tending new plants, until all garden beds of flowering herbs, and a duck prolific yard without lawn,

Many colleagues burnt out, me too,
I took the easy option, and moved on,
much harder to take a stand, or stake a claim, to belonging and a form of partnership, a rhetoric of staff participation, Indigenous power prominence.

3.4. Portrayal Four: The Inquiry
The prominent themes that will emerge from this Text are:

3.4.1. An epiphany of getting connected
3.4.2. The place of the non-Indigenous in community consultation
3.4.3. Shifting practices: the borders of praxis and action

3.4.1. An epiphany of getting connected

The portrayal (3.2) gave me a sense of connectedness to the place where, in western Victoria, Koorie nations had been silenced and expunged from the mainstream white memories. The dominant ideological and hegemonic stand had prevailed for virtually one hundred and fifty years, and I had briefly experienced the renaissance of cultural knowledge emerging from strong Koorie family knowledge.

These two experiences, as described in the portrayal narrative (3.2), show the shifting role of connectedness and disconnectedness that I experienced during those incidents. These community experiences emphasised recognition of place and the change impacting upon the family lives in those particular places. The cultural interface of Yarrabool enabled these experiences. These two community visits were chosen because they allowed me to juxtapose such diverse emotional responses with the emergence of my recognition that I had a
role beyond the educator from the university. Through this role of learning to respect community knowledges, I was learning to connect life to land, and linking generations to that land, past and present. At the same time, I was introduced to community networks that extended across regions, so that I came to understand the apparent ‘invisibility’ of a strongly engaged and connected broader community.  

Prior to working at Yarrabool I had no known contact with Victorian Koorie families. This meant that my knowledge of local Aboriginal existence was fragmented, and I only occasionally considered prior occupation, when place names suggested displaced languages; such as Coragulac, Geelong, Mordialloc, Korweinguboora and Narnargoona. Working at Yarrabool enabled me to begin learning local knowledge(s), and gave me exposure to Koorie oral histories.

The recent revisionist conflict over ‘what really happened’ in the Australian landscape, is actually a threat to community knowledge holders. In response they can either protect knowledge by maintaining a silence or enter the very public debate (Attwood & McGowan, 2001; Manne, 2003; Macintyre & Clark, 2004). There is a pervasive view generally accepted by myself that many white Australians of my generation are ignorant, and grew up with the Great Silence (Attwood, 2005; Halse, 2005).

The massacre site in the narrative is probably that now known as Murderers Flat, or the Convincing Ground, both documented by Ian Clark (1995) from oral history of Hannah Lovett, a Kerup gundidj Elder who died in 1940 at the age of 91. Earlier historical research on the region (Critchett, 1990) had not included this site. Sites of massacres were also known as sites from where

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25 As briefly outlined in my biographical section Chapter 1.6: A significant cultural divide existed as my own family had apparently minimal understanding of Koorie life in Victoria. From the perspective I was then developing, I had been part of the non-Indigenous dominant majority, with relations that lived in the Western district, but to my knowledge my family had no direct engagement with the Indigenous presence. Historical moments in my own life emerge from childhood memories of holidays and trips to visit relatives. As I grew up in urban areas (Mordialloc, Herne Hill, Mentone and Newtown) I had a minimal knowledge of the rural regions but not of their histories. As I had spent some time as a child and as a youth in rural Victoria, I felt less of an outsider than my earlier experience with Murris in North Queensland, Kooris in NSW or traditional people in the centre of the Northern Territory. My disconnectedness was highlighted when as a youth I was unaware of local Koories, and this persisted until the time I learned at Yarrabool that my neighbours in my school years (early 1970s) were part of the Koorie community in the Geelong area.

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infants, whose parents were killed, were taken away (Gallaher, 2007). In contemporary times, children were removed from families, taken to orphanages, particularly children of mixed marriages were so removed (HREOC; Bringing Them Home Report, 1997).

The contemporary expression of loss and family separation continues in the oral tradition of many Indigenous singers/ songwriters, like Archie Roach. Archie recounts his removal from family at Framlingham in the Western district of Victoria through song, a place not far from the site of Murderers Flat. His Uncle Banjo Clarke (2003) retold this story, since Archie was a stolen child, and Banjo was the keeper of his story (Clarke, 2003). Through the song *Took the Children Away*, Archie captures the essence of the suffering and reunion of his experience in a separated family. The following lines recall the experience of his family:

*One dark day on Framlingham,  
the policeman, the welfare man, …  
then they took the children away ...  
(Archie Roach, *Took the Children Away*, 1990)*

One outcome of the policies of removal was the increase in numbers of children in orphanages across the nation. In the typical Australian experience of white silence of 1950s and 1960s, we children did not know of mission and reserve life, and our school curriculum did not refer to contemporary Koorie life. In contrast, Karen Atkinson (Pascoe, 1997) retells her experience of ‘the big house’ in her story in the book ‘Too Bloody Strong - Wathaurong’. Karen tells of the struggle of her times being taken from her mother as a child of five. Reading these experiences one feels the pain Karen experienced being brought up in the orphanage in Ballarat in the 1960s. Koories like Karen opened my eyes to the ‘special treatment’ that was happening to my peers whilst I was growing up in comfortable suburbia. Her pain was a message from a different reality.

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26 The Gallaher family history retells events in rural NSW, where a baby is taken from a massacre site, the boy becomes known as Punch, and eventually fought in WW1, and died in England from war-time injuries.

27 In Victoria, as a youth, I knew of the Glastonbury orphanage in Geelong. I recall a classmate telling me about his life there, but at the time I did not know if he was a Koorie kid or not. As a child from a suburban family, I knew nothing about childrens’ homes and who might have been taken from their families. From memory, my father was always employed, and we were never hungry or in poverty.
The homes (institutions) were deemed appropriate for Aboriginal children, an improvement some might suggest, on being part white part black in the fringe camps of many townships in 20th century Australia. The sense of belongingness or connectedness extends from the narrative to reflection about the life of my own family, and a better understanding of the lives of those taken from their mothers to orphanages (as detailed in publications such as HREOC: Bringing Them Home, 1997; Anna Haebich: Broken Circles, 2003).

From researching historical texts (Rowley, 1970; Fletcher, 1989; Kearney, 1976) the intent of government reflects little concern for the loss of Aboriginal culture or the impact of possible genocide. At least that seemed to be the rationale of governments and general public of earlier times. Historically, any dissenting voices were not appreciated as the assimilation of Aboriginal children into the broader Australian society took its course. Although humanitarians and Aboriginal community voices were always present, some were documented even if never prominent nor given much of a hearing (Henry & Brabham, 1994).

My own personal growth and identity emerged within these reflections, making me aware that my own role was growing with my immersion within the Koorie workplace. Here was another dimension of my privilege, being brought to the edge of Koorie community life, and being included in local knowledge. What would be the implications for my understanding? How did the process by which my Koorie neighbours were made ‘invisible’ or silent, have an impact upon my identity? In returning to Victoria (in the context of this particular workplace) meant confronting the present, reconciling the past and working towards a community conscious future.

3.4.2 The place of non-Indigenous educators in community consultation
That morning of the drive through the country, I awoke with mixed feelings. On the one hand, I would have preferred to assert my role as academic, to work towards completing my Masters thesis. On the other hand, I looked
forward to the journey and discovering my role within a rural community, meeting up with the students in that place. This minor tension of the role to be played, between wanting to travel, or to have time for research and writing, was really about being in control of my academic aspirations. Academics in the mainstream are generally autonomous workers, able to organise their own time for teaching and research. Yet this was not so easily managed in the Yarrabool workspace.

The responsiveness required from me in a visit to students in their communities - that was to travel long distances at short notice as part of a normal work load - created some tension for me. But it also made me aware of the stressors facing the students who, likewise, had to travel to campus. For students to be away from family for such an extended period of time, is bound to create tensions in relationships. Besides, a high proportion of the students were parents and some were even grandparents and so separation from their children was hard. (And this was before the mobile telephone).

The Coastland visit can be viewed as community-driven research, a very contested area of action in the context from the late 1980s and ongoing into the 2010s. Koorie voices were loud and clear stating that Indigenous communities felt ‘they have been researched enough’ by various government and university researchers. Errol West, an Indigenous professor now sadly deceased, succinctly expressed concerns for the excesses of research:

*For over twenty-five years, Aborigines have been demanding a greater say in the research enterprise in a bid to gain some control over the product, the process and the effect of such research. Research became a tool of exploitation used by non-Indigenous society and its researchers to acquire and retain power. To avoid a continuation of this exploitation, Indigenous Australians want to regulate research, but not to halt it* (West, 2000, p.117).

This message resonated with those Indigenous voices heard from the mid 1980s, who were also formative in shaping my professional praxis. This contestation impacted on the role of non-Indigenous staff since they were discouraged from researching Indigenous issues. The narrative (3.2) provided an example of working alongside Indigenous researchers, in a non-exploitative way, in that situation. Listening to the Coastland and Riverland Indigenous
communities, was an important shift in my knowledge relationships. The awareness of Koorie communities and their perspectives were absent from the recognised and written knowledge prior to these times.

One role of the educator is to develop an awareness of the literature, to get connected to community voices through song, dance and text. Literature from the 1980s demonstrates the emergence of texts disseminating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices. Speaking out about education, and their role as teachers, publications appeared like *Black Voices* (McDonald & Loos (Eds.), 1986) and later *Blekbala Wei* (Henry, J. & McTaggart, R. (Eds), 1991) which was published in the text *Aboriginal Pedagogy: Aboriginal Teachers speak out*. These texts presented views by Queensland and Northern Territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers about bringing Indigenous knowledge and community-driven research into classrooms.

Many of these writers express Indigenous viewpoints from their experiences at the school or university, and the struggles to live in community and in the university life. Similarly, the importance of working together at the cultural interfaces, is evident through the experience by Reid and Holland (1996):

> The struggle has been ongoing and has always involved committed Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, often engaged in conflict, as it will in the future. To argue that one has to be of a particular ‘race’ or ‘culture’ to engage in anti-racist and anticolonialist practices is a contradiction in terms (in Arnold, 1998, p.15)

Reid and Holland argue that the shared space of Indigenous and non-Indigenous academics emphasizes the cross-cultural coalitions in the development of anti-racist strategies within the tertiary sector. A shared response to racism can be read in the Coastland experience, as a step in a community's reclamation of knowledge, to begin to educate against the great silence of events erased from memory.

Other Indigenous opinions on effective ways to work ‘cross-culturally’ emphasize that non-Indigenous educators “*should learn to listen, and not try to lead*” (Foley, 1996, p.27). The point from Foley, as an Indigenous academic, is that non-Indigenous professionals almost always take “*their*
interpretation ... to be more meaningful than a literal statement by an Indigenous ‘voice’ ” (Foley, 1996, p. 27). This message from Foley reinforces a message: think carefully about your role, listen to Koorie voices, do not take those words as your own.

The narrative (3.2) shows a presence of Indigenous voice that is the result of consultation with community. On a national scale such consultative matters have become more significant, especially in the recommendations of the policy review panel chaired by Mandaway Yunupingu the National Review of Education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Peoples – Summary and Recommendations (1995). The review presented two dominant perspectives from their evidence:

- a view that Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders need to be in positions where they can exercise a strong influence on, and determine, the structures and processes by which education is conventionally governed and administered in Australia, and
- a view that alternative structures and processes must be established through which Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders can exercise self-determination in education (cited in Phillips and Lampert, 2005, p.132).

The message is clear. Representative voices from Australian Indigenous communities all view inclusion in all spheres of education as integral to the recognition of Indigenous knowledge structures and processes. The non-Indigenous role is also to be supportive of Indigenous structures, bringing community perspectives into the learning environments where I have been employed to work, through consultation with the Koorie students themselves.
3.4.3. Shifting practices: the borders of praxis and action

The juxtaposing of the two narratives (presented in 3.2), aims to highlight my role, positioned on the border, as evidenced in those two differing situations. Those two experiences were indicative of the challenges that arose to my actions at the cultural interface, enabling this reflection upon the protocols that are appropriate in this learning situation. This thread of working cross-culturally required a conscious and reflective praxis (Freire, 1970; Smyth, 1986; Grundy, 1987). Connelly and Clandinin use the term wakefulness to express “a kind of enquiry that necessitates ongoing reflection” (2000, p.185).

Viewing the educator as a cross-cultural worker, Giroux (1990, 43) would label such professional positioning as the work of a border pedagogue:

…characterised by what Teresa de Laurentis (1987:25) calls an ‘ongoing effort to create new spaces of discourse, to rewrite cultural narratives, and to define the terms of another perspective – a view from “elsewhere”’….the self-representations of subordinate groups as they might appear in ‘forgotten’ or erased histories, texts, memories, experiences and community narratives…. Clearly the concept of border pedagogy suggests that teachers exist within social, political and cultural boundaries that are both multiple and historical in nature and that place particular demands on a recognition and pedagogical appropriation of differences. (Giroux, 1990, pp.43-45)

This border position is a way of explaining my role in the incidents described in the narrative (3.2). Instead of placing Koorie knowledge at the fringe, my 'border role' concept grows out of recognition that the Koories were, in fact, in control. Accepting the border positioning, brought me to embrace a role with a strong communitarian spirit in the Yarrabool environment. The role of the non-Indigenous was a shared, cooperative and altruistic attitude embodied by staff to empower Koorie students in their learning, and giving away or decentring the ownership of the teaching and learning environment.

During that time, the incidents recounted an experience that was like ‘walking through cultural doors’ (as described by Harris, 1990). Walking through the door meant entering an Aboriginal domain, not an assimilated whitefella space. Similarly, the Yarrabool space was culturally strong, and the building housing both staff and students was a culturally safe place for the Indigenous insiders, immersed in that Indigenous dominant culture. ‘Getting out the door' was often a difficult task, as the work was not always 9 to 5, even though my
professional self was more traditionally aligned to working after hours at home, a habit that was embedded into my lifestyle as a teacher. Walking through those Yarrabool doors, I was subsumed into the multi-layering of tasks, and would forget to ask whether the working day had ended.

The narrative (3.2) presents an account of post-colonial empowerment by the Koorie community in affirming their historical and cultural knowledge. The Coastland incident educated me as a non-Indigenous university lecturer, about a place that rightly privileged the voice of the Indigenous participants. Leela Gandhi (1998, p.33) cautions me as a practitioner working in cross-cultural workspaces, to try to let go of the ‘mindset of rationality’:

Macaulay’s defense of the pedagogical motivations of colonialism betrays its Enlightenment legacy, namely, the sense that European rationality holds out the possibility of improvement for all humanity. Accordingly, those who are already in possession of the gospel of rationality are seen to have an ethical obligation or ‘calling’ to spread the word and proselytise on behalf of their emancipatory creed. … Civilised minds, as … Wieland wrote, are bound to ‘do the great work to which they have been called: to cultivate, enlighten and ennoble the human race’ (cited in Gay, 1977, p.13) (in Gandhi,1998, p.33).

This caution to the dangers of rationality in the colonial pedagogy urges a shift of research focus to learning for myself beyond the dominant white, western positivist logic of the colonised mindset. The concern with accepting or questioning rationality posits the question of how my role as pedagogue is constructed. The second part of the narrative (3.2), based on the Riverland experience, is also an example of post-colonial action taken by a community. The mention of the ‘gospel of rationality’ provides hints about established religions that have accompanied and still accompany the civilising project of colonialism. Once incorporated, the colonial project enables the ‘great work’ to continue, so that the colonisers expect that without such religion, ethical ‘good work’ will be improbable.

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28 I am conscious of the impossibility of unravelling years of mental attitude and construction. Thus my mind is overlaid with much conditioning – if I review my social construction – layers of Christianity and Catholicism in upbringing and schooling, layers of order from being Boy Scout, to School Cadet, and attending NCO training at Puckapunyal, Young Christian Workers, many years as a member of the Australian Labor Party, eleven years in school, eight years out with minimal study, and studying since beginning at University in 1980 as part time learner).
In seeking a way to assess my role, as well as the postcolonial and power relationships in this context, I turn to the ideas of Bishop and Glynn (1999). Utilising their ideas I assess the relationship between myself, my ideological ideas and the Indigenous cultural interface of the Yarrabool narrative (3.2).

Bishop and Glynn (1999) put forward a model for evaluating power relationships that provides tools for analysis:

of the impact of the development of the pattern of dominance and subordination ….it is suggested that this model can be used in other contexts as an evaluation tool to aid planning and to monitor progress towards power-sharing goals (1999, p.54-56).

Herein, I set out the criteria for evaluation from concepts developed by Bishop and Glynn, with my analysis of the Yarrabool context in italics:

(1) Initiation- whose interests and agendas is the education system established to promote? Are Indigenous people denied participation in the decision making systems? Indigenous educators initiated the Coastland teaching situation; the Riverland consultation was a judgement made by Indigenous leadership from that community, in partnership with the request from Indigenous staff at the university.

(2) Benefits- who will gain from the education system? The beneficiaries were the Indigenous students (both at the university and the teaching local knowledge for younger secondary school students) who also benefit for the broader community; at Riverland the community exerted their self-determination for their cultural safety.

(3) Representation - whose story of social reality is depicted? The Indigenous voices in both communities had their social reality presented.

(4) Legitimation - what authority does the mainstream education system claim for its structure, processes and outputs? The ‘mainstream’ in these contexts are two Indigenous communities providing their knowledge, claiming authority and legitimacy with cooperation from the Indigenous communities.

(5) Accountability - to whom are educationalists accountable? Who has control over the initiations, pedagogies, assessments and evaluations? The Yarrabool and Coastland collaboration on student assignments enabled local knowledge to be certified as valid within the coursework for the degree, which validated the place of oral history projects in the institution. The educationalists were
being accountable to the Riverland community, as control of access into the degree indicated.

To reflect on practices using the above five criteria shows a method of evaluating the implementation of an Indigenous agenda in higher education. In the narrative (3.2) the communities had set the agendas according to their interests. The benefits of the initiatives impact upon the cultural interface at the university, and with the Indigenous students, and with their communities. The representation was by the Indigenous community; the authority in the narrative originated in the community. The question of accountability is also firmly with the community-based actions.

3.4.4 Resolution of the research text

To resolve the issues raised in this research text, I reflect that my role was both confronted and enriched by community involvement. In my role (as a lecturer) I was a learner, able to appreciate the agency of Indigenous cultural workers, who were extending a sense of connectedness inviting my participation. My role made me obligated to have reciprocal trust with the Indigenous staff and students at Yarrabool. This research text taught me to reflect upon community and institutional action. The Coastland narrative showed me an instance of recognising community-based decision-making as being privileged, and emerging into the university. Institutionally I was also on the border, of an Indigenous place and a Faculty of Education.

The experience of epiphany emerged from both the Coastland and Riverland situations, impacting upon my conscious roles in very different ways. My own early childhood travels with family were being mirrored by more adult themes of connectedness to place, dispossession and identity. There my role was shifted to accept community decision making and to desist from researching the Indigenous experience.

This cultural interface demonstrated a strong Indigenous rights or cultural equivalence of education. This experience brought the role of the non-Indigenous lecturer into the realms of highly political spaces of Indigenous power. I was cautioned against the cult of efficiency and rational views, and
my praxis re-focussed to the residential teaching model. There on the border of Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of being I had to evaluate the power relationships and question a kind of belonging that made me feel an insider, when I knew that cannot be.
Chapter Four: Clifton and the Correctional Centre

Second Research Text: Experiencing dissent

4.1 Portrayal One: phenomenon and context

Having accepted employment as a non-Indigenous coordinator of an Indigenous higher education unit I was faced with some vexed employment questions. How was I to be part of the empowerment of Indigenous educators while simultaneously being 'the boss'? There were other related concerns with respect to taking up such a leadership role. The Director of Indigenous programs at this university set forth his vision of a strong and unified northern Australian Indigenous university, in an address made at Yarrabool some years before. I then rationalised to myself that I could indeed make a positive contribution.

Prior to my arrival, I had worked briefly in Cambodia in an ambitious project in teacher education. I had taken leave without pay from my earlier position at Yarrabool University, intending to move away from Indigenous education programs. It seemed to me that, being asked to take the position in Clifton, I would be returning to complete unfinished business, and thereby make a contribution in a position of leadership. In gaining this employment, I felt that my experience was being rewarded, and that I should be proud of my position. Perhaps I was just naive, but I did not give much attention to the question of why an Indigenous candidate was not appointed. The real situation involved a conscious boycott of the University by Indigenous community members, and I became aware of this situation only after my arrival in Clifton.

How does one convey an emerging awareness? Here I try to describe the dawning awareness in which I sensed something was missing, something was amiss. The cool, wide corridors would echo the sounds of friendly talking. Communication echoed from the hills when someone called out from the verandah. There was a sterile feel inside the architecturally modern buildings; the newness lacked warmth, required more cultural presence (a traditional smoking of the rooms with eucalypt leaves may have helped provide a fragrant improvement). However, whatever the feelings which arose from my senses, at the Clifton workspace my concern became more about the emotional toxicity - the building was fresh and clean, the image of a new and orderly institution, in
stark contrast with the surrounding wild rainforest. The rainforest, a glorious, dense green mysteriously impenetrable and majestic place, and the people also, at work nearby, were also mysterious, impenetrable and secretive.

My anxiety about the appointment increased when I arrived at the University Campus in North Queensland. The Director (since deceased) was based at the main University campus a few hundred kilometres to the south of Clifton. He was on sick leave, and the vision of an Indigenous University for Northern Australia was ‘on hold’. My position as Clifton Coordinator meant staffing the Tertiary Access Course for three locations, and supporting students and staff, liaising with university and community. The previous Coordinator was an Indigenous woman with a significant profile in Indigenous Cultural Property Rights. I wondered whether the community may have been expecting a whitefella in this role to be exploiting the opportunities for self-promotion. My initial thoughts were about strengthening the role of the Unit in teaching and supporting learners, as directed by the Acting Director from the main campus. With this at the back of my mind, I began to form ideas about the development of a team focus, expecting that one of the Indigenous staff who were working with me would take over my role when my two year contract was completed.

The pedagogical culture that had developed in this context was unknown to me since I had not taught in Tertiary Access Course (TAC) programs before. The bridging, or Tertiary Access, approach operated as a compensatory model, suggesting that the Aboriginal students needed to be brought up to a level, rather than engage with learning on their own terms or by reference to pre-existing knowledge. My expectations of promoting Indigenous knowledge meant a mismatch with the TAC reality. Previous experience taught me that learners could build upon their Indigenous knowledge through their university studies, and develop their understanding of the relationship between their learning and the community context of their studies.

Within the context of the enclave model with its access TAC course, any aspiration by me for an inclusive curriculum was inevitably going to be tokenistic. Given this, plus the outsider construction of me by my Indigenous staff and the acceptance of the concept of the enclave’s compensatory form of curriculum by these same Indigenous staff (or at least the non-questioning of
it), I was at a loss to consider ways to strategise towards the introduction of a reconciliatory pedagogy in this place. Would the Indigenous staff accept the transformative shift? Would the Director? Would the University?

The Tertiary Access Course was implemented at both Reefstown and Clifton campuses. The Clifton campus staff also taught at Floraclade Correctional Centre (just over the Great Dividing Range) and at Gribblebah (a coastal community about forty kilometres away that had been a ‘Christian’ mission until the 1960s). The Tertiary Access Course consisted of two levels: first year (TAC1) being a core of units: literacy, numeracy, computing skills. The second level (TAC2) allowed specialisation to study: Mathematics, Chemistry, Biology, Introduction to Sociology, Introduction to Education and Introduction to Psychology. The same units were available to inmates at the Correctional Centre. At that time a few inmates had also enrolled in social welfare degree studies. At Floraclade, TAFE provision was also available to inmates, possibly duplicating literacy and numeracy of TAC1.

Tony (the Indigenous Acting Director) made it clear that the budget for casual lecturers was limited, and all full time staff would teach as much of the course as possible. There was anticipation that workplace changes were inevitable, and this tended to put a cloud over the future of the courses. Staff were aware that TAC enrolment numbers were lower than in previous years, and when I reviewed the previous year’s classlists I could see that retention was less than half of enrolment. This figure was much lower than the 60 -70% expected retention I had experienced with first year degree courses. Only a few students were progressing to degree programs from the three locations: Clifton, Gribblebah or Floraclade.

Student recruitment was carried out as it had been in previous years. Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff travelled the region and met with careers advisors at High Schools, where we encouraged Year Eleven and Twelve students to consider the University Access courses. We travelled far and wide in the hinterland. The highest intake remained centred around the Gribblebah community.

Clifton staff taught at Gribblebah community two days a week, where Uncle Harry organised and implemented the TAC program. Harry was one of the first
Aboriginal teachers in the state of Queensland, graduating from Teachers College in the early 1960’s. As an Elder and an experienced teacher, his role in the community and the university, he commanded a high level of respect for his views and leadership. In my role as coordinator, I would seek advice on many issues from Harry. I visited Gribblebah regularly. This was a mission settlement that became a Deed of Grant in Trust (DOGIT) community under Queensland statute.

Until the end of the 1960s, Gribblebah had been under the management of the Director of Native Affairs and the mission manager controlled the affairs of local Aborigines (deemed to be wards of the State) under a policy of protection, preservation and assimilation. This was a very different place from the urban ‘civilisation’ encountered at Clifton. I recognised the efforts made by Harry to ensure the program continued for the benefit of the Gribblebah community. Visiting Harry was a relaxed time of community immersion, spending time in the classroom, on excursion to the community museum, eating fish and chips on the beach, and occasionally just touring around the community with him.

On visiting the Floraglade Correctional Centre to teach, I entered an entirely different cultural world. Walking from the car park to the entrance, looking up at the high fences and the razor wire, filled me with a sense of foreboding:

Press intercom, announce name and business, enter reception room and sign in, attach visitor status identity card, offer teaching materials and lunch box to Prison Officers for scrutiny, enter the metal detector, await the program manager to meet at the security point and follow the officer towards Block B. Proceed through secure doors under the gaze of closed circuit television cameras.

As a teaching staff visitor, I was invited to join the Officers in their Lunch room and partake of cold cuts of sliced ham and salad. The sterile space, and the awkward conversation had me preferring to eat lunch in the teaching space with the inmates, at least they could joke about something, or show me a painting or a poem depicting a better time.

At the Clifton campus the Indigenous learners attending the TAC course were few in number. This course was taught following the 'normal' semester timetable, and not as a residential or mixed mode course. Some mornings I
would meet Indigenous students to share a yarn whilst enjoying a cup of tea on the balcony, with the rainforest less than a hundred metres away. The Clifton Indigenous unit supported learners in the ‘mainstream’ degree programs. A few students were in anthropology, education, history and social welfare. These students spoke of their concerns: there was a rise in racism that had been fuelled by populist politicians spruiking paranoid nationalism and myths of equality. White supremacists, dressed as Ku Klux Klan, conducted night time terror campaigns, prowling the streets of a small town to the north, dealing out a bashing to any black youth they came across.

Many students were also concerned about their ability to survive financially. The restructuring of Government support provision through CentreLink altered allowances, disadvantaging mature age as well as young independent students. Attending classes for three days each week left the TAC students some time for part time work.

The staff team at the Indigenous unit at Clifton consisted of six staff, being: one administrative, one part time tutorial support officer and four academic staff which included myself as Coordinator. In time I found that I had become the one to raise either individual staff or student concerns. I learned that prior to my arrival two male staff had had heated arguments, as had two of the female staff. The female staff had gone to a mediation session prior to my arrival.

And so, a residual tension was present and much of my time was spent hearing individual staff complaints. I came to the conclusion that the earlier arguments had not been resolved, and I asked these staff members to consider mediation. I should have realised that if the four of the six staff had personal conflicts, life at this workspace was going to mean managing some interesting and conflicting dynamics.

It was January when Kristen, an Indigenous lecturer in the School, reminded me she was having a baby in a few months time. She suggested that she knew someone who could replace her while she was on maternity leave. A few weeks later Kristen introduced me to Polly, a community member who had lived at Gribblebah. (Kristen went on maternity leave and the semester commenced.)
4.2. Portrayal Two: A night at the flicks

“You don’t know what goes on, sitting with your back to the world!” Polly stated, giving me her literal and metaphoric advice. She was concerned about ‘things’ she had heard in the corridors. I knew, facing across my desk with a view of the rainforest out the window was not good ‘feng shui’\(^\text{29}\). I was also aware of the discontent, with staff sniping over personal issues, and some hurts were simply not healing.

I compromised and moved my office furniture around.

“Aren’t you afraid to go to Gribblebah? Those fellas are really wild, and they hate whitefellas,” anxiously expressed Polly.

“Don’t worry Polly, Uncle Harry will take care of me. I have been down to Gribblebah before”. I tried not to trivialise her concerns, and assured her that I would be safe under the wing of Uncle Harry. (Thinking to myself why was Polly afraid for me? Gribblebah is as safe as anywhere, why is she paranoid about going there?)

I was somewhat bewildered by this show of concern and the attached level of emotion. Polly also warned that she had overheard a dramatic conversation in the communal tearoom shared by students and staff. She thought I was deluded, assuming that the students were there for their education; she assumes no responsibility for their attitudes, even blood letting is a possibility, she tells me, and Indigenous students were plotting rebellion in the near future.

Could she have misunderstood the context? Well, if the students had really serious issues, I would hear soon enough, since Roxy (the Admin officer) would inform me if anything was amiss. It was mid-February and the teaching for the semester was about to begin. Polly is getting familiar with the Campus systems; she thought someone had opened her mail. I took her to the Campus Operations person who received and sorted the mail, asked her to explain the procedure. Polly listened and seemed to accept that she may have over-reacted to the way internal envelopes were recycled and resealed.

A personalised pin number was required to make outside phone calls, and Polly was allocated such a number, but asked it be cancelled so that she could

\(^{29}\) The term is from Guo Pu of the Jin Dynasty referring to the altering of life condition to bring cosmic balance.
not ring out of the university. I tried to convince her that using the telephone was a part of the work: if a student rang to speak to staff, there was an expectation that you would return the call. Polly said: “I don’t want other people knowing my business”. By this I gathered she meant the administrative staff and myself, as I received a printout of calls and charges for acquittal and budget purposes. I wondered: is Polly going to be a ‘functioning’ member of staff? If you don’t use the telephone in Indigenous workspaces it suggests you will not respond to others to provide support.

Polly was about to take on Kristen’s load of teaching that included a session each week at the Floraglade Correctional Centre. Inmates could telephone to discuss issues, although this was unusual. Polly said she had a thorough briefing from Roxy detailing the histories and crimes of all the prisoners. This surprised me although I knew Roxy as an informative source. Yet I doubted that she would disclose information about the inmates in this way. She was reasonably discrete about the inmates. Could Polly be making trouble for Roxy?

A few weeks later another notable incident arose.

It was Easter Monday, my weekend had been relaxing, a stroll along the waterfront, then some gardening activity. Picking up palm fronds and cutting back the veritable jungle threatening to enshroud the back of the house. An ordinary Sunday afternoon.

That night at about 7:30pm Allan, a lecturer in the Clifton unit, rang to tell me that he had seen Polly in town, and that she seemed to have had a disturbing reaction to seeing him.

At around 11pm the police arrived at my home, they had a call out to my address on a report of domestic violence. My partner and I wondered if the police had the wrong address, they didn’t think so. At 5:25am the phone rang, when I picked up the receiver it went ‘dead’.

Back at work on Tuesday, I was told by Roxy of a complaint.

Polly had reported to Roxy that one of the other lecturers had stalked her, “Sunday night I went to the cinema, and when I came out there was Allan, he looked really suspicious, like he was waiting for me!”
Polly was certain that Allan was furtively watching her movements, following and stalking her. Since it had been a long weekend, on Tuesday, the next working day, Polly asked for a closed meeting to relay her concerns. Clearly, she was quite agitated by the situation. I assured her that I took her concerns seriously, and would deal with the issue urgently. She returned to her office, where her nine year old daughter was working with pencils and paper. Shortly afterwards her daughter Lena had presented me with her handmade greeting cards – her own hand made construction, with a heart and a message “I love you”.

“That’s a lovely card” I said.

[Then I thought to myself - Oh s#*t this is all I need. I wonder about the action and the meaning, and would like to respond as though signs of affection from nine year old girls is normal behaviour, so I tell myself: she is probably just copying another card. But in the pit of my stomach I knew I am just trying to rationalise and start to think ‘what is Polly saying to Lena?’]

Although I empathised with the alleged stalking incident claimed by Polly, I was surprised by the allegations. I suggested that initially I meet with Allan and confront him. I asked Allan to meet, and put the allegation to him. He was literally dumbfounded, he emphatically denied following her.

“I can’t believe that she thinks I am following her. This is ridiculous!”

“Yes”, he said, “of course I was outside the theatre. Being a city with two cinemas I should not be surprised to meet other people from work”.

Soon after I met again with Polly to tell her that Allan considered her view mistaken. He was not stalking her and had no interest in following her. Allan steadfastly refused to speak to Polly, except for courteous ‘hellos and goodbyes’. The tension in the workspace remained relatively high after that allegation.

I began receiving phone calls at work, no one spoke, just several minutes of music with a romantic/love theme, perhaps Michael Jackson or something like ‘soft pop/romance’. The music was mostly recorded on my voicemail. I played each of the recordings a few times, trying to detect a clue, a voice, a
background noise. I deleted them, deciding that they were unimportant, erroneous and unwanted. These occurred once or twice a week for some time.

At this time I also received a phone message from Floraglade. David Partridge the Coordinator of Inmate Education Programs telephoned asking that I return his call.

I rang Dave, and he said: “Well John, we have a serious issue here. We cannot allow Polly to work inside the Centre. She has stirred up trouble and incited anger amongst the inmates. One inmate threatened another Lecturer from TAFE, and a female staff member of the Correctional Centre. We could take a case against your lecturer if anyone was hurt.”

A situation arose where one of the inmates physically threatened another inmate and attacked a staff member. This meant that the inmate was punished by having privileges removed, and could affect a possible early release decision. Polly, the tutor from Clifton campus, had generated issues about the inmates and their family responsibilities that were very personal and the inmates reacted very angrily and strongly. Dave denied Polly access to the inmates.

Shortly afterwards, I advised the Acting Director (of the Indigenous Unit of the University) of the fiasco at the Correctional Centre. He suggested paying out Polly's contract, and finalising her employment.

Polly left me a note saying she wanted to talk, but she had to go away for a few days. As I saw her leaving I requested a brief chat. She stated that she could not trust Allan and Roxy as they do not have a high level of commitment to Aboriginal education. She ‘unloads’ a number of claims about their behaviour. I listened and explained that a person’s commitment may change over time – perhaps they are not as committed as Polly, but that does not mean they aren’t doing their jobs satisfactorily. I tried to sound genuinely interested for her concerns, and supportive of the situation for the other staff. As I spoke, I thought very carefully about my words, knowing that I was probably damned whatever I say.

Joseph, an Indigenous staff member who also taught at Gribblebah and Floraglade, had talked with the inmates and reported to me:
“Hey John, she really stirred them up, you know, and that is not fair on them. Sure they did stuff, some bad stuff, but she just threw it right back in their faces. That big fella, Isiah, that one isn’t all there, he went ballistic, they put him in isolation for a few days. He didn’t deserve that extra punishment, because of her words. In our culture, we know that reciprocal action, like payback, is fundamental, and Polly she knows what that means. That girl’s not right. You mark my words, this will come back to bite her alright.”

I listened to the wisdom words from Joseph, he gave a spirited account of the impact of Polly’s action. “What do you suggest?”, I asked Joseph.

“I think we should pray for her”, he said solemnly.

By the middle of April I began to realise the whirling head spin I was in.

A few days later, my office phone rang.

“Hello Maskell, its Wayne, heard you were up there. I graduated last year, and now me and Melissa are both here at Tumbarumba, in New South Wales. I’m the community liaison person; and Melissa is a tutor. How are you doing?”

“That’s great Wayne. Congratulations on graduation, and getting the job. Suppose you heard I was here through the grapevine? How are the family? Have you heard from Uncle Pete and Aunty Ny?”

“Yeah, Mum’s here now, doing the course, Ny is teaching up Rocky way, and Pete is having trouble, diabetes and kidneys, but they’re well enough. Be good to get you here sometime for a visit. How are things up at Clifton? Those countrymen taking care of you?”

“Yeah Wayne – ups and downs, you know what its like (I thought about my current dilemma, but decided to let it pass unspoken at this time). I’ve got a tutorial to do soon, next time I’m down that way I’ll call in. Thanks for the call Wayne. Say hello to Melissa for me.”

I hung up, and thought of Wayne. He would work well as a Community Liaison person, but at a loss to the teaching of primary kids. Melissa was doing her honours when I left that earlier Indigenous workspace.
Should I call in some connections from the grapevine? Uncle Pete and Aunty Ny could be related to Kristen, albeit distantly. No, I thought the better of it. Things were complicated enough, and I had to survive on my own merits.

After two months I decided to take my journal to an independent member of staff, the Equal Opportunity Officer. I printed out the section from February to the end of April. I placed the journal in an envelope, signed and dated the seal, and sealed the edges with transparent tape. Written on the outside were the words: Not to be opened without instructions from John Maskell. For additional protection against prying eyes, I put the envelope inside another envelope, on the front addressed as follows:

EEO, Attention: Ms C.R.
For safekeeping, confidential.
Please do not open without my instruction, signed and dated 21/4/97.

I was reacting to events, and recalled the phrase given by an Indigenous leader in another workspace, when difficulties arise she said ‘get control of the timeframe’. I rang that person who worked three thousand kilometres away interstate, and asked her advice. The brief chat was reassuring, and the timeframe was carefully considered. Up to that time my actions were indeed being played out by reacting to events. I did not have control.

I did not want EEO to know the details of the envelopes, only if something went seriously awry (e.g., allegations of disregarding or neglecting staff concerns at some future point in time). I spoke to Cheryl (the EEO officer) generally about my concerns: disharmony amongst some staff, my wanting to protect myself and the other staff, and the individuals who might make claims against others. I certainly did not want to add any tension to black/white relations in the workspace, or the institution more broadly.

My in-laws had arrived by plane that afternoon from interstate. We went for a stroll along the seaside path at sunset. We went home to relax, and were just sitting down to our evening meal as the telephone rang, I answered:

“Hello is that John?”

“Yes, who is it?”
“John, its Polly, I am very worried, my flat was broken into, and a letter I wrote to you, it explains my feelings for you, it’s been stolen, what if someone finds it?”

“Hang on Polly, can you say that again – there was clatter of plates behind me.”

“Oh John, I don’t know what we can do – I wrote a letter to you about my love for you, and the burglar has taken it, and trashed the place”. I was speechless. I stood silently for a moment and wondered how to respond to this situation.

“Polly don’t worry, I am very sorry to hear of your break-in, that’s awful. Did they take much?”

“I’m not sure, they took my CD player and TV, I didn’t have much else. The place is a mess. What if someone finds the letter?”

“Don’t worry about the letter, come in tomorrow, when you have time, being burgled is really awful Polly.”

The Acting Director (Tony) was visiting the campus the next day. I knew he was visiting Kristen and her family, but I had to ask him some questions relating to future teaching and Polly, prior to the following day’s meeting. I decided I needed to talk with Tony about the complications, although not this particular aspect. I rang Kristen’s house, she answered, and when I asked to speak to Tony her reply came loud and clear:

“John, it is 8:30 at night and you want to interrupt our family life”.

I thought about the occasions in my life, rather infrequent, but memorable, when someone at work had called after hours to discuss an issue. Was I being unreasonable? I was not trying to upset the sleeping patterns of the new baby, or Uncle Tony’s visit. I think it was the only time I had ever rung Kristen at home.

“I just need to speak with Tony.”

“Can’t it wait until tomorrow John?”

“No Kristen, I do need to speak with Tony as soon as possible.”
4.3 Portrayal Three: implications and lessons learned

I was drawn by her concern for my safety,
by the allegation against Allan,
so began the process of Polly entangling my emotions,
hers vulnerability and her agency,
the fear of the telephone,
the drawing by her daughter,
the break in and the missing letter,
the songs recorded onto my telephone voicemail (was that you, Polly?)

I felt as a fly being bound in the fine silk of emotional turmoil,
this was anything but seduction, and not reciprocal,
seeking safety and self-preservation,
tangled, caught, trying to escape.
Yet each week, another layer restrained and immobilised my thinking.

4.3.1. On learning from staff interactions

Ironically in my diary it is noted that I attended another ‘Dealing with Difficult People’ staff development day in May, amidst this difficult time. Staff development training usually interfered with routine, but on that occasion time out of the office was a refreshing distraction. The critical situations (in 4.2) were beyond the realms of unexpected behaviour by the anticipated difficult people, and the professional development day did not address those issues, but provided relief.

Polly’s fear of my visiting Gribblebah may have reflected her concerns about identity and her living on the ex-mission community. Although Polly had stated her concerns about my visit, it is possible she was projecting issues, namely about her professional life and professional relationships.

With the initial employment of Polly, I had accommodated Kristen’s suggestion, since her local knowledge was something I lacked. Yet I did not feel entirely confident about Kristen’s proposal of Polly. The employment of Polly created degrees of tension amongst all full time and some part-time members of staff, and potentially for the long-term relationship for the university with the Correctional Centre. In dealing with the employment issue and Polly, the Acting Director (an Indigenous man), presented a mainstream

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30 This response had not occurred to me prior to writing this analysis, but after discussing with a Koorie colleague who read through this narrative section.
instrumental response. Although in a position of authority, I had accepted Polly since finding staff at short notice can be difficult. I was already arranging staff to cover the Floraglade tutorials, and there had been only a few more weeks of semester.

I had not recognised the ideological shifts that I would have to personally make, because we were then working in terms of the 'enclave model' (Ford, 2005, pp.64-8) in order to bring students up to an access entry point for a degree. There was the ideological shift of one who was now Coordinator of a TAC program, whereas previously I had been socialised to be critical of such provision. Students pursuing their degree studies would assume accredited agency in whatever field, and my role was not to raise concerns about the place and recognition of Indigenous knowledge.

My actions as coordinator were intended to ensure a flat organisational structure for the Clifton staff. I accepted both Polly’s viewpoint, as I accepted Allan’s. The possibility existed that Allan really was acting in a deviant manner, if he had been stalking Polly. I did not discount this possibility. I could understand that Polly could be ‘spooked’ by Allan. He was a tall, lean character – occasionally lurching ‘like a question mark’ at the bus stop (as described by an observant Murri friend). In terms of the workspace, this allegation resulted in Allan and Polly maintaining a studied avoidance of one another.

One consequence of the events I have narrated (4.2) was indeed my response to this situation. Henceforth I kept detailed records. The journal was to try to keep track of my interactions with staff. I decided that a detailed record might help in ascertaining any ‘mis-communications’ or conflicts. Much of the subtext of staff interpersonal communications related to discourse that pre-dated my understanding of this workplace. From that day (of Polly’s allegation) onwards I kept a daily record and informed an external member of staff of the issues that emerged from reflection upon the resulting narrative. This situation also motivated me to seek advice outside the staff of the Indigenous unit. This was ethically challenging as I did not believe in letting ‘outside’ organisational staff know the intricate daily activities/issues of Indigenous staff or students. In previous workspaces I had sought counsel from senior Indigenous staff from
within the workspace, since that was a way of showing respect for the cultural difference and being an insider to situations. There was an expectation that the broader university staff had differing perceptions of teaching and learning in Indigenous environments. However, I sought confidential advice in order to protect my actions. In any workspace there is a need for loyalty to colleagues, but I recognised that this particular situation was perhaps unique, as I was both an outsider and coordinator, accountable for the situations that arose and which are recounted in the narrative (4.2).

4.3.2. Correctional centre and institutional actions

One implication from the concerns raised by the Correctional Centre staff, had been the punishment meted out to inmates as a direct result of Polly’s way of teaching, in which she had created a confrontational classroom situation. The Centre Education Programs Manager had told me quite clearly that Polly was not to return. Polly may have had no idea of the reaction she set in motion; or did she? The Floraglade episode gave a highly regrettable edge to action I would initiate to support or empower staff. Consequently I question myself: should I have suggested mediation outside of the workspace? These issues were not resolved as Polly’s contracted teaching time ended and I did not see her again.

If a situation, parallel to that in the narrative, occurred in an on-campus tutorial, either (a) no action would be taken outside the tutorial, or (b) an individual student would complain against the lecturer which would be given due process to arrive at a resolution.

Later, I learnt from Kristen that Polly had grown up in an orphanage that had a reputation, such that it gained media coverage later that year as one of the worst institutions for the abuse of children in the State of Queensland.31 Polly was a victim of the policies referred to as affecting members of the Stolen Generation.32 I never discussed her letter again with her, and I heard that she had left the area some time later. In trying to support her, I had also sought counselling advice for myself, but could not engage her in counselling. How

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31 Not that I should have been told earlier, or to suggest that Kristen knew of the psychological difficulties that may have influenced her work practices.

32 Stolen generations and children’s homes are detailed in Portrayal Four, Chapter Three.
could I expect her to confide confidences to a person ‘trained’ in the very same discipline that may originally have isolated Polly in an institution of unknown regrets and suffering? I believed that counselling was an option that may have helped Polly, but such advice could also be too easily interpreted as part of a judgment that she was wrong about Allan (and thus as an act of paternalism). Another consideration, that should be noted here, is that there was no provision for a qualified Indigenous counsellor on staff for the Indigenous staff and students.

And so I was wary of the implication that I could act in a way that sided with Allan, the other non-Indigenous male educator, in preference to believing the plight of Polly the younger Indigenous woman, the alleged victim. Tony, the Acting Director, assisted by offering to ‘pay her out and tell her she can go now’. Partly this was a response to another complication in the above narrative. Polly had asked to change the content of the Unit she was teaching, and Tony was rather annoyed that she would not present the Unit as outlined. I remember Polly had wanted to teach the Unit with content she was familiar with from her TAFE teaching. I was not in favour of just paying her out as Tony suggested, since such an outcome was letting Polly down. Being new to employing staff, I was not keen to terminate her contract. I intended to support and mentor Indigenous staff at the beginning of their careers, and resisted turning them out with a negative tertiary experience. The term mentoring comes to mind, although some educators suggest there is a negative connotation in the word, perhaps in the same vein that ‘empowerment’ is not a popular term. The issue of paying a person and effectively terminating a contract, was not straightforward for me.

The incident at Floraglade happened during the first unaccompanied visit by Polly. Most staff were introduced on their first visit by another member of staff. The incident described in the narrative was very serious. As a new tutor, Polly allegedly caused inmates to react. On a later visit when I was teaching Communication Skills, the inmates told me that they had fun with Polly, that they could “just reel her in” like a little fish. This was another version of the incident. Were the inmates having their own misogynistic fun? Of course another perspective on the situation from the inmates would reveal a different
narrative to what has been described above. The perspective of inmates playing their own game to ‘stir up trouble’ and see how the new educator reacted, particularly when the teacher is a young Indigenous woman, is a story I cannot entertain further here.

Perhaps if Polly had attended a staff induction, it might have altered the outcomes of her employment.\(^{33}\) I was in anguish from being in a position of authority and struggling for ethical workplace practices. I sought cooperation in workplace decisions, and if not obtained, I found myself in potential conflict, opposed to the staff. This became quite a tough situation, and such days were the daily bread of that institutional existence.

In the narrative (4.2) above, the curricula is not specifically brought into the discussion. Yet the teaching of the curricula at the Correctional Centre did contribute to the complexity of the issues. In facilitating a discussion on Indigenous studies, learners would engage with issues such as domestic violence that could be considered inflammatory to those men in prison, especially as some of them may have been imprisoned for that very reason. Other topics taught were the history of the stolen generations, and the unacceptable level of Indigenous unemployment and related racism in North Queensland and Australian society. One particular inmate had a significant intellectual disability and reacted violently to the confronting material presented.

One lesson I learnt concerned the need for lecturers to be better prepared to anticipate the content and the context of their teaching. I can only speculate upon how Polly engaged or enraged the learners. At the time I did not ask her about how she worked with the Correctional class so as now to ‘interrogate the subject (Polly)’. Polly did not explain the nature of the tutorial, nor did she convey to me that inmates had been challenged to consider their responsibility to victims of domestic violence, the women and children who were left to suffer due to their violent actions.

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\(^{33}\) In January 2004 I was scrutinizing my old filing cabinets in the shed, and I located a forgotten off-yellow envelope addressed to the EEO officer. With some hesitancy, and with some emotional pain, a memory emerged, and my stomach moved in an involuntary manner.
One or two of the learners (inmates) certainly reacted to this analysis and interrogation of the extent of the harm caused by their actions. The tutorial as carried out was ill-advised. It was not a constructive exercise - neither for the inmates nor Polly. In that particular context the Correctional Centre counselling staff were more appropriate persons to deal with these more personal issues.

As stated above, the TAC curriculum presented a level of Indigenous experience and sensitivity, but was essentially seeking to enable learners to gain access into the degree programs. The course was skills based, seeking to give western discipline areas privilege over Indigenous knowledge, and thereby it was thought to be providing skills that would ensure learners could manage the university experience.

This approach is common to what is termed an 'enclave' approach (Ford, 2005). Learners prepare to enter degree programs after successfully emerging from the enclave. This suggests that the lecturers of curriculum in degree programs maintain their form or integrity and the learners are prepared to engage in university study in the ways that are expected of non-Indigenous students. This approach disengages learners from their background knowledge, or brings the cultural clash into sharper focus. (This theme is analysed in the fourth level portrayal).

4.3.3 Lessons learnt from my disconnectedness

On both personal and professional levels, I was not well connected at Clifton, and without the support of Indigenous staff, this position was uncomfortable and alienating. Due to the emotional upheaval, and the sense of being disconnected from culturally safer spaces, I considered contacting friends on the Indigenous grapevine for advice. Yet I chose not to call on any social obligations (from kin or relations) that may have helped me to settle in and find acceptance at Clifton. Instead, choosing to weather the storm myself, I eventually had to revert to the institutional support of the EEO office. And so I sought solace in the white institutional structures, since they offered familiar bureaucratic processes and logic.
There was thus an alternative which I did not acknowledge. One of the older Arts faculty students was an Elder from Central Queensland from the Birra Gubba community. Uncle Cec was a regular feature sitting on the balcony consuming his morning and afternoon mug of tea. For many years he had been employed as an Indigenous Liaison officer with a State Government department. Cec was in the process of having his qualification, including his cultural credentials, accredited. He would then be licensed as a counsellor. Here was a person that could have helped both Polly and me. But I did not want to uncover the troubles I was having, especially as the balcony was a place for regular chats with many students and staff, and I was unsure whether I should discuss these matters with Uncle Cec.\(^\text{34}\)

I was conscious that Indigenous staff viewed me as another ‘whitefella’, bent on personal empire building. As so constructed, I was there to settle into the balmy north and further exploit this tropical Indigenous education environment. An implication was that I felt that some staff were ‘rattling my tree’, or setting me up, and so some paranoia emerged, and in a small workplace that meant that the vibrations in the air were not good ones. Sometimes I negated feelings of paranoia, sometimes the workspace was like a silent siege, and at other times I became suspicious of incidents, coincidences and so an uneasy feeling became the norm. This was my first time filling a position of authority, but it was only as a whitefella in an Indigenous domain, and there were many instances of past black/white tensions reported by staff, both in and out of the Indigenous unit.

All my professional instincts, accrued from previous experience, meant I tended to take action in co-operative ways, moulding myself towards Indigenous aspirations. However, the power relationships were different at Clifton, and the sense of an individual's agency differed from what I had experienced before. The structures were also different and as the Co-ordinator I related differently within them. Some of the workspace dissonance emerged from the actions of colleagues, and I felt that my role was undermined. These

\(^{34}\) There were four Indigenous leaders in this narrative, Uncles Cec, Harry, Pete, and the previous Director. All were deceased before the age of 65.
might have been minor attempts to unseat or just to upset me, or maybe they were both.

4.3.4. Reflection on whiteness, habitus and agency

One implication was the emergence of a self - questioning about my role as whitefella with authority. My habitus, the embodied habits of working hitherto, were called upon to resolve the conflicts. Consequently, the situations in the narrative (4.2) left me wondering if I really had a place as a whitefella in Indigenous education. Whiteness was not an area discussed, apart from a self-deprecating joke or a laugh, and usually this involved government institutions, the habitual subject of Indigenous disparagement.

No doubt whiteness impinged upon my role at Clifton, and with my relationship with staff, including Polly and the Correctional Centre staff. At Floraglade there were two levels of privilege: being white and credentialed with black students in a TAC course was one level. The other was also being white and not living on the inside, and so one shared the privileges of the prison staff. White educators were sharing this double layer of privilege over and against the inmates. Maybe I tried to forget about being white. The non-Indigenous writer, Sue Shore (1998) alerts us to the selective amnesia that can occur in our pedagogical relationships. We white Anglo Australians can easily overlook (or forget) how our whiteness interplays with teaching, and our work relationships.

There were lessons for me here. I was coming to understand how whiteness was a barrier to communication with Kristen, and was also sensing how I was something of an unknown quality to other staff. But from the incident (4.2) I had not learnt the culture of the organisation, had not recognised the ways that this Indigenous workspace was different from previous spaces and workspaces I had experienced. Being socialised to be a compliant whitefella is easy enough for the left and progressive ideologue, but I came late to an appreciation of the tension in being the authority figure. This was a difficult transition as I saw myself as a supporter of Indigenous rights, yet exercising authority by being ‘the boss’. My position as a co-ordinator at Clifton introduced a tension into my sense of legitimacy and authority, and it, in all
likelihood, caused annoyance for some of the Indigenous staff. Whilst I hoped to achieve teamwork and support the students, I could understand the Indigenous staff feeling that another Indigenous position had become White simply to satisfy the University hierarchy.

Another implication of whiteness in the narrative (4.2) is to consider the decisions made by Polly, and the positioning she adopted. Perhaps Polly saw my privilege and positioned herself accordingly in relation to me. I cannot speculate on her intentions. The situation reminds me of a historical context, in which Indigenous women gained the favour of a ‘captain’, a powerfully positioned white man. The relationship need not be of a sexual nature, but was about gaining influence and a better position in the new colonial world. In the context of Clifton, where the institution is the power structure, my interpretation now leads me to view the situation differently, less personally, less about me and my actions. The decisions and agency of Polly is but one interpretation of the power relations that I will reflect upon further in the fourth level portrayal.

4.3.5 Lessons learned – a poetic reflection

A new challenge, my work history recognised, a tranquil backdrop and a newborn campus, the big brick barn structures, with colonial-style arched tin roofs, reminding me of the rural accommodation for refugees at Bonegilla.

Participation, Research and Development, a motto to remember, yet I struggled to maintain links to community, fewer learners engage each year. A Youth Allowance discourages the aunties and the uncles, from study, and gaining credentials. Access course different to my experience, knowledge as deficit model I feel unease.

Director departs ill, a new broom arrives, shakes up the staff, a shift of focus, to greet learners far and wide. Community met on different terms, being viewed as mission manager Layers of collegial unrest/mistrust,
personalities and attitudes,
counselling unresolved,
correctional inmates upset,
yet reeling in their tutor,
‘like a fish’.

Mental illness, delusion and perception,
an explosive combination in a prison context,
Trying to recreate team,
relationship fragmented,
institution confronts little gains,
friendships uncertain,
black white divide.
Strong local organisations,
emphasis subtly divisive,
going struggle like a tropical garden,
persistent and single focus,
perhaps I am entangled in a strangler vine.

Gribblebah history and local legends,
Harry takes ‘a dingo’s breakfast’,
to meet community,
a little at a time.

Time to move on,
‘consider retraining’,
position to be ‘Indigenised’,
Letting go of concerns,
training up whitefellas,
like a merry go round,
one trained up, then goes away

4.4. Portrayal Four: the inquiry level and relevant literature

Working in Aboriginal tertiary education is also very much a struggle in political terms. The late Lin Onus, an Aboriginal artist (who lived up Upwey way in Victoria), alludes to the difficult life among factions in the Aboriginal Arts community through his designing the technically challenging wheelbarrow full of acrylic goannas.

As Onus said, “Working in Aboriginal Art is like trying to push a wheelbarrow full of goannas uphill!!!” (Neale, 2001, p.128). The metaphoric image emphasises the difficulty of containing the agile goannas. The large lizard is renowned as a fast and threatening reptile with significant claws for climbing
trees. The barrow full of goannas is appropriately transferable to my memories of the Clifton environment.

This portrayal explores emerging themes from the narrative (4.2), and then relates to the literature in order to further illuminate the meaning of the issues. The themes as they have been emerging are:

4.4.1. Blurring the personal and professional boundaries
4.4.2. Cultural brokerage and reconciling self
4.4.3. Recognising organisational mismatch and disconnectedness
4.4.4. Educational leadership and whiteness constructions

4.4.1. Blurring the personal and professional boundaries

The incident in the narrative (4.2) illustrates a blurring of work and personal time, the interference beyond the typical preparation for teaching or reporting, into the realms of the emotions and the psyche. Peter Willis (1998, p.85) writes of being “Caught in one’s own whirlpool: chaotic and stressful” and this feeling subsumed me at that particular time. In the vortex, I was unsure how or where to turn for help. The tension in the narrative (as recounted above in 4.2) circles (like a bird of prey) around the issues of knowing how to act, trying to reflect on actions, cautious of being paternalistic, questioning actions of self and the carry over into personal life from the workspace. I spent many evening hours at home maintaining an accurate journal to record the dialogues of the day, just in case detailed explanations were required in the future. This intensification of knowing by writing through the experience has parallels with the intent described by Letherby:

Stanley (1991:209) argues that all feminist work should be fundamentally concerned with how people come to understand what they do. Thus in producing feminist theory it is important that we recognise the importance of our ‘intellectual biography’ by providing ‘accountable knowledge’ in which the reader has access to details of the contextually located reasoning process which gives rise to the findings, the outcomes (Letherby, 2000, p.94).

Like Letherby, writing through my experiences provides accountable knowledge that can be analysed by others. From this autobiographical exercise non-Indigenous readers may gain an understanding of my blurring of the personal and professional boundaries. There was perpetual waking during the
night; the late-night pondering of strategies for anticipated stressful situations; the seeking of medical advice; and then the taking of prescribed anti-depressant medication. And so I was using my home-life (more particularly my partner) as a sounding board, and occasionally asking Indigenous friends from outside the Clifton area for their advice. Generally, I relied upon advice at home more than elsewhere, and as the difficulties (outlined in the narrative) arose, I found myself in need of the support from home to get through each day and week. And of course, I had not earned respect or attained ‘insider’ status within this workspace or regional environment. I had been ‘brought in’ and there I remained - an outsider.

Blurring of boundaries had occurred at other workspaces, but not with the emotional intensity experienced at Clifton. Yet, in my earlier life as a teacher, work was always brought home, and that was part of the daily unwinding of tense interactions with the work of students. Occasionally, at other cultural interfaces, I had made connections with Indigenous families and this meant meeting up after the day's teaching and learning; blurring the boundaries with the pleasantries of social obligation.

Being coordinator affected my attitude as an educator, negotiating the relationships and the power in issues of staff management. Is blurring of roles common to a coordination role? This question relates to the notion of ‘working’ the ‘self and other relationship’ as Fine states:

_Self and Other become knottily entangled… despite denials, qualitative researchers are always implicated at the hyphen… By working the hyphen, I mean to suggest that researchers probe how we are in relation with the contexts we study and with our informants, understanding that we are multiple in those relations_ (Fine, 1997, p.16).

My knotty entanglements and multiple positioning in the critical incident were as: a listener for learners and colleagues concerns and trying to maintain a cohesive workspace whilst being a white privileged male coordinating an Indigenous workspace. Being an import from outside the region; hence less connected to local community; having less institutional memory that bound other colleagues to their positioning and standpoints on issues; being empowered to manage and enact decisions for the Indigenous students of the
campus. These were my multiple positionings that intersected with various levels of agency.

The prominent entanglement is myself feeling manipulated by Polly, as the vulnerable younger black woman calls in the senior white man, singing her captain. Part of the understanding that emerges from the narrative at Clifton concerns the way that Polly worked on me, psychologically speaking. It can also be seen as a coercive call to influence or possibly exploit my position. Initially, I responded like a protector (as stated in 4.2) reminding myself that I had to beware of potential violence to myself, especially when visiting the Gribblebah community. Later, it was a matter of protecting or at least alerting myself, with a warning that the on-campus students planned a violent revolt, and this also would threaten my position, as well as cause trouble for the wider University community.

An example of these entanglements is the manipulation of the captain (an older white male in a position of power) as presented in the film by Tracey Moffat, titled Nice Coloured Girls (1986). The film shows three girls that pick out their ‘captain’, and in the context of the film the Captain is a man flashing money about a club in Kings Cross. The girls see him, select him, he buys them drinks, and later when he is drunk, they take his money and go clubbing without him. This mirrors post contact Aboriginal history (and oral history) of the idea that gaining influence with a male in a position of power, and reciprocally, the Captain could be prevailed upon to positively influence life for the Aboriginal woman, and her extended family. Tracey Moffat juxtaposes images of a framed picture on a wall, presenting an image of a First Fleet sailing ship, with another captain akin to those observed by the Cadigal people of Eora nation. The role of the Captain presents a way for me to understand how the boundaries were being blurred affecting my decision making. I recall that after Polly completed her Semester employment contract, I received two calls from potential employers asking for references for her. I was cautious, but did not negate her employment prospects. Indeed, I had become her ‘captain.’ Although as her entangled ‘captain’, I had not earlier brokered a
better employment outcome for her at the Floraglade Correctional workspace.\(^{35}\)

### 4.4.2. Cultural brokerage and reconciling self

Becoming a cultural broker is one way of achieving better relationships in workplaces with staff and students in cross-cultural settings. With a focus on Indigenous environments, Sonja Pastor and Phil Elsegood suggest:

> To become a cultural broker able to operate effectively at the interface between two cultures, we need to be able to operate within an alternative system of communicative conduct as used in a particular cross-cultural setting. In each specific cultural environment, this entails learning how to: establish rapport, give and seek information; make requests; approach people; express opinions and criticism; and participate in meetings. (HREOC, 1999, p.56).

Conscious of this description, I view the critical incident at Floraglade as an instance where I could have acted as a cultural broker. There was an opportunity to intervene and negotiate, to advocate for Polly and challenge the Floraglade inmates, and confront the incident with the assistance of Dave, the education programs manager. This was a missed opportunity to critically examine the source of the complaint, and even with my team building and power-sharing intentions, I did not implement a form of positive discrimination to argue the case with Polly. Instead, I accepted the opinion of staff at the Correctional Centre, and informed Polly that she would no longer be working at Floraglade. If I was acting as a cultural broker, I would have acted with more interest to the Indigenous voices of Polly and the inmates in the incident.

Reflecting on the above issue, I was confident in any classroom interaction, in any school practicum interaction, or indeed any internal campus interaction. But the correctional centre was a more threatening place. To this punitive bureaucracy, removed from my realm of influence as an authority with different protocols, I was bowed with deference. I was unsure how to act, but now question what occurred, and am critical of my acceptance of the decision-making processes from the Correctional Centre.

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\(^{35}\) French (1992) provides a critique of Nice Coloured Girls.
This questioning of action leads me to consider ways to better prepare for the cultural interface. Could cultural training or brokerage improve my liaison role at Clifton? With campus management? With the Correctional Centre? With local secondary schools and other tertiary institutions providing education for Indigenous adults in the region? These also act as cultural brokers between Indigenous, institutional and external interests. It is in such liaison relationships that the role of a cultural broker comes to play a part.

Writers in related social science disciplines e.g. counselling and psychology, have researched and categorised attitudes in working with ‘other’ cultural learners in cross-cultural workplaces (Brislin and Yoshida, 1994; Hofstede, 1980). Similarly, Pendle (2001) in a paper titled "Teaching Cross-culturally: Crossing Cultural Frontiers in Education" builds on Hofstede’s five dimensions of cultural variability - high context/low context; collectivist/individualistic; power distance; uncertainty avoidance; masculine/feminine culture differentiation (Hofstede 1980). This style of categorisation could be helpful for aspects of workplace consideration and understanding, however such descriptors do not represent the type of understanding that my research has aimed to illuminate.

Hofstede’s categories may have credence for international comparisons of workers in many countries, however I view the organisational characteristics as quite different from working within Indigenous education. The incident at Floraglade, or my workplace position at Clifton, could be assessed using Hofstede’s criteria, but I do not think the Indigenous workspace is as easily categorised. The collectivist concept is relevant, and as the research of Indigenous scholar Shayne Williams shows, collective responsibility is highly significant for Kooris in New South Wales (Williams, 2007). Even though I do not attempt to assess the other indices evaluating the lecturer/student interaction, academics like Pendle make the contrasting claim that:

All relationships and social organisations of a culture are grounded in these five dimensions, and that includes education. Both teaching and learning differ in different cultures, so an examination of these differences will assist you in planning your cross-cultural teaching. First, teaching differs in at least six areas: method of presentation, type of learning, classroom norms, structure and formality, interaction patterns and student-teacher roles (Pendle, 2001, p.4).
These ‘helpful’ suggestions for understanding learners do not give respect for Indigenous lived experience or postcolonial perspective (worldview). My analysis is that research like that by Hofstede and Pendle do not provide an appreciation of local, situated perspectives beyond the categories stated in the quote above, which is the criteria as set by mainstream educational researchers. The example of ‘masculine and feminine role differentiation’ is appropriate for contemporary Indigenous cultures, yet has become questionable in modern (Western) society. These cross-cultural criteria do not consider the struggle against marginalisation and oppression, which generates different responses at the cultural interface. Such categorisation actually tends to reproduce notions of otherness, as relationships of client and provider, or learner and teacher. Such positioning moves away from my focus about Indigenous and non-Indigenous workspace cultures within the tertiary system.

A more encompassing framework for developing cultural competency emerges from the work of Ranzijn et al (2008).

The above model was implemented by staff at the School of Psychology at the University of South Australia, and used as a central structuring framework. Such conceptualising was developed for capacity building of students of psychology (Ranzijn et al, 2008, p.20), and provides a more appropriate model for improving the qualities of the cultural broker. Extending from cross cultural competence, there is also a need for anti-racist training, an area
extensively addressed by Chambers and Pettman (1986), Hollinsworth (2006) and more recently by Fredericks (2008).

Another way of gauging the self learning I experienced at the Clifton cultural interface is to consider the focus on reconciliation. A bringing together of the Indigenous and non-Indigenous players in the narrative (4.2) and a working through reconciling pedagogy would have potentially brought about a greater level of understanding of the issues for the inmates, the Floraglade staff and the Clifton lecturer, and myself as Coordinator.

Indigenous academic Daryle Rigney and colleagues provide a Reconciliation Pedagogy that could be an alternative tool to cultural brokerage, and may be more useful in its application. The reconciling pedagogy is a study for non-Indigenous staff and students to explore injustice and resistance strategies. Rigney et al (2003) explain that their teaching has developed from its own theoretical foundations as set forth by the Social Justice Research Group. One aspect of the Reconciling Self curriculum designed for pre-service teachers has the following intent:

For students to become aware of the range of groups in the community engaged in resisting the injustice, of their understanding of its nature and causes and of the strategies they employ in resisting it. ...through more direct contact with community groups, to develop social and political skills to secure support for their own activities (Rigney et al, 2003, p.136).

Reconciling Self shows the institutional shift that has developed from tertiary workplaces organising cultural awareness for staff and students to providing federally mandated units of study for pre-service teacher education. Another aspect of reconciling pedagogy (or cultural brokerage) is that non-Indigenous educators ensure they construct inclusive curriculum with relevant Indigenous content.

To comprehend the narrative (4.2) I turn to Fay and his consideration as to how we understand our history, essentially how I can now comprehend my action, learning and meaning (my working praxis). Fay assesses ‘knowing and understanding others’ and asks ‘Must we comprehend others in their own terms?’ Fay brings into focus the view that interpretivism ‘is not so much false as one-sided’. His thesis highlights some relevant points:
Interpretivists desire to learn not what actual agents know but what a fully self-knowledgeable agent would be able to provide if there were such a person.... Unfortunately, this claim ignores crucial elements of human life. Even ideal members of a society may systematically misunderstand their own motives, wants, values and actions...just as individuals may be systematically mistaken, so whole forms of life may be based upon such self-misunderstandings or what Marx called “false consciousness” (Fay, 1996, pp.127-8).

Fay reminds me that ideological intent, my goal of working for Indigenous voices, may be misguided. I face the disturbing thought that instead of arranging for Polly to be confronted by another Indigenous member of staff while seeking to analyse and understand the causes of the problem, I took a paternalistic turn, and avoided an even more critical analysis. Here was a strategy that contradicts with my professed intent. Even the attempt to explain and analyse my rationalisations of praxis (and the meanings contained within that praxis) will not provide authentic knowledge for any ‘other’ educators at the cultural interface. My response to the workplace incidents at Clifton were made in that particular context, with particular power issues and personalities. I find this exposition by Fay empowering for my understanding. I am not trying to say more than I can know from my life as an instrument of service for the Indigenous institution. The aim is to critically assess that idea, with good intent, but I was misguided if I thought I was acting only as an instrument of service. Fay's closing lines are insightful, and highly relevant for my critical reflection:

*So must we comprehend others in their own terms? Yes, in the sense that we cannot grasp intentional phenomena and their products as intentional without ascertaining what they mean for those engaged in them. But No, in the sense that explaining these phenomena often will require outstripping the conceptual resources of those being studied (1996, p.134).*

Hence Fay (1996) brings comprehension and intention into focus, relating the meaning and intention within an action, and thereby thinking ‘historically’, in the way originally conceived by the actor doing the thinking (Fay, 1996).36 Fay also highlights the importance of reciprocity, engagement and expression through the hermeneutic circle:

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36 Fay explains that Grice (1957) first used this term in linguistics, then Collingwood (1961) developed his historical understanding around the term re-enactment, and the term re-thinking.
Here the hermeneutic circle is a spiral of reciprocity as new interpretations of past meaningful objects change the nature of the interpretive community to which they are related which in turn changes the interpretation of the meaningful objects, and so on indefinitely (Fay, 1996, p.146).

Reciprocity has a two-fold purpose in this quotation; on the one hand, by emphasising the work of interpretation and on the other by calling attention to the importance of reciprocity as reiterated by Joseph (see above in 4.2). Although it may be understated in this thesis, reciprocity or social obligation is an underlying theme at the cultural interface, and is closely linked to the intentions of the actor.

Fay also questions the way social scientists think of history in shaping our understanding, by asking: “Is our understanding of others essentially historical?” In aspects of workspace relations, the actors’ history may play a significant role. My role in relation to Polly, (as recounted in the narrative), involved a questioning of the expectations I held in relation to my role. There was also a constant reflection upon my intentions, in actions both current and from the recent past, and less often with respect to future consequences.

Writing through these concepts of intention, and reviewing aspects in which I needed to know how to act, has brought me full-circle to reconsider the historical position of the actors in that Clifton workspace.

One day on a visit to Gribblebah, Uncle Harry took me up to his duplex (i.e. half a house in Queensland architectural terms) where he told me a story. He likened the affects of various Aboriginal education policies to the wearing of a badly cut suit. He would describe the suit in these ways:

*the left arm is too short, the right one is cut off on an angle, the back part has not enough material to cover your body, the collar is cut-off and ill-shaped; and the new policy being made has just removed the inside pocket, or moved the buttons so they are no longer have any purpose.*

The metaphor really worked. The badly cut suit is useless to the wearer, it looks bad, it’s a joke on the wearer. The message being that many government policies have not fitted around the lives of Aboriginal people, just as this suit does not fit!

The metaphor was a message that Harry was offering, but I did not comprehend it. There was more to his retelling than I can adequately recall,
and the affect of policy upon a person such as Polly is prominent in my contemplation of old Harry’s metaphor. The life of Polly as a product of the system, indeed many systems, was like the ill-fitting suit. Harry was a man who could tell a story, he created the metaphor, he could give expression to a cultural expertise available to Indigenous listeners. Harry exemplified Indigenous knowing, and Indigenous difference, which contrasts and coalesces with the concerns and challenges put forward by a non-Indigenous academic Kathryn McConaghy (2000) when she raises questions about the intentions of non-Indigenous educators.

An extension of these concepts of cultural brokerage, of reconciling pedagogy and the intentions of non-Indigenous educators leads to the concept of cross-cultural expertise. McConaghy reviews the challenges of the Narratives of Cross-cultural Expertise (sic!) stating that many non-Indigenous academics write for the purpose of “knowing what works in Aboriginal classrooms” (2000, p.208). McConaghy states that many non-Indigenous academics act on the basis of a viewpoint which seeks to address the deficit or reduced psychologised position of Indigenous voices. One view, referred to as the ‘radicalised view’, sits close to my experience, and I acknowledge I may have embodied aspects of such a discourse.

McConaghy suggests that the origins of this 'radicalist' tradition may lie in the critique of education. In trying to negate colonialism, radicalism becomes complicit in accepting the impact of colonialism.

\[R\]adicalism is a project which is centrally about the inversion of colonial power relations. (McConaghy, 2000, p.219).

The discourse of empowerment and emancipation, as explained by McConaghy, developed within radicalism infused with a sense of justice, rightness and reasonableness that disguises radicalism's exclusive focus upon short term gains for Indigenous people to the exclusion of all else. Such shortcomings are viewed by McConaghy (2000, p.220) as radicalism's failure to adequately theorise contemporary forms of colonialism, power and racism. McConaghy suggests that radicalism is bound within culturalist boundaries that reinforces, rather than disrupts and displaces, colonial constructs and regimes of othering. Although she concedes that radicalism was an extremely
influential tradition within Indigenous education that has been responsible for some significant transformations in relation to colonial control and authority. (McConaghy, 2000)

Part of this has to do:

… with the popularity of emancipatory discourse and the notion of hegemony within the political left, and the appeal that the discourses of Indigenous control have within many sectors of the intellectual and bureaucratic classes. Another aspect of radicalism’s appeal is that in attempting to negate colonialism it leaves intact the structures of patriarchy (2000, pp.221-220).

This analysis provides a framework from which a credible interpretation for my positioning at Clifton can be given. I remained as a dominant male whitefella, intent on supporting Indigenous control, attempting to negate colonialism, having an emancipatory discourse and a critical awareness of the hegemonic structures of the institutions. Patriarchy did not seem to be present in the Indigenous centre where the new Director replacing Tony as Acting Director was an Indigenous woman. On the other hand, Gribblebah had Uncle Harry, who was a patriarchal figure. My place could be viewed as maintaining a patriarchal structure at Clifton. The university had males at that time in the key roles of Vice Chancellor, Pro-Vice Chancellor and campus Rector. The Floraglade Correctional Centre was also dominated by males.

One difficulty I faced, was the shift of vision from the previous Director, to the new Director. The Centre that had an Indigenous agenda was being replaced by a School that had a different view and intent. I was caught up in a dissenting workspace, the Indigenous staff appeared wary of the new direction that was being handed down as 'from above'.

The above matters of cultural brokerage, a naïve intentionalism and alternative narratives of cross-cultural expertise, provides a conceptual framework in which to explain my feeling of a mismatch that arose from this institutional experience. My role was being shifted towards an acceptance of mainstream provision via the enclave model, and so, being immersed in the Clifton workspace, I was, in fact, trying to catch up. So, there I was straddling a new boundary and in so doing conforming to a situation that had arisen from the imposition of new management structures. In the following section, I present
some historical changes recognised in the representation of Aboriginal education, and a discussion of my disconnectedness and the organisational mismatch.

4.4.3. Disconnectedness and organisational mismatch

Organisational or institutional mismatch constitutes another theme that emerges from the narrative (4.2). For me this contrasted markedly with what I had experienced of Indigenous control from earlier times. To put this situation into its historical context, I track briefly to the shift in institutional attitudes that has occurred over the past two decades. Here I rely upon the analysis of Sue Whatman (2005) about recent Aboriginal education provision at the school level. Sue Whatman and Pearl Duncan (2005) discuss the various approaches to Aboriginal education and identify the shift in terms of:

...moving from ‘student as problem’ to ‘system as problem...

The various approaches to change and this basic shift has a decided consonance with change in the tertiary contexts, and they suggest that education systems have maintained the positions as required by government policy.

![Diagram showing phases in Indigenous education](image)

(The above diagram is an extract from Phillips and Lampert, 2005, p.124)

The above illustrates a shift from assimilation and compensatory education to Indigenous self determination as evidenced in bilingual, two way and cultural
responsiveness approaches. At the primary and secondary school level, influential models of Aboriginal learning styles, along with two-way learning models, were part of a diverse continuum of ways to understand and explain the complexity of cultural difference (Hughes et al, 2004). I contend that the cultural deficit model has actually been continued by the role prescribed for educators by certain models of tertiary education provision, and I would therefore conclude that the Clifton TAC program is an example of this model. The self determination models are rare, if found at all, in the tertiary system, although I believe Yarrabool provides an example of this model, or at least a concerted attempt to implement it.

... An idea common to the many divergent perspectives presented here was that a culturally responsive approach was dependent on who really controlled the school (Harris, cited in Phillips and Lampert, 2005, p.129)

Here Harris refers to the presence or absence of Indigenous control, and undoubtedly the Indigenous control was minimised at Floraglade. The situation at Floraglade shows course provision is for the ‘educationally at risk’ at the Correctional Centre. The narrative (4.2) highlights that my understanding could have benefited from specific cultural awareness, about the Indigenous prison population, as well as the Indigenous staff at Clifton.

As this account of the TAC reveals, the student and staff expectations of the institution seemed different from mine. In the narrative (portrayal 4.2), there is a thread by which staff became less than communicative, which compounded the impact of the critical incident as described. 37

The outcomes of differing ideologies meant differing and conflicting staff views about their own roles in the TAC program. There were also different and unresolved views about their own contribution as part of an Indigenous centre for learning - this in particular has been highlighted in the narrative (4.2). Part time and sessional teaching staff were often not able to engage in staff workshops or in-house discussions that may have been crucial in shaping the workspace culture. Similarly, Polly was not adequately ‘socialised’ with the Indigenous institutional practices. Consequently a range of viewpoints may

37 There was a lack of trust amongst staff, and I was not confident to discuss the situation, except with the Acting Director Tony.
emerge that can result in some persons speaking out and others appearing agreeable.

In a later incident at Clifton an Indigenous staff member questioned my decisions on passing one of the inmates for their unit of study. A meeting was called with the Director, which became an inquisition into my decision-making. The Indigenous staff member wanted the Director to rescind the pass grade, an act which would have undermined my authority as well as intervening in the student's academic progress. This is an example of two competing perspectives, also theorised in "Representations of Aboriginality in Tertiary Education" - the results of Gale's research (1997).

This research contrasts two emerging types of educators - the gatekeepers and the facilitators. Gale states that the gatekeepers are seen to be

... excluding many (students) from becoming accredited with the profession ... (1997, p.195)

and the facilitators hold concerns for a hidden agenda against inclusive Indigenous knowledge production,

... this amazing push towards competency based education which is the antithesis... of what we’re hoping to achieve ... (1997, p.309).

By juxtaposing these two views of educators practice, I begin to discern how these two positions (and other viewpoints besides) could be held by staff in the same workspace, creating tensions for teaching, for course completion and a range of employment and academic practices (recognition of prior learning, credit for previous studies). In my example of the 'inquisition' described above, the Indigenous staff member was acting as a gatekeeper, an unusual situation since it was I who was defending my facilitative actions.

My role was not specifically leadership, but as Coordinator of the Indigenous unit at a small campus I was still in a position of power that created some staff conflict. Clearly, I was another non-Indigenous manager at the Clifton Indigenous unit. This may indicate that qualified Indigenous academics were wary of becoming part of this university due to institutional conflict with the Indigenous leadership. My ignorance of the dynamics of power and politics at the campus was not an advantage to me when I arrived from Cambodia.
My expectation of the workspace was shaped by the recurring pattern by which life became absorbed in resolving crises and so I came to expect the unexpected, knowing that Indigenous community life had a way of impinging upon the Indigenous unit. Teaching as timetabled continued but there were layers of community business that also had to be dealt with by Indigenous staff.

The lack of Indigenous lecturers may have partly resulted from a lack of senior Indigenous academics and administrative staff employed across the sector. Duignan and Butcher (2003) emphasise

*we place great faith in learning from experiences but frequently we cannot observe the consequences of our actions (they are separated from us by time and space and we work in complex, dynamic and non-linear organisations) … our faith in the power of teams to solve problems, and add to our learning, may be displaced. (2003, p.7).*

Such displaced hope in team-based solutions certainly aligns with my experiences at the Clifton workspace. Staff relationships at the cultural interface were breaking down, and had been doing so some time prior to my being employed. In hindsight, I believe the Indigenous staff simply adopted resistance positions. Resistance was an appropriate response if the intention was to make an impact upon the power structure in the Clifton workspace.

The tensions and positioning of staff required mediation, and for at least two members there had been complaints about each other, and two others had another dispute prior to my arrival. However, the way to a resolution of these staff conflicts was unclear, and probably sat just under the surface as unresolved antipathy. The dialogic tools as outlined by Freire, Mezirow and Habermas would all have been helpful to enable better communication.

I had anticipated (erroneously) that I was prepared for this leadership role from my earlier years living in the north (of Queensland) along with knowledge of some Indigenous families, as well as my experiences in three differing Indigenous higher education programs. That sounds quite reasonable although perhaps, to some degree, I overlooked the importance of Indigenisation within the sector. However, I never really aspired to take a leadership role in Indigenous education.

How was I to understand my world at Clifton? Michelle Byrne states that
Phenomenologists believe that knowledge and understanding are embedded in our everyday world … that truth and understanding can emerge from people’s life experiences... (Byrne in AORN, 2001, p.830).

The essence of my lived experience in that workspace was complex and conflicting. The notion of consciousness relates to the above discussion about intentionality and is also important in this space, as essential to phenomenological understanding. As Crotty states,

Consciousness is always consciousness of something (1998, p.79).

In terms of my consciousness at the time of the complex interactions at Clifton, my approach to workspaces was critical, or perhaps post-Marxist, and even a touch Buddhist. Part of my intentionality was contemplative and reflective, recognising the flaws of acting hastily and also of the folly of being aloof to reality. It was indeed as Polly had observed in one of her first comments - there I was with my back to the world!

4.4.4. Addressing whiteness

Attempting to comprehend the construction of my own whiteness, I look again at my personal perspective of cultural capital (from Bourdieu) and at my ethical and ideological mindsets. By being part of the ‘left thinking progressive element’, as an academic in a University, shows my self in terms of a hegemonic power; that is in terms of the degree of autonomy that is retained in an Indigenous environment. Recognising self as being from/within a hegemonic structure, and being therefore in an elite position, provides a critical perspective upon the tension between autonomous action and collegiality at Clifton.

Although it is a generalisation, academics expect to be autonomous decision-makers in their university life. However, within the Indigenous higher education unit the self (or ego) must relinquish much personal power. If not, one could be seen as working counter to Indigenous ideals, i.e. detracting from the ideals of ‘self-management’ or self-determination for Indigenous education units. At Clifton this was also evident, but the demands were different, with less students, and therefore also less staff.

The concept of ‘decentring’ (discussed in the introductory chapter) emphasises disengaging from my essential whitefella mindsets and cultural baggage. This
also means an intentional disengagement from any privilege granted me via my role in the workspace. At Clifton this was confronting. I had previously become familiar (to some extent) with giving up personal power (as ‘trained up by Koorie’) and so I tried to embody such a de-centred positioning in that Indigenous workspace. Conversely, as the Coordinator I had to choose not to relinquish the power at certain times. Clearly I lived through a conflict of intention and role, a perception of being dominant in my approach, giving leadership messages to both learners and staff.

The issues I have covered at Clifton were not all about my role. The actions of the inmates and the new lecturer Polly were also central to the situation explored. Yet my whiteness is a factor bound up with recognising the problem of non-Indigenous positions in an Indigenous environment. Frankenberg summarises this invisibility of the whiteness and western-ness, historically viewed as follows:

*The white Western self as a racial being has for the most part remained unexamined and unnamed. On the other hand, studies of racial and cultural identity have tended to view the range of potential subjects of research as limited to those who differ from the (unnamed) norm. On the other hand, whiteness has elsewhere been simultaneously ignored and universalised. ... In short, whiteness and Westernness have not, for the most part, been conceived as ‘the problem’ in the eyes of white Western people, whether in research or elsewhere* (Frankenberg, 1993, pp.17-18).

Frankenberg presents a significant challenge to my self-definition and to my understanding of the depth of my whiteness as an Anglo-Australian (my parents were of Irish and English descent). I have difficulty in deciphering the construction of my personal whiteness. Western-ness is also under theorised in this work, only revealing my own named influences. It seems strange, therefore, that we white folk always think the ‘other’ is more discernible than ourselves and therefore more open to critical analysis.

As a white educator embracing Indigenous perspectives, I recognized I could not attain degrees of ‘blackness’ or Aboriginality, or achieve an authentic Indigenous perspective as part of my knowledge or praxis. This discourse around identity presents a continuum of whiteness construction, at one end of ‘going native’ i.e. attempting to lose the ‘markers’ of whiteness whilst being non-Indigenous.
The position of white privilege was particularly nuanced at the Clifton cultural interface. In presenting a comparison with American tertiary education, Michelle Fine suggests the:

*racial formation was filled with parasitic interdependence such that whites needed Blacks in order to become privileged* (Fine et al, 1997, p. 60).

This interdependence and privilege questions my intention, provokes the questioning of my legitimate place at the cultural interface at Clifton. There are differences in a comparison to the North American experience, as Afro-Americans, not First Nation Americans are the focus in the text edited by Fines (1997) titled ‘Off White’. Applying Fines’ statement to my context, I see that working with Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal staff and students at Clifton provided me with a position with privilege. Such forms of exploitation are not easily recognised by non-Indigenous individuals, unless they are able to adopt a critically reflexive evaluation of their role. The relationship of such a power position could be made with other oppressed or ‘studied communities’, not necessarily only with ‘black’ colleagues (e.g. those working with ‘others’ such as refugees, NESB, people with disabilities, etc).

As Jean Phillips states

*Cultural privilege and power is actually being revealed in statements such as ‘I tolerate’ and ‘I accept’ because speakers assume they already have the power to perform the role of moral and culture arbiter. On the other hand, ‘those in the dominated position do not tolerate they just endure’ (quoted in Hage, 1998, p.88)...(Phillips & Lampert, 2005, p.22).*

Phillips succinctly reveals that privilege, like whiteness and western-ness, is invisible through the linguistic turn that goes unchallenged by the speaker. My cultural privilege and power may also have meant my assumptions were misplaced and my intentions misunderstood.

To analyse my actions and praxis in the Clifton experience, the following five mechanisms of whiteness construction are suggested. Hurtado and Stewart examined the “power that whiteness holds for its owners” (referred to in Fine, 1997, p.300) and present this power as being a

*birthright that is socialised from generation to generation in the largely racially segregated living arrangements that exist in the United States (in Fine, 1997, p.300).*
The Hurtado and Stewart research deconstructs and summarises the ‘mechanisms of whiteness’ as:

*Distancing; Denial: Superiority; Belongingness; Solidarity;*  
*(in Fine et al, 1997, pp.300-3).*

Adopting these five conceptual tools, I herein briefly document my assessment of the degree to which my own whiteness construction is recognised in the above Clifton narrative (4.2). My whiteness was positioned through avoiding confrontation and being in denial. First, this is seen in my failure to bring the staff together to confront their issues, those which had occurred prior to my arrival, and I did not recognise the urgency of resolving these prior staff tensions. Secondly in my lack of response when Polly suggested that there were dangers for me in visiting the community, and alerted me to dangers from the students plotting violent dissent. Thirdly, my whiteness was further positioned by not critically engaging and questioning the issues emerging from the Floraglade incident. My whiteness might have played out in other ways that may be identified in the narrative (4.2), but the following are prominent. My denial in these incidents was not to ‘see’ my responses as responses informed, essentially, by my Anglo-Australian cultural (social and political) construction of self. In the cultural interplay at work in each of these three different incidents, I acted as a *whitefella.*

Distancing: did I distance myself from Indigenous staff?

I doubted the view taken by Polly of the early incident of Allan, as I had befriended Allan prior to meeting Polly. However, I spent considerable time talking with Indigenous staff, so this question can not be definitively answered one way or the other.

Denial: did I deny the issues of ‘colour’ or disadvantage? Denial implicitly (albeit unintentionally) occurred as I brought my past experience to my workplace and denied my complicity in the institutional politics that maintained hegemonic whiteness in the institutional structures, i.e. as I accepted and maintained the position as coordinator.

Superiority: the presence of superior thinking relates to having privilege, that attitude of self as being academically, economically and socially secure,
superior in terms of security and social position. Whilst I deny this was prominent, being viewed as having a position of authority may be taken by the staff as an attitude of being superior. I maintain that at Clifton my demeanour would make this an unlikely claim. My way of working was to work with, beside and not from a position ‘above’. Prior to reading "Off White", I had not focussed on whiteness as highly influential in my analysis of my actions and learning. Perhaps that is an example of my own ‘colour-blindness’. Ben Wadham (in Moreton-Robinson, 2004) reminds me that:

> notions of race and gender, whiteness and masculinities structure the potential for Aboriginal reconciliation, both in how different subjects conceive of Aboriginality and what it means to be Australian (Wadham, 2004, p. 207).

Structures like the TAC course are sites for the contestation either re-affirming or questioning the assimilative practices that occur with students learning how to be ‘whiter’ in their language and professional practices.

Belongingness: did I see myself as belonging to the Clifton Indigenous spaces or to the University? My view of working was seeing self as an instrument being utilised to carry out Indigenous aspirations and empowerment within the institution. At Clifton I did not stay in that place for sufficient time to feel that I belonged, but saw myself as virtually a fringe dweller to both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous community. For in my role there was an absence of belonging which ironically perhaps, eased my departure, and became an important step in a process of Clifton Indigenisation. I might have stayed as a lecturer and created another whitefella role for myself, among the small number of staff.

Solidarity: Certainly there were examples of solidarity at Clifton: staff rallied together for NAIDOC celebrations; we went together to meet with CentreLink staff to present our institutional argument to maintain support for students receiving allowances from ABSTUDY (the Centre Link staff themselves were having their jobs rationalised in a major structural reform). Together we went to pay our respects at funerals of Indigenous leaders, who died too young, all aged in their early sixties. These ‘solidarity examples’ are evidence of working towards shared goals, but differ to the solidarity of shared white privilege expressed by Hurtado and Stewart (in Fine, 1997, pp.320-1).
The above five elements of the dynamics of power present the intellectual challenge that faced me. Through this reflection, looking back on the past and upon the present, a realism is maintained by understanding self and my whiteness construction. The Clifton workspace presented significant challenges, and left me desiring escape from the turmoil of office politics and the suspicious intentions of 'others'.

4.4.5 Resolution of the research text:

This research text shows a shift in my role; my prior experience had positioned me adversely to a role in which I was disconnected from community input. Taking the role of coordinator I became emotionally destabilised in work and home existence. The literature explored the role of a cultural broker, and the consideration of reconciliation pedagogy, but I was moving towards the mainstream and away from a border pedagogy.

My role experienced disconnectedness and dissent that emerged from being the whitefella in charge, an underlying impact on the ongoing business at the workspace. My praxis in teaching seemed less applicable in the TAC course, as students prepared for mainstream degrees.

The Gribblebah community and the Floraglade Correctional Centre became refuges away from the dramas of the Clifton campus. My role included becoming a 'captain', but I sensed an underlying disconnectedness and a shift in the organisational intent. The school was moving toward Indigenous Studies, which was a shift away from what I had applied to be part of. This enabled me to find an exit point when the two year timeframe of my contract was completed.

Beyond the immediate issues and themes of the narrative (4.2), this particular workspace raised issues for my work practices and understanding. In confronting self with reality the paramount question became one in which I wondered, "What was my future role in the Indigenous workspace?"
Chapter Five: Tumbarumba

Third research Text: Learning to Support Learners

5.1 Portrayal One: the phenomenon and context:

In the urban surrounds of Landcombe, situated opposite the largest cemetery in the Southern Hemisphere, is a college of health sciences, a campus of the University of Sandringham. Tumbarumba is a fictitious name for a school of Indigenous health studies. The Indigenous programs offered were delivered in both on-campus and residential/ block teaching modes.

My role at this Indigenous Health school was as the coordinator of the Aboriginal Tertiary Assistance Scheme (ATAS), as well as being a support lecturer teaching academic skills in the Academic Support program for the Diploma of Health Studies which was delivered through the residential/ block teaching mode. The Federal Government Department of Education Science and Training (DEST) funded the Indigenous school by providing ATAS support in the form of allocated tutors for the (approximately) one hundred students across all the programs offered by the school. Students studying courses delivered through the on-campus mode received their tutorial assistance on-campus, whilst students studying courses delivered through the residential/ block teaching mode were able to receive tutorial assistance either in their home community or on campus during the residential block teaching.

The Academic Support program was a feature of the Tumbarumba Diploma of Health Studies course enabling students to enrol in what was referred to as the "reduced load" program of study. This meant that the students were better prepared for the academic units of study, and also extended the duration of their studies. The Diploma articulated into a Bachelor of Health Studies, which was also taught in residential mode.

My role was both academic and administrative, and included accounting for funds and assessing student needs, as well as matching tutors to students. Much of this work required telephoning around the state to arrange tutoring contracts, with only occasional visits to communities.

In 2001, the School had a number of lecturing staff dedicated to providing academic support for the students. Students enrolled in either the residential
block program for the Diploma or Bachelor of Health Studies or the on campus ‘mainstream’ degrees in health sciences (e.g. physiotherapy, sports science, nursing, etc.). If students chose to enrol in the Academic Support program they studied a comprehensive academic skills program parallel to their two years in the Diploma of Health Studies. Academic Support studies were directly related to the academic units – for example, a student enrolled in Community Development would also enrol in Community Development Academic Support. This Reduced Load Option, meant the academic weighting was lowered, and correspondingly the stress on the student should be decreased as only two units of study were formally assessed. The Academic Support studies built the skills of the Indigenous learners in a progressive manner. Similar to Clifton, the Academic Support program at Tumbarumba was, technically speaking, based on a ‘deficit model’. This model views students in terms of their ‘need’ to increase skills to be competent to complete their studies. This is quite different from the Yarrabool model that encourages the validity of Aboriginal knowledge in the university context. The issue of knowledge models is subjected to critique in the Portrayal Four level of this chapter. Support staff would try to anticipate student need. This would involve following up by phone call or by a letter for those who could not be reached on the phone, or who did not have a phone, or were restricted in their phone use e.g. having access to a "ring in only" phone service. Another method of support was to be by means of planned regional visits. Visits were usually a social support, a way to connect with communities. However, with the intensification of work requirements the frequency of visits diminished. Prior to my arrival at Tumbarumba, all academic staff had areas of the State designated to them to which they were required to visit in order to provide ‘pastoral’ support. Coloured pins decorated a large map of New South Wales in the administration office. Such mapping of the locations of students enabled staff to visually appreciate the places where students could concentrate. Such mapping also enabled support to be targeted to groups of students. There was an expectation that staff would make time each year to visit communities, to meet with learners and possibly engage with community activities. Usually these visits were for academic support purposes, and
possibly some visits also involved the development of research projects.

However, due to the high numbers of students, there were difficulties in providing equitable Academic Support from community visitation. The map of the State was divided up into areas of staff responsibility for liaison and visits. Sections were coloured in, and staff names were attached to each section with pins indicating the students residing in different towns. But with diminished frequency, and increased student numbers, visits could not remain the central focus of the support program.

5.1.1 Categorising academic support (MARS or Monitoring at risk students)

Learners deemed ‘at risk’ were the subject of a meeting held after residential blocks. This categorisation meant that the student had missed attending a residential block, or perhaps had not completed more than one unit of study (more than 25% of their study load). The ‘at risk’ status meant that an academic support staff member would contact the learner, usually by phone, or in writing by fax, letter or email. Strategies were discussed and in some cases action needing the authorisation of senior staff would be recommended.

In some cases the 'support' advice would be negative, suggesting the withdrawal of status, and consequently the cancellation of enrolment. Understandably, support staff were reluctant to take this step. I considered it to be an act of paternalism for me to act on behalf of a student without their explicit request. The penalty of withdrawing students from units in which they were enrolled was also linked to DEST funding policy. Student progress and retention was linked to measuring the School's performance, thus an increasing percentage of students not progressing could result in a decrease in the School's recurrent funding.

Lecturing staff would advise me that they were concerned about a student's lack of attendance when the lack of assignment submission affected their progress toward the completion of their studies. I would then check with other staff to ascertain if anyone had some local knowledge on the student's family situation, and then arrange an encouraging telephone call by one of the support staff.
The fact that the program needed staff to resolve issues for the ‘at risk’ student, indicated, to me, that students had not yet been institutionalised to manage their own studies. Such institutionalisation, as I then viewed it, referred to the socialisation of students to become accustomed to university study regimes. An unstated aspect of this support, but just as important, related to the possibility that too many 'at risk' students might reflect adversely upon staff performance. If the number of students failing to progress dropped then the staff would come under scrutiny. The ATAS reporting indicated that though 40% of students had accessed their tutors, a high percentage of these same students were not completing their units of study. Clearly other life factors were at work. Those who were unable to attend a residential block would often be classified as 'at risk'. Often this absence was due to illness or the death of a family member. There seemed to have been an increase in students attending to family grief. This was a major family responsibility for Indigenous people and one student told me that nine relatives had passed away over the past twelve months.

There was a responsibility on the student to inform the administrative staff if they were unable to attend a residential. Conversely, if an at risk student did not attend a residential, a support staff would normally telephone to find out the difficulty the student was experiencing which caused the missed attendance. A follow up advisory letter would remind students of the need for them to contact lecturers to discuss their progress in the course. In such an instance some of the ‘junior’ staff felt that the standing of the sub-committee would be undermined should a stern warning not be given.

At this point, the demands of the administrative and academic roles of my work increased. Perhaps this is what happens when someone is settled into a new position, but my duties and responsibilities seemed to increase on a regular basis. The academic support role became greater when support lecturers completed their contracts. Then there was also a reallocation of roles for other staff, resulting in an increase of the overall busy-ness of the support staff at this workspace. And as a consequence, the 'at risk' working party no longer met.
As ATAS coordinator and support lecturer, I was the person that lecturers would advise about their concerns for students in need of support. Staff referred the names of students to me, and I had to check that they had a tutor and ensure follow up telephone contact. This form of support was important and kept me very busy. I would arrange for myself or other support staff to contact targeted students, and discuss their academic support. Often students did not have access to computers, printers or fax machines, and many found it difficult to getting tutors in their home community. For those students that were juggling a number of responsibilities at home and within community, we could anticipate difficulties in their getting assessment tasks completed. For those particular students (possibly 50% of those enrolled in the first two years of the Diploma program) the ‘at risk’ term was most apt – but for many students their determination provided the level of persistence needed to succeed in the longer term.

A meeting of the Academic support staff was planned after each residential block. For a few blocks such meetings did occur, but after a few months the workload and general academic support busy-ness overtook our intentions to uphold ‘best practice’ criteria and hold meetings. The nature of residential blocks is that learners often need to work with staff on specific assignments, and consequently, for most hours of the working day, support staff (at least I know it was true in my case) are driven by student demand. A broad range of interpersonal dynamics are at work in this scenario. Learners might ask a few staff about ways to approach an assessment task, in order to gain different perspectives, and also because they respected and trusted the opinion of the educator. Perhaps this engagement was ‘best practice’ as the reality of the busy-ness was a direct response to providing a high level of support when the students were able to most easily avail themselves of it.

5.1.2. Academic role and ATAS administration:

As already stated, academic support, additional to that provided by on-campus lecturers and support staff, was also available through a Commonwealth government funded Aboriginal Tertiary Assistance Scheme (ATAS).

Essentially the ATAS funding provided an allocation for Indigenous learners to receive tutoring weekly in their community, as well as additional tutoring
arranged during their residential attendance. My main responsibility as ATAS coordinator was to match tutors and learners. My educational praxis guided my practice, as well as the relevant Commonwealth government department (DETYA and later DEST) guidelines. I attempted to maintain the government and institutional policies whilst trying to ensure the funding provision covered as many students and their tutoring needs as was possible. (On my initial acceptance of the ATAS Co-ordination I was informed that, in the previous year, the allocated budget had been overspent by about $50,000. Such overspending was considered undesirable and hence my job involved curtailing it in the following years). As part of that curtailing role, I was required to reduce tutorial allocation to no more than four hours per week. Many students did not use their full allocation, since the process of obtaining a tutor may take a few weeks, apart from the fact that it may take a while before a student has assessed what it is he/she needs.

I understood that in providing the allocation of four or more hours per week for most ATAS applicants we would overspend by roughly the same figure as previously. Consequently, the following year was guided by the advice from the Head of School, to aim for an overall reduced allocation of ATAS tutoring for the learners. The balance between budget and provision was difficult to attain. Part of my responsibility was to provide a budget that met the needs of the learners, and by arranging group tutorials wherever possible. The ATAS contract between the institution and DEST suggested that group tutorials be provided to a higher proportion of learners than individual tutoring. The allocation of group tutorials is possible when learners live in reasonable proximity to one another. However, in most instances students lived many kilometres apart. Some group tutoring work was allocated, but not to the significant proportion suggested by DEST guidelines. The tutoring during the residential blocks would occur for individuals or for groups of students, either at the motel where students were accommodated or in a space on campus.

However, for many learners from remote or rural locations, finding a suitable tutor was often difficult. Firstly, by noting carefully that many Indigenous learners are already involved in community activities, it is understandable that ‘having a tutor’ or ‘needing a tutor’ may be a cause for shame. Living in small
rural communities means that privacy of tutoring arrangements is virtually impossible. Consequently, some learners accessed tutorial support, and ATAS tutoring, only when attending a residential block. Family pressures at home were also a reason why students preferred tutoring at the residential block. There was an additional concern at play here. Some students compartmentalised their studies to the residential times, and tried to cram all their academic assignments into a very narrow time frame during the residential block.

For me, the most taxing work, in terms of my own energy output, was when I was trying to provide support for the beginning (first year) students. Many were difficult to locate on the telephone and perhaps uncertain of day-to-day commitments, that could create impediments to their study program. By mid-semester I came to realise that a significant number of tutoring contracts were set up (written up and approved) for students, but some had not met their tutors, and consequently were not gaining ‘academic competence’ from the tutoring experience. This could be a significant support issue since the ATAS contracts were framed with a semester time-line in view, and had to begin and end on specified dates. If a student did not access a support tutor early, the amount of tutoring available was decreased accordingly.

Part of my role was to also teach in the academic support program in the community-based program. There were at least four staff involved in the community-based academic support program, and two staff for the on-campus mainstream program.

5.1.3. Tutoring context:

While one of my responsibilities was the arranging of contracts to employ tutors to academically support learners in their home community, I also contracted other tutors to support students during their residential visit to the campus. The ‘on block’ support meant arranging tutors to visit the campus or the motel so that students could access tutoring. The students had requested this support and many made use of this tutoring.

Some tact was required in engaging community-based tutors for Indigenous Health workers. Many tutors were experienced in community development,
youth and social work, generally connected to Indigenous community activity. In small rural towns the learner may also be an Elder holding positions of power, and may be reluctant to have a tutor from the local community.

The task of contracting tutors for students in their community meant many hours on the phone, calling potential tutors and explaining the course, conditions and student expectations, as well as assessing whether tutors were culturally appropriate. Students living in a town or region often wanted the same person as their tutor. Consequently known and trusted tutors were much sought after.

Non-Indigenous and Indigenous tutors provide valuable academic support for Indigenous students. The residential or mixed mode programs with two or three residential per semester rely upon tutors to keep learners on track with their studies. My practice from previous work at Yarrabool had been that lecturers in residential teaching programs would use teleconferencing to support students midway between residential to discuss teaching and learning issues. Tumbarumba staff had not made use of teleconferencing, so there individual calls to students was required. Student feedback had confirmed that this form of support was important in the first two years. However, the casualisation of staffing also meant that many of the lectures were taken by sessional staff. Consequently sessional lecturers were less likely to carry out a ring around to students unless the student specifically requested contact.

On campus, levels of assistance exceed what was usually recognised by other staff as academic support – e.g. one tutor would brainstorm ideas with students on paper, then type up notes. The students often worked with tutors on campus in the student computer laboratory. The following narrative attempts to capture the experience of a tutoring relationship:

5.2 Portrayal Two: A view of the fishbowl.
Sharon is a typical mature aged Indigenous tertiary student. In her early 40s, Sharon is a grandmother. At her home live her four grown up children, as well as two grandchildren. As a woman who has represented her community at Indigenous forums internationally, in Indigenous health conferences and spiritual gatherings, her position and presence in the community means many
relatives rely upon her for many purposes (social support, advice, as well as health related assistance, and being a spokesperson for the community).

Sharon had telephoned to request additional time at the residential to spend time with Wilma, a tutor employed through the ATAS support scheme.

In seeking to understand her situation, I asked Sharon to explain her home environment and her studies. Sharon replied with a question: “How can I study at home? Most weeks there are twenty people living under my roof. We have a computer, but it breaks down all the time with this lot playing on it. I’ve still got assessments to do that were due last semester.”

“I suppose being on ABSTUDY makes it a bit difficult to repair a computer”, I commented.

“It’s Terry’s laptop from uni, but between the blocks we didn’t get much use out of it”, Sharon replied.

“Well next residential you better bring it in so we can get it fixed”, I replied.

It was difficult trying to suggest a time management schedule or options to Sharon. I considered what I would tell a grandmother about how to organise her life, and how to get through her study and home life. (If we had known about the laptop, we could have brought a replacement with us, but possibly none were available. Terry, another student living close by, could have told us earlier).

“When I’m at home, there are always too many family issues, like illness, and we’ve had three deaths in the past four weeks, Ronny’s sister that was so sad, and I’m a gran again with the birth of little Robby, we had those Maori health workers over for a visit, had to take them over to Canberra, and you know – obligations locally.”

Such a range of issues I had some knowledge of, as a decade earlier I had met Sharon’s father. A guest at the Tranby College graduation dinner, he was a highly respected Elder in the wider Indigenous community.

Sharon asked if she could extend her residential stay for a few days to work with Wilma. I went to my supervisor Sandy and explained the request. Sandy gave careful consideration explaining there were equity issues to consider.
How many days a student spent at the campus, and that other students may then also want to extend their stay to enable time to work with the university-based tutors. She asked me to get a written request from Sharon so that procedures were followed and the request duly considered. I located Sharon working in a room with Wilma (a tutor), pieces of paper blue-tacked to the whiteboard with Sharon’s conceptual map of her work. This was the way that Wilma progressed the learners from brainstorming the ideas onto small pieces of coloured paper, and the students would build up their ideas in response to the number of issues they explored for the topic, then on to constructing their series of ‘card text’ into sentences. Sharon was noting down a structure for arranging her points, developing paragraphs and generally getting ideas about how to shape her work towards assignment submission.

I didn’t like to interrupt because I knew that the train of thought could be lost, and this was precious time for Sharon. Wilma was in high level demand by many other learners attending the eight day block. I asked Sharon to provide a written request to me as soon as possible for consideration. Later that afternoon Sharon gave me a handwritten request, and I passed it to Sandy; the process was in motion.

A day or two later Sandy asked me into her office. Sharon had already had a few days extra accommodation at the motel, and policy guidelines would be broken if we showed favouritism to a few students to extend their stay in residence. I considered my response. Only a limited number of learners make the request to attend a few extra days, Sharon has a complex situation, in a place that was fairly remote to services. The nearest TAFE learning centre was almost one hour away from where she lived. Of course I could see the point Sandy was making, and there was always the possibility of some other reason for coming to Sydney at the time.

So as Sandy set about adhering to policy, Sharon found the stresses of managing home and study most worrisome. I felt I had let down Sharon, and also, in some small way, had not given due respect to the memory of her father. Sharon spent as many hours as possible during the residential block working with me or the tutor, Wilma. Wilma was an experienced tutor in communication studies, and was highly regarded by students, as she had
worked with Indigenous students for many years. Senior staff sometimes made critical comments about employing tutors like Wilma, for being awarded too many tutoring contracts, suggesting that a dependency was being created, particularly if students were in the degree program. However that was my business - to ensure funding and employment guidelines were observed by tutors.

The next day Bert, a lecturer of many years at Tumbarumba, reported to Sandy that he witnessed a tutor working inappropriately. He stated: “That tutor Wilma is in the computer lab typing up a student’s assignment…”.

Sandy spoke to me the next morning and advised me, as manager of tutor contracts, to speak with Wilma, and warn her that she was working contrary to her Contract Agreement. I thought about this predicament and the accusation being made by Bert. Shortly afterwards I rang Wilma explaining that other staff had concerns about her actually writing assignments for students. I asked her to take me through how she worked with students.

Wilma explained: “No way do I write student’s assignments!! I type up the points a student has brainstormed from an earlier session, and print it so that the learner can see their ideas soon after; the process takes considerable time initially, but the typing up I do because I can touch type, and the students mostly cannot. There is no way I would do students’ assignments, and it is an insult to both the students and to me!”

I reported the conversation back to Sandy, as she was Academic Support Coordinator, but the damage was done. The senior staff had their perception of Wilma, and if I didn’t stop the matter, then she would have no more tutoring in the program. Staff seeing this occurrence (a tutor typing rapidly) would report to me that the tutor should not type for the learner. I agreed – but the situation was not one of the tutor typing up assignments, but typing up the learners’ notes).

Knowing that other tutors based in the far flung communities of Australia probably worked in similar ways, I thought that a staff workshop on this issue could be useful. The School had three whole school planning meetings each year, these provided a forum for initiatives and change activities.
I regarded Sharon as ‘at risk’ in terms of what was needed in order for her to get through the degree course successfully. Her home life meant that Sharon risked not completing her studies as there was always more pressing community business - literally on her doorstep. She could not just take the telephone off the hook, or close the front door and ignore her community. (I knew that she wanted to get to Uni to work through, put more time in, and perhaps escape the pressures of home for a week. There may have been other things happening in the city, but I did not ask). I told her I would see what was possible, but I knew the Support Policy only provided for a set number of days accommodation. There was no simple way of getting Sharon accommodation for a few additional days (unless I knew someone who had a spare room at home for a few nights). 38

Sharon was one example of many mature age Indigenous and non-Indigenous learners. Life was complex, but the determination to strive to use the knowledge they had was stronger than the option to take life easy. Typically, Sharon was on committees in her community, and was respected for her contribution, as well as being a grandmother. Sharon was also a key maternal figure to her family, many living under the same roof.

5.3 Portrayal Three: implications and lessons learnt from the narrative

The reaction by senior staff, Bert and Sandy, (both non-Indigenous) makes me re-view the scenario, question the original observation by Bert.

Information processing:
was Bert telling me that Sharon should fail her assignment, implying these were not her own words on the page?

Further had Wilma (also non-Indigenous) crossed the line of what was appropriate for a tutor and therefore should not be employed in future?

Word processing,
competency is gained in time and through regular practice.

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38 I try to keep home and work separate unless there are absolute emergencies. I remember Wilma said Sharon probably could stay at her house – or Wilma could get the train and a bus and stay nearer to Sharon (about three hours away). There was no budget or funding available for either of these strategies.
Visual and virtual processing: I look into the fishbowl, I see Wilma and Sharon, and other students, all focussed to word process their ideas, the multiple fluorescent lights make the view plain to see. I wander in and invariably a student asks me to look at their work, discuss their ideas, a normal situation for me. Do I look for practices to challenge, do I doubt the practices of my colleagues?

The narrative above (5.2) presents an example of supporting learners academically, but it is also about the contested relationships amongst staff leading to dilemmas, for me, over supporting tutors who, from my perspective on academic support, are competent.

5.3.1 Implications of contracting tutors and monitoring practices

One of the implications to come from the above narrative concerns the relationship of lecturing and administrative staff with support tutors. Staff attitudes could blur the situation under scrutiny. One example: Bert was walking past a room drawing conclusions, he was suspicious of Wilma and also had expressed concern that she had too many tutoring contracts with students.

Let us also consider the implications of strategies such as establishing the sub-committee to monitor 'at risk' students and the reliance upon ATAS tutors to support the learners. Do not these strategies intrinsically shift the ideological focus away from promoting Indigenous knowledge, to a so-called equity model of Indigenous access to higher education that represents pedagogy in terms of a deficit model. The message this conveys to me is that this model could lessen the ability of learners from engaging meaningfully in the environment of the tertiary institution. Such a model in such an environment will not strengthen the student's culture, nor bring their Indigenous authentic voice to their learning. This may not be the impact upon all students, but the influence upon the learner is such to imply that they need to be brought up to a level, their writing of their knowledge is not adequate unless a tutor assists in their academic planning and intellectual development. The consequence of this model of support essentially implicates the support staff as complicit in
positioning Indigenous students as always in need, as defective in their academic ability.

The hierarchy of staff and the layers of responsibility meant that the tutor, Wilma, although an elder in terms of her educational experience, was a contracted tutor in a less powerful position in the staff hierarchy. Bert and Sandy held continuing positions (tenure) and I was on a fixed term contract. My job entailed assessing individual student needs, then communicating, contracting and arranging the employment of tutors. Hence it was my responsibility to communicate with Wilma the concerns these permanent staff members had about her work practices. Although non-hierarchical structures can exist in higher education (theoretically speaking), at most institutions it is left to the part time and contracted staff who have less power and voice to deal with the matters of institutional practices in face-to-face terms.

The spirit of the DEST guidelines suggested that ATAS tutors should not be engaged for too many hours each week, that they should not be ‘fully employed’ as ATAS tutors. The ATAS funding formula usually allocated most learners with two hours tutoring per week. A number of tutors had more than one contract, and it was possible that some tutors worked for a number of tertiary institutions. Hence ATAS tutors were considered as external to the staffing body of the university – more akin to fee-for-service tutors.

Many students actively displayed their agency and their ability to take autonomous action by telephoning to discuss their tutoring needs. Most requested additional support from a tutor close to their home, some stated that they could cope without a tutor. However, others were unable to arrange a tutor in their community, since they lived in a country town and they already knew the teachers and nurses, and did not want them to know their study needs, their perceived academic deficits.

The problem was that tutors were viewed via the lens of the deficit model, that a tutor is required to ensure that assignments conform to a university's linguistic and structural standards. In the written work of students I always looked for the voice of the author, and maintain that such a ‘signature’ of the person, such an identifier, is a distinctive attribute. However some work by
students (be they of any cultural background) may become indistinguishable due to the demands of the academic writing process.

One lesson I learnt concerned the vital time separation which the student Sharon made for study and for the time with a tutor. In the narrative (5.2) Sharon described her home, I envisioned seeing a sea of faces, and then the reality of Sharon’s tutoring needs struck me. The bustling commotion of adults, teenagers and babies was quite engaging, if not alarming in considering aspects of self-directed study. Anecdotally I had been told by students that they kept ‘uni work’ separate to home life. However, this would generate a tension in viewing the community-basedness of the learning process, and question the contribution to the students’ university experience. I had to carefully reflect upon my actions, and the impact of the incident upon Wilma and Sharon.

Another implication was that I needed to review how other experienced tutors were working with students, and decided to informally research the ways of working by those that were located off campus. My request was that the tutors write a brief explanation of their typical ways of working a weekly tutoring session.

Six tutors volunteered a detailed explanation of their routine tutoring process. I intended to present my findings to one of the staff gatherings either monthly or at the retreat that was held quarterly. My follow-up discussion with the six ‘volunteers’ was based on presenting ‘good practices’ to the on-campus staff at my workspace. The tutors responded to my stated usage was virtually universal– ‘use this statement of my work practice anyway you want to’.

After analysis, there was a marked similarity in the tutor processes, with Wilma being the only tutor of the six working on-campus. The group consisted of three tutors who were Indigenous and three non-Indigenous. Through reviewing the profiles, it was clear they presented evidence of six approaches to tutoring, all essentially giving the learners a central role in establishing their knowledge, and crafting their ideas. Some of the tutors word-processed ideas as presented by the learners, but they each stated emphatically that the students wrote their own ideas first. I found this outcome quite revealing. Each tutor independently viewed their procedure as valid and defensible.
My intention was to find an appropriate meeting time to address a staff seminar on the brief survey I had conducted on the role of the tutor. There was always a meeting, but not so the space on the agenda as other matters took precedence. My intention was that other academic staff might come to recognise the similarity of tutor practices, and reconsider their respect for students’ work. My intentions were to inform staff and to support the sessional and contracted staff.

5.3.2. The dilemma of the compensatory or deficit models

Issues of tension between empowering student autonomy and paternalism lead me to this section of analysis. Sharon was at risk, she had assessments overdue from the previous semester, and a request for special consideration had meant an extension of time for her completion. Typically, students deemed at risk were unable to complete their studies in the allocated semester. The causes of incompletion could be many-fold, presumed to be either through demands of community responsibilities or family (as evidenced by Bourke et al, 1996). Hence university deadlines and timeframes made for a difficult ‘fitting in’ for many community based Indigenous learners.

At risk students might be advised, even encouraged, to take leave of absence for the Semester, as a means of getting issues in order, and to return the next year to complete outstanding units relative to the stage of their study. This intervention could be viewed as paternalism even though the ‘best intentions’ are seen to be working here.

Questions about structures and barriers to success troubled me. In what ways could academic support be managed differently? We had surveyed students about internet access and considered on-line materials to support the community-based program. Results indicated the students who were employed had access but few at that time had access at home.

The obvious lesson learnt by me from the narrative (5.2) is about alternative perspectives on support, the ways support staff work with students. From my perspective a tutor typing up a learner’s ideas is a beginning point for students still gaining competence in their keyboarding skills, and as such would be acceptable as a method of supporting learners. Similarly, a tutor talking
through a piece of writing and transcribing notes is acceptable. But writing assignments for students is unacceptable. Consequently, I discussed my perspective with the tutor and the student separately.

The underlying message transmitted to the students was that they should have a tutor to enhance their understanding of the course content. My message to students was always to access the ATAS tutor, if one was arranged, as a way of ensuring a regular time each week to reconnect with the study, and read through texts. This suggestion was based on the frequency of students saying they:

had no time to get organised to complete assignments due to the busy family, community responsibilities, often linked to schools or health centres, as well as sporting commitments, caring for extended family, maintaining employment, oh, and yes, that uni work, must get that done before the next residential (my words, a compilation of many typical responses from telephone conversations).

Life impinges upon the learners in many ways and tutoring arrangements are overlooked when family issues are more urgent (e.g. births, illness or deaths). As stated (in 5.1) there was on-campus academic support available within the Indigenous unit with tutors, as well as after classes at the motel for students attending residential blocks. Student access at home was sometimes reduced as university experienced tutors were of limited availability in rural towns or remote communities. Hence, access to academic support staff was limited to a few visits on campus, where the residential program was literally crammed with lectures, tutorials and tasks to be completed. Per capita, most students were only funded for two hours per week of tutoring.

5.3.3 Advocacy

When Sharon asked for additional time to be on campus, a number of institutional considerations had to be considered. For me, I took the approach, that if the student needs specific support, I would do whatever I could to facilitate the request in a timely and appropriate manner. For Sandy, the matter of equity seemed more important. If one student has extra days on campus, other students will be entitled to the same and expect similar additional support. Clearly Sandy had a broader view of the implications of support for all students, whereas my focus was acting on behalf of that student as soon as
practicable. Both viewpoints are valid in enacting support for students. However, I believe my approach was to carry out an action, supporting the rights of the individual. Here is an implication made clear, that institutionalised equity means treating every one the same, whereas my practice was more around provision as needed, positive discrimination for each, according to their needs.

5.3.4. Lessons learned – poetised version

Change of role,
a shift to Student Support [another deficit model],
urban city environment,
eagerness to understand dynamics,
meetings regular and timetabled,
committee structures and responsibilities,
appreciated by the highly organisational space.

Uncertain future,
begging to compromise,
told how to proceed in workspace,
watch over tutors.

Looking for research questions,
to understand barriers to success,
arranging tutorial support,
in two weeks “67 individual student discussions,
resulted in telephoning more than thirty tutors”,
is this active? or manic,
perhaps both but is it valued?

Irresolvable issues like retention,
timely assignment turnaround,
dominate praxis consciousness.

Cultural health workshop,
shift of curriculum from mainstream to Indigenous,
is there a place for the spiritual amongst the academic,
ilusive or transparent – but not an issue for discussion,
seeking balance and ‘professionalism’.

Perception of life becoming more Administrative,
sense of not being replaced,
perhaps a trust in position,
not privilege but not knowing.
Eventually released from the workspace,
such flexibility of contracts ensures short term and partly Indigenised staff profile. Release from connectedness, but not wholly.

5.4. Portrayal Four: the inquiry level and literature
This portrayal explores the prominent themes from the narrative (5.2) linking to the overall thesis. Initially I consider the ways that educators support Indigenous learners in a block residential or mixed mode teaching program. Themes emerging in the narrative focus on: ideologies or discourses that are influential in this research text:

5.4.1. Supporting Indigenous learners in higher education
5.4.2. The dilemma of compensatory and deficit models
5.4.3. Advocacy and residential programs
5.4.4. Uncovering discourses shaping provision

Firstly, I connect the concerns about support with the themes from Tumbarumba, reflecting philosophical differences in the approaches to supporting learners in residential programs.

5.4.1. Supporting Indigenous learners in higher education
The narrative (5.2) illuminates concerns for the relationship between learners and tutors in academic workspaces. The way in which a tutor scaffolds the learner's tutorial activity, could lead to misunderstandings between staff. In the portrayal (5.2) the tutor, Wilma, is viewed by Bert as crossing the boundaries of supporting the learner. The role I had to advise Wilma that her tutoring processes were unacceptable, and outside the boundaries of her contract. This critical incident leads to a consideration of the role of tutors in the provision of higher education to Indigenous learners.

The students at Tumbarumba were given the option of gaining access to tutorial assistance if they requested it. This meant that most students anticipated and expected weekly tutorial guidance to assist them in their study as they prepared their academic assignments. Implementing this tutorial support was integral to my work support. I did not recognise that policy could direct learners away from strengthening, or testing their own Indigenous knowledge. However, the intention to provide all students with support does create a dependency, where some students may feel less able to attempt
assignments unless guided in the response by a qualified tutor. This tendency to rely upon a tutor's guidance can set up students to fail either in their course or as autonomous academic learners. Consequently this scenario may weaken cultural expression or inhibit the exploration of knowledge that may be controversial in the context of challenging the lecturer's western cultural knowledge or praxis.

Appreciating the role of academic support staff, Indigenous lecturer Maria Lane (1998) reiterates that the first years of study are critical for effective Indigenous student support. The support strategies required were:

- Highly dedicated and competent staff exclusively concerned with support;
- Carefully thought out support mechanisms, ideally with specific hom-base structures and well-integrated procedures and mechanisms;
- Input into, and a clear understanding of, support mechanisms by all Indigenous students… (1998, p.27).

Assessed against this summary of criteria from Lane, the data within the context (5.1) and the narrative (5.2) shows that Tumbarumba met these criteria well. A number of dedicated staff were allocated to support learners, and this workspace had carefully implemented support mechanisms. The discourses surrounding student support do not exclude the building of Indigenous knowledge by Indigenous learners. However, the goodwill of the tutors and support staff were inclined towards success in the academy as a priority, and tended to shape expressed knowledge according to the task requirements. The resulting outcome is more likely an assimilated response to a task, rather than necessarily a building upon Indigenous knowledge. Hence the role played by a tutor can significantly impact upon the student's self-belief in the veracity of their Indigenous knowledge.

Indigenous academic Dennis Foley poses critical questions to institutions and educators relating to their endeavour to support the aspirations of Indigenous learners. Foley's research highlights concerns that academics within Indigenous units tend towards self-interest, as he states:

- Academic staff with hidden agendas striving for higher degrees who are continually on research leave are not student support officers, co-ordinators or whatever else you want to call them. From a student’s perspective it is better to have an unqualified person who has the people and world skills in these roles than “high priced show ponies who do not
and cannot deliver the goods’ (student quotes). …. Support staff must be culturally sensitive, they must have ‘people’ skills and all the other attributes listed above, and ‘they must be accountable for the students in their care’. (Almost 80% of students interviewed concurred with this view) (Foley, 1996, p.55).

The concern expressed by Foley that academic staff are mostly focussed on their career remains an ongoing dilemma. Junior academic (and some ATAS tutors) are usually on the path to a higher degree as the university academic advancement system values research and higher degrees as entry to the higher education system. The tutors working in Indigenous units also have a self-interest in career advancement (e.g. via an Indigenous research project leading to a post graduate qualification) that may be viewed as another example of whitefella colonisation on an individualistic level. At Tumbarumba, most junior academic staff were on the higher degree research track, although still able to provide a supportive and responsive role within that Indigenous interface.

That staff were employed into designated support roles, with additional tutors for the ‘at home’ or community-based time, further emphasises the compensatory nature that is accepted as ‘the norm’ in Indigenous higher education. The tension here is that rather than aim to engage the students with their own Indigenous epistemology, the institutions focus on ‘bringing learners up to the norm’. One outcome is the minimal recognition in this University of the legitimate pursuit of Indigenous epistemology for the disciplines: i.e. education, health sciences, the humanities and the sciences.

Keeffe, a senior policy maker in Western Australia, has reiterated that there are critical aspects to Indigenous support programs, such as bridging courses into tertiary studies that may not engage learners with issues of teaching and learning. Keeffe's research (1992) indicated that some tutors may have (in the 1980s and early 1990s) compromised ethical boundaries in doing the academic work for the learner. Concern and criticism of academic support as tending towards paternalism is evidenced in the following:

*It is the concept of 'support' which is repeated in writings about bridging course and enclave programs. It is, of course, neither something I wish to see eliminated from the vocabulary of this sector, nor left out of the toolkit of teachers, but it is a value-laden term that should be used with caution. It evokes images of crutches and patronage. In pedagogical*
terms, it encourages dependency more than autonomy. Skills development is rarely mentioned, especially the necessary and difficult tasks of developing the working skills of an independent, autonomous tertiary student in a short burst of formal education. The patronising and passive concept of support has supplanted the active dialectical concepts of teaching and learning. A number of Aboriginal students I have spoken to at Dirrawong and elsewhere, talked about the ease with which students could get tutors to 'write their assignments for them', and were critical of the condescending way in which predominantly non-Aboriginal tutors and support staff would 'help and look after' students (Keeffe, 1992, p.166).

Keeffe refers to 'Bridging (to nowhere)' courses (sic!), suggesting that many Indigenous applicants to higher education had undertaken numerous courses to ensure their preparation for a successful career. However, the preparatory course at Tumbarumba was directly linked to the Diploma of Health Studies, thus could not be deemed a 'course to nowhere'.

Another discourse, of Indigenous rights (in Gale, 1997), would expect a cultural equivalence that gave recognition to the Indigenous learner's knowledge through the course of a ‘standard’ three or four year degree program. However, the cultural equivalence model is quite different to the compensatory or deficit forms. Indigenous students at Tumbarumba were much more scrutinised, made more accountable in their attendance and subjected to more degrees of surveillance than the mainstream students. This occurred for reasons that could be validated readily, within the hegemony of the dominant western cultural paradigm of equity for Indigenous higher education access, in terms of the local interpretation of government policy guidelines by people in the thrall of university academic organisational culture. Such is the recurrent nature of being in the gaze of governmental and institutional scrutineers.

The concern expressed by Keeffe links to the concern expressed in the narrative (5.2) with the work of the tutor and the writing of the learner. Perhaps, the tutor word processing notes for the learner takes away from the intent of autonomy, yet much depends on the tutor’s and the student’s strategic understanding of the practice – initiating, temporary and premised on capacity building with the intention of ‘handing over the keyboard’. The tutor suggested that by word-processing pages of notes the learner sees very quickly that their
ideas can be viewed as text, and thereby gaining added self esteem that is absent when they do the word-processing themselves. This concern raised issues of student support which were common for the mature age learners in community based programs, without home access to computers or regular practice in word-processing, or other required information technology software.

The criticisms presented by Keeffe continue to be relevant in the pedagogical act. Academic support staff at Tumbarumba, and at other enclave-derived centres, are positioned in the discourse of the deficit model, i.e. bringing the student up to the level of institutional expectations without critique of the institution’s knowledge paradigm. The tutor is charged with being advisor for a student's writing, providing constructive criticism, and directing learners on research and how to locate information using both physical resources (library, texts, media) as well as electronic sources (internet, ejournals, etc).

In the narrative (5.2) the tutor provides a contracted service, as an adult educator working the border of academic literacy and specialist discipline knowledge. The issue of work practices links to judgements about paternalism. If a tutor is working inappropriately there would be a code of conduct issue. Such an action was not brought to my attention at that time. I also consider, as Keefe stated, the tutor could be creating a barrier to success, or unwittingly setting up a learner to fail in terms of their future career. In my discussions with tutors and lecturers, they had agreed that when marking they could usually locate the learners ‘voice’ in their writing style.

5.4.2 The dilemma of compensatory and deficit models

A major theme emerging from the narrative (Portrayal 5.2) is the nature and implications of the compensatory or deficit approaches in Indigenous education. Programs such as Access or Bridging courses, or courses that offer a reduction of units to be studied each semester are exemplars of the compensatory model. Such programs emerge from deficit expectations that the performance and progress of cohorts of Indigenous students, that are based on the application of a ‘standards’ approach to institutionalised schooling, being uncritically applied to adult Indigenous education.
Indigenous academics hold differing views on the purposes of tertiary preparation or bridging programs. Veronica Arbon (2007) refers to Maria Lane (1998) who stated the positive effect of getting Indigenous people into courses, and graduating as being directly linked to support programs. Arbon recognises that the access programs have positively assisted many people to further study and employment (2007). However, a negative aspect is the possible ‘neglect’ to engage Indigenous knowledge, as Arbon expresses:

... But the programs did not awaken us to the use of our own ontological or cultural knowledge positions nor take the students to understanding ...

The enclave program has thus come at an expense, I would argue. The expense is that this model of welfare, development and transformation prevented the seeking of our own alternatives to being, knowing and doing as Aboriginal people in the academy. Rather the model placed students as the victim needing support and benevolent care ...

... The continuance of the Ularaka or Indigenous knowledge as a legitimate knowledge form in learning was not necessarily in the consciousness of working in the enclave or even in the new expansions these have taken today. This focus along with the continuing drive for employment outcomes and the fundamental purpose of learning tied to these employment outcomes has compounded the present crisis within tertiary education. What is more critical our Indigenous knowledge positions are not even in the consciousness of some Indigenous people and many others. ...

... Rather there is a continuing focus on supporting and developing the 'deficient' individual in isolation to content from our own knowledge positions and connections to elders and others. The enclave model has shown through its own Indigenous staff and graduates, done its hegemonic work on many of us such that amongst these who have continued to work in academia some are unable to imagine alternative paradigms of Indigenous tertiary education. This is a powerful assimilative intent (Arbon, 2007, pp.119-120).

Arbon makes me see that working in the enclave model has shifted my awareness of Indigenous knowledge production, and in the context of this Tumbarumba text, shifted the gaze from valuing knowledge, to interrogating methods of support. Lane (1998) believed that support systems were intricately connected to student success in Aboriginal tertiary education. However, other Indigenous academics like Arbon, clearly outline contradictory concerns about Indigenous knowledge being disregarded.

Given that success is measured by graduation rates, the unknown qualities are the extent of success in accompanying graduation with subtle cultural
assimilation, or is success accompanied by a new level of interpretation and accreditation of Indigenous cultural knowledge by the graduate and the university?

The nub of this dilemma is captured in the narrative (5.2) as it reveals how, on the one hand, the Indigenous enclave situated within a powerful western institution (a sandstone university) provides structures to better enable Indigenous learners to succeed within established western knowledge regimes, and, on the other hand, may constrain the enhanced connection with Indigenous knowledge. This issue is contentious and alludes to the possibility that authentic knowledge of the community can be diminished by the institution. One outcome of this situation is that Indigenous students may be ‘cognitively shaped’ to fit in to the institutional academic model, a model that does not easily recognise contrasting Indigenous knowledge systems.

This shifting of the Indigenous learner is captured as Harrison writes:

> It is often assumed in education that we have left the deficit model behind, but … policies and programs continue to position Indigenous students within a discourse of progress and enlightenment. Through this discourse, they are positioned between an image of what they once were as disadvantaged and what they are supposed to become in the process of studying at school and university … having to catch up to the non-Indigenous students… (Harrison, 2005, p.41 cited in Whatman et al, 2008, p.119).

Perhaps I too thought the deficit model was ‘left behind’, I hoped that good practice of cultural knowledge strengthening was occurring in the later years of their degree program, and I was merely unaware of the range of Indigenous knowledge being enhanced. At Tumbarumba this deficit dilemma was evident as the diploma articulated to a degree. Students would graduate with the diploma, and then apply for admission into the final two years of the degree. This two-stage form of articulation suggests that students may complete the diploma, and graduate with an option to complete the degree. In effect, this two-step process places a further hurdle to advance to a higher level of study. The concern for the compensatory model, as expressed by Arbon and Harrison, is that it may diminish the respect for Indigenous ways of knowing. However, in New South Wales at the time only one university offered a course at University level, so students had little choice in seeking alternative provision.
Looking back to the narrative (5.2), Sharon’s situation raises the critical appraisal of tutorial support as a regular or advisedly required mechanism of support. The provision of tutors is an acceptance of a model of deficit that Indigenous students are to be brought up to an academic level prior to entering degree studies, similar to the Clifton access program. In the pursuit for credentials, to gain the qualifications required to maintain employment as an Indigenous health worker, Sharon is a typical residential student accepting the support that is offered to enhance her studies. The model of provision, fitting of students into tertiary contexts, was accepted. There was no questioning of whether the structures could be ‘Indigenised’, that changing degree structures might better align with an Indigenous framework.

Hypothetically, most staff would support the view that necessitates the place of tutors as a support mechanism, and that such provision was central to supporting the learner. The University policies at Tumbarumba had a focus on equity issues and maintaining equity mechanisms as central to the support environment. The dilemma over this matter is alluded to by a 2006 Federal education report. MCEETYA (2006) recognized the need for a new approach (in the report titled Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005-2008) to bring about a paradigm shift in Indigenous educational environments:

While this deficit view is now contested, the perception that Indigenous students are to blame for their poor educational outcomes lingers on. Disparity in educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students has come to be viewed as ‘normal’ and incremental change seen as acceptable” (MCEETYA, 2006, p.16).

The MCEETYA report tellingly illuminates the problem of institutions not recognising Indigenous knowledges, and measuring Indigenous students only against ‘normalising’ criteria. (This is reminiscent of intelligence tests that do not account for the culture of diverse and different respondents).

As the University policy emphasised an equity perspective, it was reasonable to expect most staff maintained a similar intention. Yet the experience at Tumbarumba indicated divergent perspectives by staff, indicating that policy and implementation were at variance. Staff interpretation of equity approaches were not discussed nor contested, and I consider that this has been an important influence upon the resultant narrative.
As an academic support lecturer, my role was to implement the mechanisms of support to students studying at a distance, and I agreed with the viewpoints of Wilma and Sharon. The vigilance of Bert might be considered a positive step in ensuring student academic support was not paternalistic, but empowering. However, the narrative (5.2) shows conflicting professional ethics, as the experienced tutor stated emphatically that she was not writing the student’s assignment. Academic isolation was an issue impacting upon Sharon’s tertiary experience, and for many off-campus learners, coming to the campus builds a solidarity of experience that could be either embraced by the teaching staff or ignored. I wonder if Bert accommodated this solidarity of Indigenous experience within his lecturing pedagogy?

Arnold (1998) states that ‘isolation’ is a most potent factor affecting performance of Indigenous students in higher education. Certainly, the narrative highlights isolation as a factor influencing the need for additional on-campus assistance in the residential program. It is partly the impact of isolation that requires empathy and decentring by the support staff and the lecturers, if engagement with distant learners is to be effective. As Mary Atkinson (in Arnold and Vigo, 1998) emphasised, non-Indigenous academics should undergo a process of cultural de-centring as a way of learning to connect with the Indigenous learner. De-centring is certainly an important pedagogical method, for lecturers and tutors to engage more appropriately and tactfully (as mentioned in the introductory chapter). However, most research provides data on the role of academic support in terms of the number of students accessing, as shown below by Bourke, Burden and Moore (1996).

Professor Colin Bourke and his team conducted research on support issues in Aboriginal higher education that were highlighted in an Evaluation and Investigation Programme commissioned report (EIP 96/1839). Although dated, the report (Bourke, Burden & Moore, 1996) significantly highlighted learners’ experiences of support. While this investigation focussed on factors influencing success, there is minimal detail on ATAS provision, or even any descriptive exploration of the learner-teacher interaction. A summary of specifically relevant recommendations is as follows:

39 EIP 96/18 indicates the 18th Evaluation and Investigation Programme report commissioned in 1996 by the Federal Government.
... with only 26% of indigenous students studying ‘on-campus’ and 74% studying in ‘external mode’. This shift in the mode of study ... has important implications in ... the future directions of teaching and support programs (p25) ... Recommendation 3: ... discrete support unit offering academic, social, cultural and political support to all indigenous students of the university (p31)

... among indigenous students the most successful group of all (100% success rate) were those with less than year 10 schooling. The success of these students appears to be due in part to their high level of motivation which saw them access the support services, in particular, the Aboriginal Tertiary Assistance scheme (ATAS) which gave them the academic support to improve their study skills and gain early academic success in their university studies” (Bourke, Burden & Moore, 1996, p35).

The above is confirmed by my experience with more recent cohorts of students, as in the narrative (5.2) the classmates of Sharon were generally not graduates of Year 12 secondary education. Although surprising, more than ten years after the research by Bourke et al., the cohorts of new Indigenous students remains predominantly non-school leavers, i.e., more mature-age students. A key finding in the above EIP research is that community-based study programs were required to maintain Indigenous learners continuance in higher education.

In summary, many students were strongly motivated to engage support, and a number of staff were employed to provide support on campus and off-campus. The complexity of the support issues taught me much about my role, of providing support and the diversity of viewpoints held by different stakeholders in that workspace. As outlined above, an organisational practice can develop with equity measures informed by the hegemonic colonial state that directs learners away from autonomous expression of Indigenous knowledge. This could be described as assimilationist or paternalistic, and can also be discerned in forms of advocacy.

5.4.3 Advocacy and residential programs

Another theme underlying the narrative (5.2) is that of advocacy in working at the cultural interface. The request from Sharon for additional time with tutors was a call for support, in effect asking me to advocate for her. Advocacy for learners in Indigenous education is a prominent aspect of the cultural interface. Carol Reid, a non-Indigenous lecturer, and previously co-ordinator of an
Indigenous teacher education program, provides an insight into the area of advocacy. She reiterates views from Hesch, who argued that particular readings of Indigenous cultures create objects of Indigenous peoples, making Indigenous agency invisible by privileging white agency.

Hesch ... pointed to the difficulties he faced when he tried to create a curriculum based on critical pedagogy paradigms that he thought would provide liberatory outcomes. Underlying his approach was the assumption that students needed to know the cause of their oppression so that they could become advocates themselves.... Advocacy is therefore a difficult strategy and can be in a difficult relationship to the moral lexicon of paternalism. This paternalism is often found in benevolent acts of kindness that can be well intended but not wanted. Tina provides a snapshot of this potential difficulty of advocacy when she was an administrative assistant for AREP. ... “... you were dealing with a different group of students, because they weren’t here all the time. So the limited amount of time they were here, I tried to make sure that their journey was a bit easier. ... You had to be careful you weren’t over-serving them, in that it might not have been what they wanted. You didn’t quite always know ... They might not have wanted that. Some would expect it and some didn’t want it. It was hard to find that line. That seemed to be very much an individual thing”. (Tina: interview transcript cited in Reid 2004 p. 150) ... Advocacy can then be seen to be removing self-determination since it conceals and builds on a relationship of dependency. For the white administrators, framed by institutional arrangements that position them as advocates through a dependence on their individual goodwill, there is frustration. (Reid, 2004, p.157).

A number of important issues emerge from this quote. I concur with Hesch (in reflecting Freirean philosophy) on the importance of raising awareness with students about their oppression. Yet many Indigenous students at Tumbarumba knew how the systems oppressed them, and would readily talk about the impact of institutions upon their families’ life experiences. The comment from Tina of over-servicing, resonates with my alarm with ‘removing self-determination’ and being paternalistic. The balance between adequate support and excessive ‘hand holding’ is an inexact science. In the above quote, Reid reiterates the frustration as a white administrator, a feeling I share in these matters of advocacy. However, the residential program with minimal on campus time, created a time-poor, pressured environment where the support lecturer could offer to facilitate administrative matters, or offer advice on interpreting text and approaches to assessment tasks.
Advocacy was pervasive and intertwined with the everyday, as a habitual response. When a student rang or emailed, my role was to respond in a timely manner. Sometimes this felt like paternalism, but usually the recognition of student hardship meant that staff would endeavour to resolve matters, with the student.

5.4.4. Uncovering discourses shaping the role of the non-Indigenous educator.

A theme which underlies the narrative is that of the competing discourses in tertiary practices within Indigenous education contexts. By reconsidering my observations of tutorial delivery in the narrative, I here extrapolate to interpret the differing discourses or philosophical stances that exist in the Indigenous tertiary contexts.

Referring again to the writing by Peter Gale (1997) on the representations held by educators of Aboriginal tertiary students, enables a way of categorising discourses in the workspace. Gales’ research uncovers discourses or themes emerging from staff attitudes, and likewise I found that such discourses were indeed evident in the interactions with non-Indigenous staff, although no dominant view was discernible within the workspace. Gale's research of over 130 predominantly non-Indigenous educators in tertiary institutions are categorised into three themes.

The distinctions between these themes are based on an analysis of competing representations of Aboriginality and ideas and beliefs about the role of tertiary education (Gale, 1996 cited in Teasdale & Ma Rhea, 2000, p.98).

The three themes emerging from his research are: (1) mission and welfare (2) equity and (3) Indigenous rights. The interview transcripts revealed that non-Indigenous educators viewed the role of tertiary education correspondingly as: (1) compensatory education (2) skills and outcomes and (3) Indigenous control. Comparing the attitudes of non-Indigenous educators Gale states:

(of theme One: Aboriginalism),.. the ‘problem’ of the lower levels of participation among Indigenous students is based on a perceived lack of linguistic resources’ and ‘confidence’ .... illustrates how knowledge about the ‘Aborigines’ or what tertiary educators have been ‘told’ or

40 NB: Such discourses are underlying all the contexts, but is presented in this thesis in relation to Tumbarumba.
what they have ‘read’ about a minority group significantly influences the ways in which they conceptualise the ‘problem’ even before they encounter any Indigenous students in their classes.

(of theme two)... focus on educational disadvantage ... Indigenous people as oppressed ... features closely associated to concepts of ‘liberation’ and ‘empowerment’... aspects of the equity theme: training and accreditation; culturally appropriate curricula; and liberation from disadvantage.(gaining competence over prescribed curricula... content that remains Eurocentric while the students are encouraged to interpret and apply this knowledge to ‘their’ own cultural context. ......

(of theme three)... founded upon both global and local identities and a greater level of significance is accorded to the collective rights of Indigenous peoples....issues raised ...(Indigenous) control over courses and curricula... on the allocation of resources...over academic and administrative aspects of the tertiary institutions... (Gale in Teasdale & Ma Rhea, 2000, p.103).

The above themes reflect attitudes and intentions of staff in the Indigenous workspaces researched by Gale; however, I can only speculate on the attitudes of staff in the context of Tumbarumba. As stated earlier, the equity theme guided the program delivery there. I concur with Gale’s findings, and the context evidenced teaching that was aimed at getting students:

    competence over prescribed curricula, providing Eurocentric content while students are encouraged to interpret and apply this knowledge to their cultural context”(Gale in Teesdale and Ma Rhea, 2000, p.104).

Such intentions may satisfy non-Indigenous university staff of ‘good will’ but as they do not attempt to embrace or extend Indigenous cultural knowledge, the power position of western knowledge remains intact. 41 More recent research by Williamson and Dalal (2007, pp.50-53) explores attempts to Indigenise the curriculum, through cross-cultural negotiation and pedagogical practices within Humanities and human services at Queensland University of Technology. This entailed an initial audit of units to develop a curriculum framework, followed by the establishment of guiding principles and performance standards of graduate capabilities.

I recognise Tumbarumba lecturers embodied areas for contestation that mirrored either an equity or an Indigenous rights perspective (possibly even a welfare perspective). I felt the tensions, since within this cultural interface

41 The equity goals of the university were stated in a DEETYA (2000) publication, detailing Indigenous education strategies for each tertiary institution in Australia.
differing and conflicting ways of working ‘together’ were manifest because of
the presumably ‘shared’ institutional direction (i.e. a general acceptance of the
institution’s mission statements). Studies of equity-based strategies suggest that
this equity approach is often inadequate.

…it seems that the equity emphasis itself is not only misleading in terms
of the educational needs and interests of Aboriginal Australians, it is not
sufficiently culturally self-critical, and its advocates are misleading
themselves about their motives, their logic and the fundamental cross-
cultural nature of the problem. Not surprisingly, the huge potential of
philosophical self-reflection to provide an effective and achievable
solution is lost to them ... (Slade and Morgan in Teasdale & Ma Rhea,
2000, p.51).

Hence, the problematic nature of equity is outlined, and leads to a
consideration and an emphasis upon the third theme of Indigenous rights. The
third discourse, the Indigenous rights theme, views knowledge as being
socially constructed and temporal, contextualised as emerging from particular,
social, political, economic, historical, linguistic and cultural contexts. This
view suggests that Indigenous voices be given equal recognition to ‘European’
or western knowledge traditions, not subservient or lesser than those academic
traditions.

Gale argues for the Indigenous rights approach and for him the preferred
model is one centred on local knowledge that would feature:

a focus on ‘local knowledge’ in the process of education;
‘local knowledge’ being seen as primary to the formation of curriculum;
‘western’ knowledge being viewed as peripheral to locally based curricula;
competency and accreditation being based on ‘local knowledge’ and
financial and human resources being allocated on the basis of ‘local’

The preferred local knowledge model reiterates a view that emerges as a
tension for my situation in the next chapter (the narrative of 6.2). The inclusion
of local knowledge in teaching a course is difficult to evaluate, as is the
specific inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in curricula. Tumbarumba had
lecturers drawing on student community and life experiences in order to make
relevant links in their teaching. A lack of connectedness by staff to Indigenous
communities can affect authentic relationships with students, but may not have
any impact upon the academic progress of students.
Given the divergent perspectives of deficit, equity and Indigenous rights, there is difficulty in ascertaining attitudes of staff on these perspectives. Conflict resolution strategies would need to be implemented to appraise staff perceptions of the preferred or appropriate ways of tutors and learners working together. Perhaps such strategies would clarify the role of the tutor and the supporting staff at the cultural interface.

5.4.5 Resolution of the Research Text:

The narrative (5.2) shows the everyday business of a student and a tutor that became questioned when there were conflicting discourses in the workspace. Tensions emerged as staff criticised a tutor’s work practices, indicating differing expectations of the equity perspective. The view, through the fish bowl, is one way to gain perspective. It was a hectic work environment, with residential teaching, and there was insufficient time for staff to gain other perspectives on situations. In the role of the ATAS coordinator, I felt like a swimmer learning a new stroke.

The Tumbarumba text presents learners and the discourses around reduced load programs, and learners relying upon tutors to manage learning; students with their own agency and making their own self-determinations. Reduced load meant lighter study loads, as recommended by academic course advisers for the Indigenous students (i.e. health workers) to maintain their employment. For Indigenous people seeking to work in community health there was virtually no other course available, hence no choice in the academic structures of provision. Alternative programs based on an Indigenous rights theme were non-existent in NSW for Indigenous health workers.

The literature illuminates conflicting viewpoints around academic support and the concerns for bridging or access programs. Such programs pertain to both Clifton and Tumbarumba, and bring into doubt the strength of Indigenous epistemology in these particular programs. The prominence of deficit programs does indicate that most universities are unable to shift in their view of academic knowledge, and maintain colonialist or assimilationist standpoints that discriminate against aspirations of Indigenous knowledge. The example of Yarrabool is one institution that stood out as a strong place for establishing
Indigenous standpoints and the prominence of Indigenous knowledge across the academy. My role in teaching in the preparatory program was to encourage and support new students in the given institutional direction, bring them up to the required skill level; my role was complicit in compensatory mechanisms of support.

Through the writing of this Research Text, my analysis of this workspace shows a concern for the deficit model, evident in the reduced load course. At Tumbarumba the life tensions of students in community-based programs were exposed: they might seek tuition at home, but needed to return to campus due to the efficacy of separating home life and study. This raised questions about the discourses of provision in Indigenous higher education, and this will be taken up in the following chapter.

Tumbarumba was a teaching school, which had the possibility of strengthening culture to a much greater extent than an enclave model. But the ideological underpinning was still derived from the enclave approach to equity and, as such, limited any serious challenge to this deficit or compensatory paradigm. At three of my workspaces community-based teaching and learning (i.e. community-based/ residential blocks) were prominent: Yarrabool, Tumbarumba, and also, as discussed in the next chapter, with the Sub Urban School of Education.
Chapter Six: Sub Urban

Fourth Research Text: in search of space

6.1. Portrayal One: phenomenon and context

It was in 1985, that Paul Hughes, Indigenous education leader, presented this challenge:

"I challenged our own people to discuss what I called our own epistemology – that is ‘our own grounds of knowledge’ (Hughes et al, 2004, p.9)."

At this workspace, the community-based/residential block (i.e. mixed-mode) course for Indigenous primary and secondary education was conducted within the School of Education. This is the only research text where the Indigenous support staff work separately under what I will term ‘the learner support only’ enclave paradigm in a program that was funded solely to enable student travel to and from the University, accommodation while on-campus and ATAS support for the students but not the delivery of the students’ academic programs. The residential teaching was coordinated by a non-Indigenous academic within the School of Education. I was initially employed as a sessional lecturer in the Sub Urban School of Education, then given a full load of teaching for the semester. So, like many other sessional staff, I was then teaching at two institutions.

At the time of the events depicted in the following narrative (portrayal two), I was teaching a unit on Australian society. Being in a School of Education meant there was less Indigenous intensity in the workspace experience. The Indigenous support enclave employed three Indigenous administrative staff, and a non-teaching director. Teaching of programs (e.g. education or arts degrees) was maintained by faculty staff (most were non-Indigenous, with approximately one in eight Indigenous lecturers employed as sessional staff for a small number of units). An Indigenous advisory committee acted as a consultative body for residential curriculum advice. Hence the curriculum taught could have been discussed at some point or other with the Senior Indigenous administrator, but usually this was minimal. This lack of Indigenous control in curriculum and pedagogy meant that Indigenous learners were potentially presented with knowledge and learning experiences that
assumed less *connectedness* between their community knowledge and university knowledge. Hence the discourse shaping my work was of diminished Indigenous influence, essentially due to the diminished Indigenous academic presence except, of course, at the cultural interface with the learners.

As a sessional staff member my view was that I was a lecturer with less responsibility or allegiance to the workspace. I took the perspective that an institutional decision to send the classes off campus was an invitation for a reactionary response from some students. The decision seemed unjust to me; here were students travelling from all over the state to attend a residential, and they were being bussed off campus. Students expressed their opinions that they were being penalised due to the ‘residential school’ teaching and learning format. The thought went through my mind that the ‘regular mainstream’ students were not being asked to change their routine. (Perhaps a minor example of how institutional racism is manifest). The community-based program was only for Indigenous students, the mainstream B.Ed was offered to all applicants able to travel each week to attend classes in that format.

The enclave model coincided with the conservative discourse that maintained a minimal Indigenous presence within the University structure. In other workspaces where the Indigenous centre staff teach the courses, there was criticism about the academic separation; it was suggested that learners and staff were in a space that was 'too inward looking'. In a way, most Indigenous programs teaching in residential mode are open to such criticism. The programs are isolated from campus life and so students do not participate in the day-to-day life of the campus, except for four weeks (or perhaps six weeks in some programs) each year. This could be compared to the experience of students enrolled in distance education degree courses offered to the general public.

As there were a number of sessional staff teaching in the residential program, such increase in the casualisation of employment meant less connectivity within the staff in the program. The perceived lack of ‘team’ co-ordination or

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42 My estimate is that one in four lecturers were sessional, or part-time casual lecturers.
43 Program or course team meaning the staff that teach across a program, sometimes in the same curriculum area (e.g. Indigenous studies in the course, or Foundation education units of study.)
shared Indigenous knowledge vision was partly due to the workloads, but
moreover that there were no Indigenous staff governing the teaching of the
program. This is simply part of the fragmenting and fragmentary employment
in higher education residential programs.

To find myself in this School of Education with its attenuated relationship with
its Indigenous student teachers through casualised academic staff, brought with
it a niggling frustration based on my knowledge that Indigenous knowledge
was more marginalised than ever within this enclave model. I was faced with
contradictory questions: Could I work for the enhancement of Indigenous
knowledge in education and at the same time assist in maintaining the
marginalising of the Aboriginal epistemology?

6.1.1. The learning context:

As with many tertiary groups of learners there were young and old, across the
spectrum from recent year twelve graduates to those few closer to fifty; some
were from near Urban, and others from distant communities around the State.
This was a similar context to the learners in Research Text One and Research
Text Three, the focus also being on community-based residential programs.
The learners were Kooris\(^{44}\) and Murris enrolled in a teacher education course
taught in residential format. Each unit of study in the course was usually taught
across the semester and within two residential blocks; additional academic
support was arranged by the administrative staff. The learners had just begun
the unit, and were about to embark on the modules concerning family and
schools, followed by race and racism.

Liam, the Course Coordinator, had sent an email around stating there were
some issues about room allocation and times on campus for the forthcoming
residential. Liam saw me prior to the residential beginning:

“I’m sorry John, but the timetabling system could not cope with the
residential bookings, so the School of Education has organised rooms for next
week’s residential at a building off campus”.

That is part of the context of the following situation which occurred in the next
suburb, since the residential program teaching was re-located a few kilometres

\(^{44}\) Koori is spelt differently by New South Wales Kooris. Murri refers to Indigenous persons in north western NSW and generally in Queensland.
away. (This was not ideal, but an emergency solution to a room allocation problem).

6.2. Portrayal Two: being sent off

Monday morning

Walking through the car parking area at the uni I notice a few Koori students emerging from their car. The driver is talking with the Uni car park officer, a tall, dark-skinned African man who is doing his duty, policing the designated Staff car parking areas.

“Hey you're black” one student called out, “can’t you let it go this time?”.

The groundsman replied in a quiet voice, the words did not carry for me to hear. Obviously he had asked the students to move the car to the Student car park, as the Staff spaces were designated for staff.

“You could have told us before we parked the car. You waited until we all got out.” “Some people! Makes you wonder why they do things the way they do……”, one of the other two students commented.

Observing this interaction, I wondered if the students would consider the life of this particular groundsman, who had lost his extended family in one of the most brutal episodes of ethnic cleansing in a recent African atrocity?

Collecting my basket full of teaching materials, I notice Indigenous staff and students milling outside the Indigenous support room, the ‘enclave’. We have arrived just in time to meet the campus bus to transport us to our designated learning space. It is full, so I join a student named Craig sitting on the floor. Our feet and lower legs are dangling there in the door opening space. Craig says to me:

“What’s this John, no room at the inn? How come we come all the way here, to be bussed off campus?”

I nod to him and say “Exciting times Craig, it is a bit unusual being sent off campus”.

Rod, a Koori administrative staff member, drives the bus steadily along the tree lined avenues, as we ironically watch the big, palatial houses so close to the campus pass by. There are three lecturers on board, and about twenty five
students. A few minutes later the driver stops the bus beside the railway line, and across the road is the Burville Professional Centre. Rod, the driver, is at the rear of the bus, and says:

“Just go up to the second level, and ask up there at the desk. They can direct you to the rooms.” He turns and heads back to the bus to return to campus.

The traffic is busy, not constant, and I call over my shoulder “Careful crossing the road, this road is like a rat run.” Is this being paternal I think to myself, or just a common sense response of being a teacher and having concern for one’s charges - this mob are all adults after all and quite capable of surviving the streets of the CBD of a capital city. A few at a time, we cross, and being one of the first across, I decide to go up to the second level with those that have crossed the road. There are two lifts, and about seven of us get in to go to the second level. On the second level there are many teaching rooms. Two groups are in discussion, mainly women, and not obviously part of the uni “off campus program”. No sign of an admin desk, so I head down to the street level to ask which rooms are for us.

At the front desk two women sit behind a desk. I approach and ask: “Excuse me, we are from the Uni and believe that there are rooms booked for us on level two.”

“No we have no bookings for you”, replied the first woman. “And a very rude young man ignored my instruction to wait here downstairs – I said you can’t just come in -we need to know which rooms you are going to. And he just went straight past.”

“I was about to press the red button – and get Security”, added the second woman.

I thought about my response, but opted for the compliant semi-grovel I thought necessary for this situation: “I’m sorry for any misunderstanding, we were told to go upstairs first – we didn’t know to ask here about the rooms. I’ll ring back to the Uni and check the details.” I dialled the number for the Indigenous Support Admin staff and heard a familiar voice:

“Hi Michelle do you know which rooms we are in?”
“Yes John the rooms are on the first level, they are part of the Burville Community College. Ask for Satyananda – she is the contact person.”

“Thanks Michelle, I’ll pass that on, bye”.

I announce to the gathering of students and women-behind-desk that we are booked into rooms on the first floor. Up the lift to the second floor, to tell the waiting crowd the good news. As I get down to the first floor a number of students are waiting there to move into respective rooms. As I have a tutorial group of less than ten I opt to accept the smaller room. Cathy and Adrianna, the other lecturers from Sub Urban, decide on the rooms they will teach in, and the students and staff eventually settle into the space.

“When back everyone.” I begin, as if to formally begin our conversation.

“Hi John, the two girls from Cairns might not get here due to the big rain up north. So there are only six of us”, says Roxanne.

“Thanks Roxanne. Yes there certainly is a lot of rain, and the road was probably impassable to their community”.

We start on some revision, the areas of interest relating to the reader I had posted.

“Hey John, before we start, you realise that the Reader you posted out was only received last Tuesday. So we’ve had only a few days to read these articles?”

“Thanks Craig, I appreciate the difficulty with that. I am sorry that I didn’t get the reader out earlier. It wasn’t possible. So during this residential, we will focus on a few particular sections of the readings. Let’s do some revision on the key concepts we discussed last residential.”

We begin mapping concepts and connecting examples of community knowledge to the ... (interrupted by) ... A knock on the door, “Hello I’m Lesley. I have Advanced Standing for this subject, but thought I could sit in for today. Is that alright?”

“Sure Lesley – come in”.

The door opens – “Hi John” (It is Djuane, a student I knew from a previous
year).

“O.K Djuane, come in – I need to have a chat anyway. I’ll get the group going on some reading, then you and I can step outside”.

“Oooohh that sounds like trouble (a playful laugh went around the room)”, he said.

I proceeded to put the students into groups and set them tasks to work through.

I left the room with Djuane. I had to discuss some issues regarding his previous study, and noted that he was not on my list of students from the previous semester. I wanted to explain that he would have to enrol again in the second semester of this year. I considered Djuane could just complete the outstanding requirements as his participation in the unit the previous year had met the requirements. Some negotiation would be possible.

Djuane rolled his eyes and said, “I do not believe this – so I have to finish this Australian society subject AGAIN, as well as that Cultural Diversity one last year”.

I said I was sorry, but the enrolment and census dates were the way they were, and I would give him some feedback as soon as practicable. Djuane was a little upset.

“Well it is no wonder that Liam (the co-ordinator) didn’t tell me, he knows that I would just spin out COMPLETELY. I can’t believe how much I’ve been mucked around by this University Administration.”

We returned to the tutorial room, and Djuane asked: “Ah, John can I make an announcement? Everyone here you should know that there is a march (rally) at the Block on Wednesday for TJ”. The room is quiet, and after a pause I said “Thanks Djuane”, recognising the solemnity of the upcoming gathering. TJ was a young boy killed two days earlier; four witnesses stated the police were chasing him in their police car. He was found impaled on a fence, dead, with his bicycle wheel severely buckled. The police deny they were anywhere near the scene. The day after TJ’s death rioting occurred with much publicity and police injured.

We continued with the revision, and discussed the meaning of co-operation,
forced association and coercion. We tried to link cultural capital to the recent discussion about public and private school funding.

Another knock on the door – I am beginning to wonder if this is my lucky day (irony) – three interruptions in a row – and the morning has barely begun. It was Satyananda. She has a sheet of ‘house rules’ to inform us about the space we’re in for the week. As we pass the sheets around, Djuane reacts somewhat (perhaps) inappropriately.

“Hey what is this here – no spitting – like as if we are going to spit in the building. Look we’re Kooris, doesn’t mean we don’t know how to behave. Anyway, where are you from?”

Satyananda continued: “Please read these, and have a good stay this week. Of course these rules are for everyone. Don’t take offence”. With this she left, Djuane said a few things, and I did not really hear.

Later in the day around lunchtime there was to be a meeting of the students. I arrived back to hear the decision about ten minutes before the hour. Along the front of the building was the Campus Operations office. The door opened and the Head of School emerged with a stony expression on his face. Normally I would nod and say hello, but on this occasion I noticed the Head was stepping out quickly, not making eye contact. A moment later, the door opened again, and the Course Coordinator departed the office with similar deportment and haste.

The students refused to return to the ‘off-campus’ tutorial rooms. The lunchtime meeting had made resolutions that were to be passed to the Head of School of Education, that the move off campus was deemed inequitable for the students, and not acceptable. A few minutes later the group for my teaching gathered near the Indigenous Support Unit. We agreed to sit on the lawn nearby, with partial shade by the lasiandra tree. Across the lawn I noticed that the Murray Hall had curtains drawn, and wondered if the space was booked for the afternoon.

We went towards the hall, and I said "Well let's colonise this space until we're told to leave". The main doors were unlocked, I re-arranged a few desks into my preferred ‘horse-shoe’ setup, moved the whiteboard to complete the
Then, as we finally sat down to get into the class discussion, Laura and Rochelle arrived. “Welcome to Laura and Rochelle, I heard you’ve been trying to get to ‘Res’ and the tropical low poured centimetres (or inches) of rain on your town. I saw the TV footage – boulders blocking the road, I was surprised the airport opened so soon”.

Laura and Rochelle smile, yawn: “Good to get here – eventually…”.

"If you two get tired, that’s alright, just put your heads down. Now I’d like to suggest some consideration of the modules, and the focus of the day."

Janice, an older woman, was forthcoming: “Look John, nothing personal, but we cannot think about this Australian society stuff, our whole day has been messed up with the issues this morning. I would have gone back to those rooms, but we have to stick together. But we’re here to learn, and I want to get the most out of our time. We only have another six hours of your subject, so how can we get through all these readings and make sense of it all”. (In classroom discussions Indigenous students tend to allow the elders in the class to speak up first and, as a sign of respect, rarely contradict or directly disagree with older students).

“Thanks Janice for bringing up these matters, I want to suggest we shift the focus today – there are four modules for the unit, we have covered and completed the first one, and worked on the second with our discussion on family and issues of law. I like to use the tension of the day – as I know we are all pretty upset about the business this morning – perhaps we can use this feeling productively. The last module is on racism, and ways to understand expressions of prejudice. One of these is institutional racism, the way in which an institution acts that can be seen to be prejudicial. Often this form of racism is not recognised by the person employed to carry out the rules and regulations of the institution.”

Djuane spoke out: “What would you call the police chasing TJ on his bike, and then finding him dead around the corner? Isn’t that institutional racism? Or us coming to the residential and being sent off to rooms? Why are we treated like second class students?”
“Thanks Djuane. You could interpret both of those situations as forms of institutional racism. The death of young TJ Hickey, a teenage boy riding his bicycle, will be examined closely by the coroner, but the street riot that followed is a response to the police acting in questionable ways. Also this morning we experienced two differing examples of institutional racism. Firstly, as the staff responsible for room allocation did not anticipate the requirements of the Residential, we could say that their response was to deal with the matter as an example of the institution's ineptitude with matters of timetabling. Not intentionally racist, but the outcome has put many of you in a position of feeling like second class students. As someone said this morning, they wouldn’t put the mainstream learners off campus and upset their week…”

“The second – again perhaps unintentional – act of institutional racism may be the reaction of the reception staff – suggesting they would press the alarm bell as they ‘requested’ one of the group to wait downstairs, and he replied – I’m going to catch up with the mob” (or words to that effect). From our perspective – the front desk person was being overly concerned about one of the group, and distrusted his appearance, and that looks like prejudice. From her perspective, she had made an instruction to unknown visitors to the building, and as an employee of the managing organisation she was in a position of power. She threatened to exert her power by way of excluding Craig from access to the building, until she was assured that we were meant to go to the upper levels.”

“I suppose there is a third example, when Satyananda entered the tutorial room to inform us of the ‘house rules’. When Craig read the last line – No spitting – he reacted that such statements suggest that they are dirty, and he took offence (umbrage) at the suggestion. But if this instruction is given to all visitors, then being informed of the house rules cannot be considered racism”.

A few days later:

The normal administrative task of allocating tutorial rooms or teaching spaces had become just one more frustration complicating the pedagogical act and praxis. It was a situation in which tactlessness abounded. On the last day of the Residential in Semester Two I found the room I was to use inhabited by another person teaching another part of the same Residential program. The
tutorial group I ‘led’ moved to another room in close proximity called the Print room - this was a specialist art room. I borrowed the Overhead Projector from the room that was double booked, and projected onto a double door of a gunmetal grey locker. Towards the end of the session we discussed posture and stretching as the stools we were perched on were not favoured by all present.

At morning break, I tried to find a better room, and was pleased to be told a tutorial room was available for the following two hours – ah relief – no need to worry about being ‘room refugees’ and being ‘turfed out’ by another tutorial group. At the end of the break, as students made their way to the assigned room, another student asked me to check their re-enrolment form and to consider giving credit for previous studies - at that point a voice then from a balcony a voice called:

“Hey John – there is another tutorial group in here.”

The choice was mine, I could and should have gone to the room and demanded that the group depart. But I was not in a confrontational mood. Mistakes happen, and recurrringly happen again. (I joke that possession being 9/10ths of the law, and that we will re-colonise another room for ourselves))

I called the students down and located a room that I thought would suffice for the time, although I knew it had little airflow and was internal, no windows to the outside. But a space to engage the discussion and show a few more overheads. The learners (few in number but keen to finish their sixth consecutive whole day of lectures and tutorials) sat and breathed, but not deeply as there was an unpleasant mustiness in the room. I turned the air-conditioner on to freshen the space.

We departed for the Indigenous support office space, the kitchen table would have to do, but alas the room was full, we spied two tables in the outside square near a purple flowering tree, beside a statue of a benevolent Saint or martyr. Suffice to say enough room for a tutorial. At last a pleasant and sunny spot – and the overhead could be presented and discussed against A4 paper held in front of myself. I felt relieved about the space we ended up using but am sure the learners felt it was all like a poorly scripted comedy of errors: one woman commented
“I’m not changing to another room!”

In hindsight I could have used other media to teach, I relied upon discussion, but almost subconsciously I blocked out thoughts about relying on video.

The last module was discussed in more detail, and the group considered the concepts of institutional racism, and other definitions in their readers. I said to the group that due to the disruption and unease, I would carry out a telephone tutorial to talk to the group in two weeks time.
6.3. Portrayal Three: Implications and lessons learnt

Metaphorically this experience was about displacement and reaction, being sent off sounds like a football analogy, the oval being the campus, so who was I: a coach, a supporter of the team?

The teams ran onto the oval, and then an extra team, from out of town wanted to play, the outsiders team was sent off, to practice down the street, but they decided this was unfair.

There were Indigenous support mechanisms, there for tea, coffee and advocacy.

Was I captured by the system? Feeling grateful for a spot on the team, upgraded to full-time, very grateful now, unwittingly becoming part of the conservative culture, my presence at Sub Urban, was just employment.

Yet the team lacked a collegial cultural interface, no presence of Indigenous peers or non-Indigenous radicalism. I was virtually conforming, although trying to subvert the dominant paradigm.

The implications here: an issue of cultural awareness, should I intervene and mediate the Burville situation? Could I have supported the decision to travel off campus, worked to convince the students that was the best option?

6.3.1. The lecturer, space allocation and negotiating praxis

I felt a bit guilty as the week ended, since as lecturer I was partly responsible for some of the miscommunication that had emerged in the Residential program (6.2) from the time we entered the Burville Centre. Yet I was one of three lecturers, and felt my main responsibility was facilitating the learning activities for my own unit of study. I watched as Djuane questioned the resident staff member about the house rules. Although the tone was abrasive, I did not see a role for myself in mediating the discussion. This was something I might have chosen to do in past situations, but here my decision was not to intervene as mediator as I thought the students did not need to hear my viewpoint.
Djuane had expressed a valid viewpoint when he observed that the professional centre where we had tutorial space was clearly used for migrant education and language courses. The rules were meant for the diversity of ‘newly’ arrived migrants, highly likely from countries where spitting was more common: e.g. Bangladesh, China, Korea, Pakistan, etc. Of course some Aboriginal and some non-Indigenous Australians would also spit, but to be handed the do's and don’ts really emphasised the issue of difference to Djuane; he might have been the only voice reacting for an audience comprised of himself alone. But perhaps he had prior bad experience of administrative difficulties as a student, and here was another set of bureaucratic requirements.

As a consequence of the disruption to the teaching and learning in my unit of study, I decided to follow up the residential with some academic support. A week after the residential I enquired about setting up a teleconference to enable the tutorial group to link up. A telephone link-up in the period between residential was my preferred means of reviewing the learners' uptake of the content covered in the residential. I was also keen to talk to students as the week had been very disruptive and we had only barely covered the content I had anticipated for our tutorial discussions.

The Sub Urban institution used a 'meet me' set up. This means one person sets up a ‘call in’ number, and informs the interested parties when to ring that number. Technical staff explained this system enabled efficient links for staff and students who may be on campus or at major cities interstate. As I thought about the implications of this system, it was clear that the learners living in rural and at a distance from the major cities would have to pay for the 'meet me' privilege on the telephone.

Mentally my alarm bells were ringing. This system was not going to be useful for my situation. The learners living at a significant distance (over 100kms away) would be paying for the link up. (Possibly ten dollars or more each). What sort of student support would this be? I then proceeded to ring the eleven learners individually.

My calls began with an explanation of why I was ringing around individually, as I did not want to incur additional cost to the learners. After repeating this mantra eleven times, I realised that saving students money was admirable but I
was getting annoyed that these particular learners in residential programs got little for their HECS fees. My offer to phone around was accepted by the learners without reservation, but I also knew that this meant spending more hours teaching than I had been allocated. The differences between full time and fractional work raise issues about which sessional staff are very familiar. As a full time employee you can do whatever is required, but as a fractional or casual employee, you begin to draw lines on the amount of time spent on the unit.

The coordinator had requested room allocation, and it was only a matter of days prior to the residential when the staff were made aware of the problem. Timetabling was complex for both room and staff allocation. This should have alerted lecturers to expect some problems and if anyone attending had tension at home, this complication would only make that situation worse. I thought that the situation was unjust. This was the first time that room allocation was a major issue in my twenty years of teaching. My earlier experiences were of Indigenous Centres within Universities organising residential in a rotational manner (e.g., year one intake for a week, year two intake for a week, year three intake for a week, etc) ensuring that staff and students had time and space for teaching and consultation. Also, as the Indigenous teaching centres usually had spaces for classes, rooms were rarely double booked. In fact I remember no other program having this level of ‘timetabling inconvenience’. Other Indigenous programs taught within Indigenous centres were more likely to consider the needs of learners and the impacts of institutional decision making. They would have recommended the privileging of Indigenous controlled teaching spaces, and the Directors would advocate on behalf of the program and, if possible, force a positive outcome for the Koori students in the overall teaching and learning environment.

But in this narrative (6.2), student participation was deeply affected due to the distress and frustration levels. My negotiation skills were called upon to manage the difficult situation of being ‘mobilised’ off the campus, and then trying to locate a space by ringing back to the campus.

The negotiation of the teaching topics would have occurred even if the tutorial room was not an issue. In many ways the incidents allowed a stronger
connection between the students and the materials, as less abstract ideas were presented. (Such negotiated praxis is based on the work of Garth Boomer (1982) Negotiating the curriculum, as mentioned in an earlier footnote).

Yet in this critical incident (6.2), the Indigenous students knew much better than I did the oppressive regimes affecting their lives. In our discussions of schools as socialising institutions, we explored the hidden curriculum, and this proved a useful concept for exploring the school environment. The students knew much more about what was being hidden, and so I learned about the lived experience of families that would talk about the policies used to marginalise them. Since I did not live an oppressed life, how could I know daily oppression? Often there was a less than forceful discussion, I would concur with students of my awareness of situations, but personal trauma had been a minimal factor in my own life experiences.

6.3.2. Implications of the death of T.J.

The suspicious death of T.J. Hickey had resulted in riots that took place the night before the critical incident. The implications for the classroom were that students were already agitated, some quite angry and most were emotionally upset. A number of students were wanting to pay their respects by attending a street march to protest the police actions that were suspected of causing the death. While I said I was sympathetic, I was yet encouraging those who wanted to attend class to do so.

Tension is brought to the narrative situation by the sending of the students off campus, compounded by the reception at the Burville rooms and then there was the suspicious death of T.J. in the background. The room allocation decision indicated to the Residential students that the ‘mainstream’ students were not to be inconvenienced, and reinforced the ‘othering’ of the Koori students by the School of Education. The seemingly benign perceptions of staff could be summed up in these terms: ‘Indigenous students have much hardship, are resilient, and this will not trouble them’.

6.3.3. Implications of working with the enclave model

The above-mentioned Sub Urban administrative matters are partly due to the separation of the teaching and the support aspects of program provision. One
lesson I learnt from this experience was that this 'enclave model' form of Indigenous higher education, allows the Schools and Faculties to control the teaching and learning processes, and in a way assimilates the students into mainstream practices.

In the events detailed in each of the previous Research Texts, administrative matters, and most timetabling and tutorial rooms allocation invariably assumed that there were dedicated teaching spaces for the Indigenous higher education workspaces. [NB: The complexity at Sub Urban was the allocation of teaching spaces for a diploma (3 year levels) and two (a two year and a four year) degree courses, being taught during the same week. This meant allocating several (up to nine) rooms, each day, on a small campus]. Consequently the teaching on weekends was seen as preferable, as it would be less likely to result in a clash of rooms. But this also meant that learners and lecturers were giving up their weekends. And so another set of tensions accrued challenging my ideological position and what I considered to be acceptable practice. Negotiating 'days in lieu' is always difficult to arrange, and in this Indigenous workspace neither administrative staff nor lecturers get paid overtime.

Hence, organisational matters at this workspace were being handled by non-Indigenous staff, co-ordinators and administrative staff. Timetabling was centralised, and were the responsibility of non-Indigenous staff located elsewhere, at another campus. Clearly, the enclave model requires allocation of rooms, and an administrative system that understands the complexity of residential teaching, preferably under Indigenous control. As an 'enclave', the Indigenous staff did not positively suggest student attendance at the street march. But in other workspaces with Indigenous control, the attendance at an important event, like this sorry business, would undoubtedly have been supported.

6.3.4. Lessons learned – a poetised reflection

Another semester another unknown, 
sessional, part time, enough work for a full time contract. 
An enclave model of administrative support, 
teaching the responsibility of the School, 
clash of room allocations (again).
once more pushed to the outer.

A journey east, towards unease, hesitation and student discontent, shattering of calm illusions, reaction to confrontation.

While down the Block the riot kicks off, a reaction to another young man dead, police car chasing bicycle rider, silence.

Heed the voice of students, undercurrent of dissent, unspoken prejudice from the system, “we are paying for our education”.

Residential rooms and timetables, never sure of each day. Learners deserve a better deal, but sandwiched between mainstream needs, with almost tireless monotony.

Is ambivalence a sign of wisdom or a paternalistic position of past caring? am I travelling in circles, or exploring meaningful learning spirals?

6.4 Portrayal Four: inquiry and the literature
There are five themes that emerge from Portrayal Two:

6.4.1 Administrative and organisational matters
6.4.2 Community connectedness and the death of TJ
6.4.3. Negotiating with pedagogical tact and cultural safety
6.4.4. Differing discourses about the enclave model
6.4.1. Administrative and organisational matters

Emerging from the narrative (Portrayal 6.2) is the complexity of delivering a course outside an Indigenous higher education centre where the teaching of courses has been relinquished. This Research Text is unique amongst the four in the thesis since the Sub Urban Indigenous Support Unit did have the formal role of teaching students. Hence, the enclave did not engage epistemological matters in course teaching, and therefore was less concerned with the pedagogical issues of Indigenous knowledge. 45

At Sub Urban the responsibility for room allocation was centralised with overall timetabling systems under the control of Student Administration. Program decisions in the 'enclave' model were part of the dialogue between the Sub Urban School of Education and the Indigenous Support Unit. An Indigenous Advisory committee was consulted for matters pertaining to course structure and guidance in cultural matters pertaining to the curriculum.

Control of Room Allocation was out of Koori hands, and after two semesters teaching learners at Sub Urban, the room difficulties were continually confounding and perplexing. Thus, it is not clear how the Support Unit (the enclave) should relate to the School of Education. There are tensions that arise from trying to align support with teaching under this attenuated model where the School guards academic content, employs casual academic staff to teach and assess this ordained knowledge and controls the on-campus room allocations while the enclave is out of the academic loop essentially providing pastoral care. Was there a form of institutional racism in sending students off campus? Am I being too reactionary? I did indeed view the Burville solution as institutionally racist to the students. One of the students expressed the view, stating:

"they wouldn't send the mainstream students off campus for a week? why should we have to get off the campus?"

There was an element of irony in the material being taught (Australian society and issues of racism). These matters were ‘all too difficult to discuss’ as one learner angrily expressed. He was right, and I did not and do not dispute his

45. Other Indigenous higher education centres, as portrayed in Tumbarumba and Yarrabriool, arranged a rotation of allocated weeks for student attendance, lessening demand on teaching staff, and providing allocation of tutorial space within their immediate environs or workspaces. Clifton did also, albeit that that one space was in a prison.
opinion. Not that the tutorial was intellectually difficult, but deeply emotional in dealing with the hard things in life that are staring Indigenous learners in the face, virtually everyday.

In residential programs it is important to recognise the intensification of work. The staff were essentially cramming the content of half a semester's work into a week (approximately ten hours face to face with students), and students were similarly cramming three or four units of study into a week. This is quite a cognitive burden for all concerned. Similarly the issues of academic support for learners 'away from base' are paramount. But here on campus support is not available to any real extent. This highlights the difficulty experienced by staff in their role as lecturers and in their responsibility to provide tutorial support. The ability of staff to be responsive, or to anticipate individual support needs, is left to telephone calls and emails. Beyond these forms of contact, any additional support may be beyond institutional expectations, especially if your mainstream teaching is considerable, e.g., a lecture and three or more tutorials for twenty five learners on campus each week. With a dozen learners who are mostly remote (one of the Indigenous student group lived ‘locally’) the ‘phone around’ is virtually an essential part of the educator's toolkit for teaching in Indigenous higher education.

The Sub Urban School had many years of organisational learning with the residential program. The experiences I have outlined above in the narrative portrayal (6.2) indicate that organisational learning is often learnt in hindsight if at all. Staff may be considering learners’ needs, but not be fully cognizant of the cultural perceptions of any 'on the spot' decision.

Duignan and Butcher (2003) write about learning within, and for, an organisational structure. Duignan and Butcher express relevant concerns when they summarise:

...we place great faith in learning from experiences but frequently we cannot observe the consequences of our actions.....Hierarchical structures and supporting bureaucratic rationality impose their own straitjackets that limit, or even prevent, learning, information and knowledge flows in such structures are, too frequently, restricted and there is a tendency for competitive and ambitious individuals to ‘hoard’ important information or distribute it selectively......
2. Mental models: assumptions, frameworks or paradigms that influence how we understand the world and how we act and interact can lead to unyielding, fixed mindsets that drive out reflectivity, creativity and lateral thinking. What we end up with are thinking models, structures, and processes that provide a blueprint for conformity but what we require, in today’s complex and uncertain environments are frameworks for creativity (2003, pp.7-9).

The above highlights aspects of the discourse around organisations and learning, recognising the relevance and complexities of cooperation between organisations and of (the almost organic demands of) strategic learning. Senge (1990) has elaborated upon on systems thinking as a ‘sensibility’ to interconnectedness and interdependency. Complex systems demand a shift of mind, a reconsideration of how organisations act. In this Sub Urban research text there are two organisations that should be learning - the Indigenous Support unit and the School of Education. Both had experience over many years (about two decades) in organising support for learners and for the program delivery. The scenario in which we were required to move 'off campus' leaves a strong doubt as to whether the organisations had adequately considered the perception of the learners, or had reckoned with the cultural interface that should underpin a long term relationship between the institution and the Aboriginal support staff 'enclave'. The 'enclave' model here does not seek to re-colonise space in the institution, but encourages assimilating learners into the institutional spaces, albeit only for the teaching and learning experience. An outcome of this assimilationist intent with its engendered passivity within the enclave, is that the stresses associated with room allocation and timetabling, as outlined in the narrative are not usually negotiated. Similarly, the narrative (6.2) describes a situation that indicates that the learning organisation was somewhat disengaged and therefore quarantined from the process of learning from the Indigenous learners' perspective.

The next section reviews the prominence and impact of the death of a young man, and how that highlighted a negotiation with the curriculum, as has emerged from portrayal two.

6.4.2. The impact of the death of TJ Hickey

The death of a fourteen year old teenager, coinciding with the first day of the Residential, meant a wave of sadness and pain had travelled through the
Indigenous community. The following evening scores of youth in Redfern created a human barricade and threw objects at police as a protest about the circumstances that surrounded TJ’s death. The relationship of police to Aboriginal youth is an enduring issue eliciting widespread concern amongst the Indigenous community. The reaction reminded me of another suspicious death that had an impact upon students in a tertiary setting, when NSW police with the Tactical Response Group (TRG) carrying weapons stormed into the teaching facilities at Tranby Aboriginal College in Glebe in 1989.

Back then (in 1989), a few hours earlier in a nearby suburb, a policeman had been killed, and the police were looking for a young Aboriginal man, who was not a student. The next day an innocent man, David Gundy, was shot in his bed, in what was later revealed to be a case of mistaken identity (Indigenous Law Resources, 1993). His girlfriend was a student at Tranby, and the wanted man had spent a few nights at their house. So I was thinking:

If I am making this historic connection, what multiple connections are the Kooris in the class making? and what level of trauma might some be experiencing at this campus, during this residential?

I wondered how many relatives of TJ were attending this residential. A student mentioned his family was from Walgett, a rural western NSW town where a number of students resided. My anticipation of familial relationships between the students in my class and TJ Hickey was important as a catalyst for my subsequent pedagogical choice, and illustrates the ‘tact’ I sought to embody in my teaching. Yet my inaction to see the larger crisis affecting the community shows my over-cautious paralysis to act.

This pedagogical ‘tact’ was theorised by Van Manen (1991). When, as the narrative recounts it (6.2) Janice said "We have to stick together" I realised that I needed to seize that pedagogical moment to connect my teaching with the situation of that moment as experienced by that class. That morning the death of TJ on the prior Saturday afternoon was present in the experience of the classroom. The group dynamic certainly affects the pedagogical act. And the class was then able to engage with examples of institutional racism, and also to discuss their broader life experience. Of course institutional racism was a more accessible topic among those set down to be covered on that occasion.
In a tertiary classroom discussion, Indigenous students tend to allow the older learners to respond first, and rarely did students contradict or directly disagree with them. This was simply a sign of their respect. Pedagogically, this allowed considered viewpoints to emerge, although rarely leading to disagreement. I do not claim transformative outcomes for the learners, but consider that my praxis attempted to allow the learners to positively benefit from the prior learning space discussion. A statement of the central concepts for teaching Indigenous students are stated by Maureen Ah Sam and Craig Ackland:

*Although there is no single model or recipe for being more effective teachers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, there are some fundamentals that should be incorporated into how and what we teach:*

- each student must be respected
- their cultures and the relevant implications of those cultures must be respected
- they must be taught well
- they must participate consistently.

*(The Australian Curriculum Studies Association and National Curriculum Services, 2002 cited in Phillips and Lampert, 2005, p186).*

These criteria are set out in the What Works program (2009), as pedagogical guidelines for schools, and apply similarly for tertiary institutions. Such expectations may be idealistic, but reflect a standard expected in the Indigenous spaces in universities. How did my teaching in this compromised residential measure up to these the criteria? Had I not become complicit in the institutionalised racism, even if it was mild and unintended, by supporting the move off-campus? Or was I being secretly subversive, allowing the situation to be read as negative, although not quite encouraging dissent? The above criteria, emphasising respect, good teaching and participation suggest a dialogue with students. The next theme looks at some critical issues of such dialogue.

6.4.3. Negotiating with pedagogical tact and cultural safety

Negotiating curriculum to engage the reality of students daily experience is one pedagogical aspect that emerges from the narrative (6.2). As Carol Reid states, Indigenous learners may experience a tension in giving priority to autonomous action and asserting their own identity:
... There is some tension in this process for the students in terms of their own cultural understandings, in the ways in which they remember the formation of their cultural self and how that is expressed in relation to their future as teachers. This is a tension between their collective and individual identity. As the students learn about becoming autonomous professionals, they reflect on communal and familial influences and practices. This can create another tension between family and study. Both tensions emanate from a reframing of students’ Indigenous identities and the emergence of a professional identity (Reid, 2004, p.210).

This theme emerges in the relationship of the students to the death of a younger community member. The ensuing community response entailed a march in protest at the police action which allegedly led to the death. And corresponding to this, during the residential, the lack of room space on campus had fed a frustration or recognition that institutions continued to treat this marginalised group in a manner they deemed irksome and thus unacceptable. Pressure built over the loss of precious on-campus teaching/learning time which was propelled further by the call ‘to arms’, to attend the protest march at Redfern (The Block). I was ambivalent over my advice to students, equivocating over whether they should attend the march or stay in my tutorials. Where did I stand? I was complicit with the institution, the issues around the death were for the court, I had reneged on taking a stand, or an action.

The Indigenous worldview would need to be vigilantly implemented as the dominant discourse, ensuring critical assessment of the tertiary and university curriculum. The intention was flagged, but the implementation has not gained universal acceptance within the university sector. Here is a critical background issue that is implied throughout this thesis.

Beyond being tactful, my intention was to maintain and ensure a culturally safe place. This idea is to engender supportive teaching and learning, which includes mechanisms for inclusive cultural social and spiritual support offered by and for Indigenous support staff. This means a praxis that goes beyond being ready to listen to Indigenous voices, or merely thinking “I know how to act”. Of course tactfulness is a part of a teacher's toolkit, but providing cultural safety is an intangible that can be missing in practice.

Such knowledge of action must be tempered by an educator’s tactfulness. Max van Manen (1984) presents the notion of tactfulness as a key to implementing adult education, and this discourse is highly relevant to my experience in
community based Indigenous education contexts, and it has particular relevance to Sub Urban. Van Manen (1984) argues that tactfulness is a dimension of pedagogic competence that transcends teaching technique. Tact in pedagogy can be stated as the sensitivity to a situation that enables the teacher to act in the interests of the learner.

The idea of tact reintroduces the ethical acts of pedagogic action (Van Manen 1991, p158).

Upon first reading of Van Manen, this concept of tactfulness resonated with my experiences in the Sub Urban narrative (6.2), and the open negotiation brought to that teaching and learning environment. Tact as he explains it, is essential for all teachers, and is utilised everyday by educators, and especially with those working the Indigenous cultural interface. The Sub Urban cultural interface actually required more than tact; it was necessary to act in a culturally safe way and this was also uppermost in my mind. A recent IHEAC report (2006) recommends that the pedagogical frameworks for cultural safety that operate in the Indigenous health sector, be adopted in higher education:

Cultural safety focuses on cultural sensitivity and an equitable power balance in order that one’s cultural identity and well being are not diminished, demeaned or disempowered; Cultural security entails a systematic approach to incorporating cultural differences through education... Cultural respect builds on the notion of cultural security and incorporates a holistic approach involving partnerships ... cultural competence builds on the attributes of awareness, knowledge, understanding and sensitivity”. (IHEAC, citing Thomson, 2006, p.36).

This evolving pedagogical framework of cultural safety enables me to look back and reflect on the example of my teaching and consider how I might measure up against such all-encompassing criteria. At Sub Urban, the physical, social and cultural context explored in the narrative (6.2) could not be deemed a culturally safe space with cultural awareness secured. So while a more significant role for Indigenous academic staff may have engendered greater cultural respect and competence, as I see it the prevailing tendency to only employ Indigenous lecturers in sessional roles tends to undermine those same values in my eyes.

Herein is a critical consideration of the enclave model explored in the narrative.

As a model for provision, Indigenous students at Sub Urban were supported by an Indigenous 'enclave'. I believe this difference in program delivery had an important influence upon the outcomes for the students at Sub Urban. This section examines the origins of the 'enclave' model as a discourse shaping the separation of support units from academic units in the delivery of higher education to Indigenous students. To understand the model, I refer back to a NSW AECG Report, titled Aboriginal Enclaves Report (1984). Even at that early time, academics questioned the implementation of such a model. Dr. Jim Gallagher raised the question on the role of enclaves:

What about the enclaves? If before you never realised the power of the European oppressors, think again. The mistake Aboriginal people and their supporters have made is constantly to under-estimate the power of those they must contend with at all levels. And even those of us who are white and who regard ourselves and are regarded by Aboriginal people as 'alright' have the potential to oppress as Elkin did, through our unremitting self-deception that we are right and, more especially, that we know what is good and best for the Aboriginal people who are our students. Thus we make a mockery of the concept of self-determination, and prove ourselves part of the problem instead of part of the answer. The enclaves have put Aboriginal people into the Colleges of Advanced Education and to a lesser extent at present into the universities, with what results? Is there an institution in this country which has recognised and acknowledged that the culture of Aboriginal people is something to be taken seriously, or an institution which has recognised and acknowledged the primacy of self-determination? Or is the hidden model – or not so hidden – in effect an assimilationist model, which requires Aboriginal people to think, breathe and eventually to become ‘white’ middle-class Australians (Gallagher, 1984, p.82-3).

Gallagher addressed the AECG conference in his roles as representative of the Lecturers Association, of the NSW Teachers Federation, as well being a professional historian. His message resonates with my own concerns that institutions (e.g., the Sub Urban School of Education and Indigenous Support Unit) used the enclave model to effectively minimise Aboriginal pedagogy or epistemologies. Here lies a danger that the ‘enclave’ model may simply be a means of assisting in the assimilation of learners into non-Indigenous models of education. To avoid re-assimilation through higher education, Indigenous pedagogies need to be embraced and encouraged by the staff teaching in Indigenous programs. The above quote is evidence of the existence of differing
and contrasting views about the qualities of 'enclave' models, and that was over twenty years ago. Consequently the 'enclave' model can be seen as a backward step away from Indigenous self-determination, back into a re-colonising of the Indigenous learners.

However, Indigenous academics still hold contested views on the outcomes of the 'enclave' approach. Nakata (2004) advises that Indigenous academics must engage in a discourse across the broad range of disciplines to address the meaningful inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in the university.

If we think that negotiating the structural and organisational elements of reform and inclusion have been difficult, then prepare yourselves for the next stage in the process – negotiating at the level of academic and scholarly knowledge – where the negotiations are not just with management but with the elite level of scholars and faculty. The establishment of the enclave system, which supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in universities, is a powerful and effective mechanism that gives us a visible presence in the university system. It has achieved much, and is still effective but it is not sufficient. Universities support the enclave, not just because they see it as a good system for us. As well, it can conveniently keep us out of core business, give us a space where they can point and take credit for what they have facilitated on our behalf. It will increasingly, in these times requiring higher performance, accountability and scrutiny, give them the basis also for blaming us for failure (Nakata, 2004, p.2).

As Nakata emphasises, Indigenous presence with University structures has the potential to increase engagement at the level of curriculum, the structures of the school and the faculty. At Sub Urban such higher level Indigenous knowledge engagement would have altered the fragmented situation that has been portrayed there (6.2). I judge that the exclusion of Indigenous knowledge in the institution to reflect the conservative nature of the university in general.

At Sub Urban the Indigenous business was kept at arm's length, not really engaged in the structures of the schools and faculties, and therefore not in the core academic business of the University. Hence, it represents an assimilative intent (Arbon 2007) and a disempowering of Indigenous knowledge. The students did succeed in their career choices, but in a system that lacked the cultural competence of the stronger forms of Indigenous knowledge which are recognizable in Indigenous Centres or Schools in other universities.

Subsequently, Indigenous academics have developed sustained critiques of the 'enclave' model in higher education. Veronica Arbon relates that Maria Lane
(1998, p.3) has stated that the positive results from getting Indigenous people into courses, and therefore to graduate, are directly linked to support programs. Arbon recognises that the programs have aided many people in gaining access to further study and employment (2007, p.119). However, an important and potentially negative aspect is the all too frequent neglect by academics and institutions to engage students with the reality of their own Indigenous knowledge. Arbon (2007), Ford (2005), Gallagher (1984) and Nakata (2003) clearly identify the assimilative intent of 'enclaves', and the lack of pedagogical control by Indigenous communities through their own Indigenous academics; academics not yet captured by the power of the western academy. For over twenty years, the Sub Urban School of Education provided quality teacher education programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Yet the presence of Indigenous knowledge is limited. There were Indigenous lecturers teaching in the course, but only in designated units of study. Clearly, as Ford (2005) stated, the 'enclave' model does not provide significant Aboriginal perspectives in the university program. The intention of the NAEC was to ensure 'enclaves' enabled Aboriginal worldviews to become integral to teacher education programs, and the concept of the 'enclave' was stated (by NAEC) as the best way to achieve 1000 Aboriginal teachers by 1990 (Reid, 2004, p.87). One example of those thousand teachers who had graduated through programs adopting an 'enclave' model, was Shane Williams who reflected on the relationship between the learning and his Indigenous knowledge. As an Indigenous teacher, and now a policy maker, Shane Williams (from Queensland) said of his learning:

"Although the rigour of university coursework ... prepared me to be an excellent teacher, they added little value to respecting the depth and complexity of my cultural capital (Williams in Herbert, 2003, p.73)."

This experience of the 'enclave' presents a familiar pattern, namely being taught predominantly by mainstream teaching staff, without any strong Indigenous epistemology. Williams, as a successful teacher, is able to identify the positives, but clearly the institution was neutral (at best) or conservative in terms of enhancing the ‘learners’ Indigenous knowledge.

Herbert (2003) provides further evidence of successful Indigenous graduates that agreed that Tertiary Access programs were a central component for
success in their studies. Herbert argued that the

*access courses designed to prepare Indigenous students for participation in mainstream university programs are considered to be a vital and valued component of Indigenous support provision (Herbert, p.253).*

Such a viewpoint is evidence of the differing experiential or ideological viewpoints that are maintained in Indigenous higher education. Herbert’s research presents Indigenous graduates from universities with Indigenous teaching staff as well those who have come through in ‘mainstream’ university courses. (It should be noted in passing that these Access to Mainstream preparation courses, similar to that described in the Clifton text, were quite different from the Sub Urban residential programs). Herbert's perspective encourages a re-assessment of the pedagogical issues around residential programs, and this is a concern expressed by many academics ‘outside’ the Indigenous workspaces. Such concerns centre around equity and equality, are concerned about the depth of studies, and the pedagogical breadth. Put simply, in the quantifiable terms so often used to assess ‘quality’, these may only relate to the number of hours spent face to face with lecturers, tutors and in student discussions.

### 6.4.5 Resolution of the Research Text

There was limited representation of Indigenous staff in the School of Education, such that it was sessional lecturers only employed to teach Indigenous studies units. Apart from those few staff, there was some evidence that non-Indigenous lecturers were constructing learning situations with Indigenous content, and viewpoints drawn from secondary sources. This may not be significantly different from some Indigenous teaching centres, except in those places more full time Indigenous staff are employed, and carry out teaching duties. Many of the continuing non-Indigenous lecturers that worked in the residential program had many years experience of teaching Indigenous students in this format. These teaching staff were mostly sympathetic and resourceful, and brought Indigenous content into their teaching. Some lecturers negotiated the teaching and learning approach, and utilised student-centred pedagogical approaches to engage the views or standpoints of Indigenous learners on Indigenous knowledge.
As this ‘enclave’ model separated Indigenous programs from mainstream programs, a response to the Sub Urban timetabling debacle might involve the institution considering the impact of more self determination for Indigenous staff and related programs. Even though my role was as a sessional lecturer, I felt compromised knowing that the course minimised Indigenous input in the pedagogical delivery to Indigenous students. My inherent concern for Indigenous control was captured by the conservative nature of the ‘enclave’ and the school. Although underlying the institutional role of school and ‘enclave’ was a mission of social justice, there seemed minimal institutional interest in advocating for Indigenous rights; for example, there was no support for the street march in response to the death of TJ Hickey.

The literature in this research text explored the difficulty of administrative issues and the negotiation of the pedagogical space, showing how my own role was implicated, as one who was unable to have a legitimate influence due to a lack of Indigenous involvement. The discussion of tact and cultural safety are given prominence to highlight complexities of classroom interaction. Juxtaposed against this is the structured reliance upon an 'enclave' framework, indicating the conservative approach taken by the institution to the enhancement of Indigenous knowledge, in contrast to more challenging and innovative Indigenous rights models of provision. This research text showed a variation in the residential programs when managed by a School of Education and provided with 'enclave' Indigenous support. Such a model can not engage the Indigenous teacher education program with a substantive level of Indigenous epistemology.

The critical incident in the core narrative (6.2) confronted and frustrated the fulfilment of my role and made me question the management of the course in this particular institution. My internalised response was a subversive one. The placement of the residential teaching within a School of Education forced me to question my ideological position. Here was I, ‘trained up’ to work within Indigenous educational structures, being complicit with greater non-Indigenous control. A lack of local connectedness would have alienated the students, and also hindered my grounding, both with the institution, and with the students. Reconciling my role, I recognised the larger institutional
intention, that the main function of the residential course was to credential Indigenous graduates into the profession of teaching.

Of course the 'enclave' had supported many successful Indigenous graduates. However the institutional environment endangers culture with re-assimilationist practices. The educational practices, beliefs and culture of graduates would be confronted if institutions did not demonstrate an actualised respect for Indigenous culture. However, the graduates may not experience the tertiary cultural interface as a culturally strengthening experience.

The Sub Urban example suggests a fragmentation of the experience of Indigenous learners, the administration being institutionalised, systematically removed from Indigenous control, while the Indigenous staff were consigned to the margins of the pedagogical process. This is a conservative model that seems to hold on to a 1980s form of provision, and the teaching staff were heard to hark back to the good old days, when there was a smaller number of students, and a better interactional relationship.

Yet I feared that staff did not and do not share my concern for the lack of Indigenous voice, a voice that challenges the teachers and the learners to consider their own standpoint, to consider their whiteness and their impact upon the Indigenous psyché. (Of course I cannot say that other staff did not consider their impact upon Indigenous learners, how would I know).

The narrative (in portrayal 6.2) based on experiences at the Sub Urban campus, indicated the continuing ‘outsider’ or fringe nature of the Indigenous program, of it being fitted in, temporarily taken to rooms off campus, a situation that many students felt emphasised their ‘otherness’ and implied they were somehow external to the core business of the university. In the context of many years of provision by the university, that occasion was indeed an unfortunate and low point of contact for students and lecturers.46

The next chapter brings together a discussion of the findings from the four research texts, as a way to illuminate my emergent praxis.

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46 The narrative has possibly found a place in the oral tradition where Indigenous learners educate new students about the highs and lows of university life, and the qualities of the higher education provider.
Chapter Seven: Emergent Themes: a Discussion to Illuminate Praxis

“The more I teach the less I know’ - my recurring thought on being an educator in Indigenous university environments.” self reflection 2001

This Chapter comprises a discussion of:

- emergent themes and key findings;
- making a proposal about what these findings mean;
- identifying some implications for others;
- charting a meaningful and realistic future orientation;
- reviewing new self-knowledge that has resulted from the project.

I begin with a brief review of each Research Text.

The first Research Text tells of my experience of becoming connected, learning the life experience of the Koorie students, especially from visiting their communities. This involved me in learning not only to accept unwritten accounts of past atrocities at a beach in South West Victoria, but also how to abide by the decision made through community processes which assessed and eventually denied a young man’s claim to Aboriginality. This text outlined my role as a border pedagogue. In this role I developed a self-critical caution about the dangers of the whitefella mindsets, of rationality and post-colonialism. The Bishop and Glynn (1999) model for the evaluation of the power relationships provided a framework for critical reflection of that cultural interface.

The second Research Text brought into focus the difficulty I had in separating the emotional and professional tensions in the workspace. Such emotional blurring required reconciliatory work on myself, and the questioning about the preparatory training as an intercultural educator, or as a ‘cultural broker’. There was an obvious mismatch between contrasting workspaces, being enculturated at two previous Indigenous environments about respecting Indigenous control. Here I was positioned with authority to manage an Access program, which in fact was technically a negation of the Indigenous control with which I had previously become familiar. This involved me in an indirect confrontation with, and recognition of, my whiteness in that context. As well, in that Clifton workspace, with its pervasive undercurrent of dissent, I had to juggle the
ambiguities of such authority, while dealing with matters identified by staff as matters of professional accountability. My reaction to the situations that arose with Polly left me wondering about how collegial or supportive I could actually be.

The third Research Text questioned the ability of equity programs to enable Indigenous autonomy, as the forms of academic support possibly diminish culture through what are assumed to be culturally-neutral academic processes. Deficit or compensatory models are discussed, as ways that institutions position students. Underlying the narrative (5.2) is the action of the contracted tutor, even though: the contract is focused upon the allocation of student-tutor time; even though there are great variations in the time and space conditions under which students study and tutors provide their services; even though there is a considerable interplay of factors at work when, for example, one seeks permission to arrange specific tutoring. All of these meant additional advocacy by myself was required to facilitate what was in actual fact a relatively simple request.

The Fourth Research text brings to the fore the fragmentary nature of the administrative and organisational aspects of the course provision. The portrayals focus upon issues that impact upon me (and learners) which effectively disconnect courses from Indigenous power, with myself very much on the border of institutional structures when they involve an unreconstructed enclave model. The death of TJ Hickey is presented to emphasise my shift to an ambivalent response to the march, becoming disconnected from students and their communities. The enclave model frame assumes a conservativist posture for the Sub Urban institution, and did not recognise Indigenous epistemologies as integral to the students’ program nor for the wider intellectual pursuits of the institution. I then recognised that without Indigenous staff, or myself deciding to take a supportive role in protest, there was a vacuum, a lack of action for Indigenous students in this institution. I was complicit in the offering of token support, just the academic and emotional issues.

The key findings from the Research Texts evident through the narrative’s emergent themes, are discussed in the next section.
7.1 Emergent themes, key findings and new knowledge
There is a recurrent theme - with sub-themes - concerning my contested role which emerges from the Research Texts: the shifts in my pedagogy, praxis and my perceptions of paternalism; the structuring of professional and personal learning; the issues confronting my identity, my legitimacy and my power in each cultural context. To illuminate these emergent themes and to discuss their meaning, I retrieve experiences from the narratives (the data set) that are also then linked with the major exploration of the literature and the inquiry overall.

7.1.1. Paternalism, pedagogy and praxis
My thesis focussed on a broader interpretation of pedagogy and praxis, rather than a narrow classroom application. Praxis extends beyond the teaching and learning environment, to knowledge embodied as the habitus of action, and involves the ongoing gaining of knowledge, learning about learning and making meaning.

The account of my pedagogical experience at Coastland is somewhat underplayed, although it is a particular example of the Koorie educators teaching about their people and history in a particular place. The pedagogy was situated in a place now impressed upon my memory, and I learned that it was inscribed in their memory from familial oral history. There was a pedagogical moment that positioned me as learner, and reinforced the importance of local relevance that then prepared the way for the knowledge to be received.

My praxis was shifted at Clifton, and that was because of two major factors: the access course and the coordination role. The pedagogical issues pertaining to Polly were (initially to me) illusory, but as reported by the Correctional centre inmates they were confronting. Was I embodying paternalism as the ‘boss’ whitefella, being blinded by ideological belief that I could be an authentic non-Indigenous insider?

At Tumbarumba the presentation of the Indigenous student in tutorial processes, shown as one who is 'seeking assistance', suggests a compensatory or deficit model which then has decisive implications for positioning both student and tutor. It results in a program delivery hat is assimilationist in intent. My praxis was shaped by coordinating tutorial support, working as a
'border pedagogue' to ensure dialogue between institution and students. Negotiating student needs, and generally being available for advocacy, reinforced my praxis developed at Yarrabool. The possibility that tutorial support might be paternalistic is difficult to determine, since each student could individually benefit and come to regard the tutor's assistance as an essential part of university experience (as is normal with weekly tutorials in ‘mainstream’ on-campus courses).

In the Sub Urban example, the narrative illuminates pedagogical moments that confront potentially racist outcomes. The first refers to the re-allocation of teaching and learning space off campus; the second entailed Djuane responding to the page of house rules. In the first my action was neutral, in the second my tactful response encouraged Indigenous voices to take action, in light of the death of a young man from the local community. I recognised the heightened concern of the students, and their desire to publicly protest their outrage of the alleged police action. This is praxis learned and embodied, through open dialogue with students.

7.1.2. Professional and personal learning

A number of experiences depicted in the narratives (the data set) enable me to draw out significant threads of learning. At Yarrabool my professional learning is highlighted as my role is one of a legitimating observer; on a personal level I became connected to a place I knew as a child, but my learning was as an adult, appreciating and recognising the historical, human tragedy at that place. I also learnt that the Indigenous workspace did not welcome research that was not driven by community purposes, that prior consultation was a 'protocol of significance'.

Amid the tensions at Clifton, professional learning occurred through brokering institutional requirements of the Indigenous unit, and through not brokering sufficiently with the Correctional Centre. Personal learning occurred as I was positioned by circumstances, psychologically challenged and experiencing dissent. This process was confirmed by the strange sense of being intruded upon as police arrived at my house one night, and numerous anonymous phone calls received at home and at work. Was I experiencing dissent or was one staff member going through a very troubled period? I never really knew.
The Tumbarumba narrative taught me about the perceptions of staff and the mistrust of tutors who worked independently with students. Although my role meant learning administrative procedures, and professional relationships with tutors, at the same time I was establishing personal friendships with staff.

At Sub Urban my reaction to the space debacle was to listen to the students who were agitating to go to the Head of School, and not attempt to argue, defend or rationalise the decision to be housed away from the campus. This was praxis and tact, acknowledging the connectedness of Indigenous communities by anticipating the family relationships linked to young TJ Hickey. By recognising the student outrage, my role reflected my prior learning, my praxis formed by many complex incidents, times of family tragedy and cultural obligation; the action I took was to allow the elders to shift both the teaching space and my planned content.

Yet I only acted in my teaching, whereas my inaction to support community expectations remains like a vacuum. I had learnt to think counter-intuitively, to doubt the importance of efficiencies, recognising that solutions to some problems require extensive or significant consultation with Indigenous staff. Learning the role of outsider, meant being willing, conscious and open to learning. The Indigenous learners were usually the insiders and educators to the non-Indigenous staff. And so this thesis has shown the evolution of my praxis and roles significantly influenced by Indigenous educators and learners at each cultural interface.

My role has been learning through the roles I occupy. This has involved teaching by means of the protocols that relate to Indigenous knowledge from the community, of working through the life difficulties of staff, of experiencing personal emotional responses to the situations that unfold in the workspace. It includes learning about students as mature aged mothers, fathers and grandparents (the typical experience), about the mechanisms of supporting learners and considering how lecturers and institutions affect the self-determination of the Indigenous student. It has extended to learning about the models of provision by tertiary institutions, and considering the impacts of these models upon learners, specifically in terms of matters of cultural safety and the role of institutions in maintaining Indigenous knowledges.
My learning has also been about learning my role: underlying or overarching all my understanding at the cultural interface is that of being in a place of Indigenous learning. I was very fortunate to have good mentors early on in my first Indigenous employment, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders. At each workspace there were Indigenous staff that became friends and sounding boards for issues relating to teaching and learning. Indigenous staff were also important reference points in understanding Indigenous responses to the institution, or the broader political issues that were then being confronted.

7.1.3. On identity and whiteness:

The data set shows how a sense of identity emerged for my own position as a whitefella. In most narratives, within the portrayals, examples can be found where the issue of identity is central to the interaction at the cultural interface with Indigenous students or staff. The influence of my own whiteness in the workspaces, was underlying and pervasive in shaping my praxis. Engaging my whiteness (self as ‘positioned’ postcolonial actor) was assessed by applying mechanisms of whiteness construction and thereby to assess myself.

In the Yarrabool Research Text, at Coastland my identity is that of lecturer as learner, observer and witness. This contrasts with Riverland, where my identity is as learner of community-decision making as well as observer and witness of due process. My identity as whitefella in an Indigenous cultural interface meant I was to take Shaun aside, to be there as another whitefella hearing his dismay, and my legitimating the institutional processes of his exclusion from the 'Indigenous only' course.

So at Clifton, in my accepting a role I knew to be an Indigenous role, I entered a workspace where I could not avoid my own whiteness. Indeed, a 'white' self-belief persuaded me to take what fate was offering, as a form of due recognition for my past works. In response to Polly, my identity positioned me as the (white) captain, and thus was ensnared within her construction of the workspace relationship. I was challenged, threatened and wanted to escape the workspace.

The Tumbarumba situation made me query the way individuals perceived the action of others, and my identity brought confrontation with my role. Though I
had learned to accept the work of the student and tutor, I was not inclined to question the work by Wilma, as I trusted her experienced approach to tutoring. In recognising that the role of ATAS coordination brought different responsibilities from those of being a lecturer, I adapted to those institutional requirements on a daily basis.

At Sub Urban I actively decentred my identity as lecturer. Although technically in charge of the students in my tutorial, when relocated off-campus I negated control and allowed students to negotiate space.

7.1.4. Authority and legitimacy

Authority and legitimacy are expressed in relation to my role in each Narrative Portrayal. At Yarrabool, one day on the beach I was accepting the authority and legitimate knowledge of the Koorie students. At a meeting in the river country I am accepting the authority and the decision-making of the community, denying Shaun his claim of Aboriginality. In both, I am authorised by the Indigenous Co-ordinator, entrusted to be part of the process, a legitimating lecturer and observer of protocols.

In the Clifton narrative, my legitimacy was confronted. For although I had experience in the sector, I was disconnected from the regional Indigenous community, and my personal ‘otherness’ meant an escalation of tension in my management of the workspace. As the empowered non-Indigenous coordinator, I was in a position where, as the senior member of staff, I was challenged by the authority of the Correctional Centre. This was a site I chose to avoid; I would not become involved in that contestation.

The authority of Indigenous leadership was crucial in setting the legitimacy of my role. Indigenous leaders (directors/ heads of school/ coordinators) were influential in shaping the nature of the relationship at each workspace, and each had differing qualities, and differing strengths, related to their own connections to their cultural and institutional power.

7.1.5. Power

There are multiple dimensions of power that are evident in all the narratives. At all cultural interfaces and experiences I am exerting power, and power is exerted towards me from many directions. The above discussion under various
headings could all be sub-headings under this theme. I have separated them for the purpose of analysis. Powerful political agendas influenced my participation and role at different times and places. Whilst the Yarrabool context emanated Indigenous control, at Clifton Indigenous staff were in dispute in subversive ways. As a defining feature of the Indigenous higher education sector, the presence of Indigenous power in institutional structures is highly significant. The strength of Indigenous voice was both celebrated and confronting; my self belief, as a supportive progressive white person, was not left untouched. At times my ideological stance was not sufficient preparation to be in the contested space of Aboriginal education, where Koorie and Murri voices were struggling for prominence in higher education.

At the Coastland and Riverland sites I came face to face with the power of community members as the holders of knowledge. At Clifton the tensions around how I used my power provides a focus for questioning the role of the whitefella, as coordinator, in a flat power structure, where the altruistic attempt was made in my work to devolve power, to give up power. This is contradictory and yet a realistic reflection of my praxis.

Taking power as the ATAS administrator in the Tumbarumba Research Text, I was also lecturer, employer of ATAS tutors, allocating and assessing student needs and ensuring tutor cultural awareness. I was requested by the authority of senior staff to use my power to intervene in the pedagogical action of student and their tutor. This confronted my professional ethics and I was challenged to research further the way in which tutors worked when not under the gaze of authority, or in a windowed computer laboratory.

In the Sub Urban narrative, faced with a situation that I thought unsatisfactory, I was almost subversive in my work, although not quite undermining the authority of the School of Education. I was offended that students were being sent off campus as a result of an administrative 'quick fix'. In a logical way this action made sense, as bureaucratically (or logistically) it was easier to send this homogenous 'outside' group to an off campus building than request a shift of place for mainstream students.

At Sub Urban the allocated space for teaching was contested by the students, and the protest came to include their seeming recognition that the lecturer
lacked the power to sanction participation in a street protest, let alone to resolve the crisis of room allocation. Employed as a fixed term lecturer, I had little power or authority to respond to the protests of Indigenous students at the injustice of the death of TJ Hickey, or to the unfair movement of rooms due to restricted teaching space. The negotiation of the teaching space encouraged students to raise their voices and make strong claims for their own preferred learning space, even though they were hindered from doing so by institutional restraints.

For each instance above, the examples were in tension, unstable and subject to shifts; and so my interpretation through writing is an attempt to make sense of these actions, and to gauge the meaning of the development midstream, as it were. The expression of power in each Research Text does not reveal the tensions between staff, except partly at Tumbarumba. The power of the Directors or Heads of School was an underlying influence. Underlying my work at the Yarrabool site was a strong Indigenous rights agenda driven by the Co-ordinator. Her energy and community connectedness provided a significant background to understanding my role in that narrative (3.2) and thus is a crucial contribution to the overall meaning that can be gained from that Research Text.

The shifting power in the Clifton workspace correlated to the change-over of the Acting Director to the incoming Director, and my actions, physically distant from Reeftown, were therefore somewhat independent from the main centre of Indigenous business at that site. The Indigenous leadership was in the throes of a period of change, the incoming Director was acting as a change agent. Power was exerted by the Correctional Centre staff when they advised that Polly would be excluded from teaching; and I acquiesced to that directive. At Tumbarumba the Indigenous Head of School was in a traditional ‘sandstone’ university, seeking to have the traditional academic roles among staff implemented. This reflects that some Indigenous workspaces can be housed within progressive or conservative institutions. Sub Urban, with the enclave support unit, was disengaged from Indigenous knowledge making and strongly confirmed the conservative ideology that was dominant at that institution.
7.2 Making a proposal about what these findings means

This section outlines my synthesis of the findings and proposes an account of the meaning of what has been disclosed for ongoing reflection and action. Sharing the border position means engaging with a discursive way of being introduced to and personally confronted with tensions and conflicts about autonomy and decision-making. At the Indigenous interfaces my individuality and professional roles were subverted for the collective good. This aspect is not highlighted in the research texts, but in line with advocacy, collective action is a prominent sub-text for my daily engagement.

Firstly the whitefella mindset needs to be prepared for a decolonising, or a decentring, orientation. Certainly there could be self revelation or personal discoveries made in haste, but deep learning is more likely achieved over time. One step towards shifting one’s thinking or approach in order to take up a role in Indigenous tertiary education is an attitude that amounts to a decolonising of the mind. As an example, we could deepen our awareness by appreciating Indigenous contestation to the discourse on the entry level and the exit points for learners. At Yarrabool, the attitude conveyed by the Indigenous Co-ordinator was that Indigenous students should be encouraged into degree studies, and that anything less (e.g. diploma or associate diploma level) was not giving due recognition to Indigenous knowledge and the pursuit of differing ways of knowing. This discourse can be deemed as one that affirms Indigenous rights, where incoming students have their knowledge positions affirmed, rather than beginning studies with an access model which suggests that learners have to develop a skill set to be able to express knowledge according to the institutional requirements, or fulfilling criteria deemed foundational by the particular discipline.

This is a situation that resounds with the assumption that the colonisation of the mind is basic to higher education.

_The night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard ... real power resided not at all in the cannons of the first morning but in what followed ... (Ngugi wa Thiong’o as cited by Rigmor George, 1997, p.40)._

The power of the curriculum as imposed by the discipline and presented by the academic can easily be an attempt at re-assimilating or re-colonising the mind,
or it could be a liberating and de-colonising experience. Hence, such a role is crucial for the educator, whiteness aside, in order to respect the self-belief of learners, and to affirm a regime in which they are culturally safe. For me, the role of the whitefella has to involve a critical consciousness of that mindset, and a praxis that consciously counters any colonising aspirations in Indigenous learning. To move from the colonised mindset, to attempt to achieve a post-colonial mindset, was to consciously place myself alongside Indigenous ‘expression’ in the workspace. This was, however, only possible in a fragmentary way, and not a constant and sustained way of thinking.

In a similar way, by shifting the colonising mindset, one faced up to the importance of letting go from one's (whitefella) commitment to belong to an Indigenous workspace. Concerns that arise from an attachment and commitment to the shared space must express the human desire for belonging. My journey, that has been detailed in the Four Research Texts, could be subtitled ‘from angst to acceptance’. And so, I learned to accept the shifts in positioning, and let go of the angst that occasionally occurred.

The term letting go was used by John Grootjans (Grootjans et al, 2002) in discussing a conference paper, to describe a situation that we held in common, and a way of moving on from that time and space. Kurt Wolff (1976) provides a more in-depth critique using the terms ‘surrender-and-catch’, which similarly touches the sense of letting go. This term resonates with a key finding from my research, as revealed in my history lesson at the Coastland community, as I let go of ‘knowing the history’. As well, letting go of attachment to the workspace was necessary at Clifton and Tumbarumba as positions became Indigenised, which is as it should be, and this was a process which kept me grounded by appreciating my role in the process as a non-Indigenous contributor. Letting go of controlling the teaching space was required at Sub Urban as students voiced concerns beyond the constraints of the search for space, in order to be in greater control of their learning activities, and thus deciding that taking to the streets was appropriate (for their own experience) instead of attending a residential class. In any role it is easy to take the attitude that you have commitment to your role, and difficult to accept that you should let go of any
power; a career structure is seductive and persuasive in ensuring staff (either administrative or academic) hold positions with a long term objective in view.

7.3. Identifying some implications for others
Let me spell these out in five basic points.

1. Underlying any consideration of role is the question of how one is committed to the Indigenous workspace. Employment in Indigenous education workplaces provides both positive learning and dynamic cultural significance, learning aspects of culture as lived experience, as well as eventual tensions for the role of the non-Indigenous educator. Non-Indigenous staff on continuing contracts may feel they belong, and even that they have become irreplaceable. This is regrettable, but is also somewhat unresolvable since it is a heartfelt commitment that positions the educator who happily becomes part of the struggles encountered by Indigenous students. The Indigenisation of role within tertiary Indigenous education has become policy in most universities, and results in a reduction of non-Indigenous staff, and a strengthening of Indigenous knowledge in institutions.

Employment matters proved to be an integral part of my journey, and yet, somewhat in contradiction to that state of affairs, they were not an essential part of the role as recounted through the Research Texts. The first and the fourth texts were about contexts where I chose to depart or stay, and the second and third texts are workspaces where I left due to Indigenisation of the position. My own view essentially reflects the Indigenous rights perspective, i.e. that Indigenous workplaces should have a high level of Indigenous staff, across the entire range of roles: giving academic leadership, lecturing and in administration.

Such employment shifts are understandable and generally supported by non-Indigenous educators, albeit reluctantly in some instances. Non-Indigenous staff are often reluctant to let go of their involvement. This seems to be stating the overly obvious, yet I know of institutions that currently are not able to fill positions (i.e. role of Indigenous Director). Perhaps Indigenous people qualified for these positions see the oppression of being Indigenous in the

47 Most Indigenous workspaces seek continuing contracts as a requirement through the Enterprise Bargaining system that has been striving for improved employment conditions over the past two decades.
university environment, and know the difficulty in attempting to shift the model of provision to encompass Indigenous epistemologies.

2. As a partially decentred, white, middle aged academic, my identity could disrupt or interfere with the productive functioning of the Indigenous workplace. As a facilitator of knowledge, I can actively and consciously de-centre, and as a phenomenologist, I should try to suspend taken for granted assumptions.

Such de-centring of identity is part of the re-socialisation of life experience in Indigenous higher education. For myself, I recall learning from each of the workspaces, much more than could be expressed in the selectively chosen narratives presented above, and the overall impact upon me has been much more than a series of re-socialisations in each workspace. As mentioned above, my interpretation of decentring is to suggest a decolonising of the mind. Decentring enabled me to consciously and unconsciously learn and un-learn, engage and dis-engage, through the experience of the rich shared space of Indigenous education.

3. Throughout the various roles I attempted to be constant in my responsiveness to students. The relationship that arises from residential teaching necessarily goes beyond the classroom.48 Residential teaching made me combine knowledge of providing for learners at a distance, with respect for culturally appropriate ways of supporting them. It was about being able to respond with supportive solutions when a student had a crisis in their life. Yet to work as an academic in a sustained manner requires time and space away from being reactive to student demand. The need for a balance between all these demands was and remains a recurrent issue, it is cyclical with the demands of the cultural interface and the academic year.

4. Life-changing experiences occur on the border, crossing the workspace interaction, listening to lives lived from culturally different perspectives, especially as each workspace consisted of differing communities. For me, at each workspace, different borders existed and had to be negotiated, and so the

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48 The one exception to being responsive was in teaching the inmates at the Floraglade Correctional Centre.
unknown was ever-present, as cultural border crossing is like learning a dance, never absolute, but a shared space engaged for a time each day.

At Tumbarumba my role was on the border of being the employer of tutors, the border of student requirements, the border which was situated beside junior Indigenous staff that reacted to the positioning of the mostly non-Indigenous senior staff. Later I was on the border of compliance and subversion at Sub Urban, as with students sent away to the fringe country.

5. Within the intensity of the residential experience, the community based learning process extended to the educators. I, like many other non-Indigenous educators, was the learner as Indigenous community-members (university students) shared their knowledge. This ranged from the historical, the political to the social, learning family and relations, linking across communities and developing an understanding for the mission, the reserves and the stolen generation. An example of such learning was in 1997, when the Bringing Them Home report was tabled in Federal Parliament, an individual at Clifton pointed to his story, retelling the horrors of living on Palm Island in the 1960s.

I gained meaning from being entrusted with knowledge, and moved to take action. As evidenced through receiving oral history that linked my working life with the later discourse of the history wars. I became a defender of Indigenous experience and the revisionist historians against those in denial, who demand written evidence as proof of massacres.

7.4. Charting a meaningful and realistic future orientation
The research findings lead now to a consideration of how to frame practice and how to develop an outward-looking focus from my experiences. Here then I list the development of empathy, the recognition of whiteness, the decentring and decolonising of mindsets; these elements of praxis are the lessons for others to encompass and appropriate with their own critical awareness.

A partial analysis of learning at the cultural interface will suggest that a high level of empathic intelligence has developed for this non-Indigenous person. This empathic intelligence is an element of the work praxis that develops, and is present in each of us, yet it is a difficult concept to quantify. Empathic intelligence as explained by Arnold (2005, p.60) is intrinsic to teachers
working with culturally diverse students. Empathy is bound to praxis as an element of the tactfulness of teaching. However, there is a danger in anticipating empathy without due consideration of the inherent empathic paternalism that is a basic construct in Western whiteness.

Awareness of whiteness shifts with differing workspace experiences, and being told you have a black heart is a compliment, and gives a tangible feeling of belonging. Yet awareness of whiteness can revert (i.e., less conscious, less connected, less aware) and be negated as one’s role shifts away from a high level of Indigenous interaction. To contrast two experiences: the strong Indigenous space of Yarrabool challenged me, making me aware of my minimal and fragmentary sense of the complexities of the interactions that emerged in certain situations where Indigenous politics and power were evident. Yet at Sub Urban, with less Indigenous voice in the institution, I felt a subtle shift away from my awareness of Indigenous viewpoints, and I reacted against whiteness. The experience of working in a strong Koorie place is like an immersion into a culturally different space, the interactions more frequently shifting consciousness and reflection, that is, when there was time to actually reflect upon what had just transpired.

Whiteness is linked to curriculum contestation and there is thus a need to shift the Western-centric tertiary studies towards Indigenous inclusion, rather than intellectually wrestle against Indigenous knowing. Such knowing is the intellectual property of Indigenous communities and the scholars that have become engaged in staking out their claims for respect of such knowledge. In previous decades this contestation had emerged from the fields of anthropology and psychology, the latter where research set out to test cognitive and intellectual abilities [evidenced in the works of Porteus, Fowler and others cited in Kearney, De Lacey and Davidson (1976)].

7.5. Reviewing new self-knowledge that has resulted from the project

This thesis has researched my memory and experience, and to do that it has focussed upon specific relationships of the non-Indigenous educator and the cultural interface.
There is new knowledge in the understanding of the inter-cultural workspaces, knowing the space and the relational way of being. This is about an embodiment of being, when in that space. Yet although this mapping of my trajectory will give a guide for being an active learner in the Indigenous space, there is no training to work alongside this without paternalistic tendencies. Every day I made mistakes and had to learn from those in order to work with the next group students who came along, to relate to another intake of individuals. This self knowledge was also telling and educative for the white person in education as teacher and facilitator. In concluding my self reflexive mode, herein I scrutinise my work in order to try to explicitly answer the research questions (i.e. the research questions presented in Chapter 1.8 p.37).

1. What have I learnt in my roles in Indigenous higher education contexts?
2. Does the autobiographical approach provide a coherent source of knowledge based on my experience?
3. Does the application of the narrative inquiry method adequately bring into relation the contexts and analysis of the narratives?
4. Do the research texts critically reflect upon my role and the shifts in my praxis?
5. How have discourses in differing contexts affected my roles?

1. What have I learnt in my roles in Indigenous higher education contexts?

Early in my tertiary teaching with Aboriginal students, I came to the view that becoming an educator in Indigenous settings enabled me to shift my praxis from that of a secondary teacher to an adult educator/facilitator. There were subtle shifts which occurred with age and experience, and I look back and note how my role as a younger teacher was more intense than more latterly. Praxis involved responsiveness to each group of learners, and remains with the constant adaptations to new contexts. My tact was enriched by each workplace, by each cultural interface, and I have gained more sense of humour. I became a border pedagogue, a mediator of institutional processes (and culture), between the institution and the learners. I believed that my role was to actively attempt to shift barriers and support Indigenous staff and students, conscious that each person has their own agency, their own choices to make and their own life to manage. As the Texts follow my experience chronologically, the thesis shows that my roles have placed me in certain spaces expecting institutional
structures to shift sufficiently to bring Indigenous knowledge into a strong and autonomous position in higher education.

I have learnt in my role that paternalism can be discerned in Indigenous contexts, especially in the role of advocacy, when learners are assisted through various complex administrative tasks. This has changed over time, e.g., as student administrative systems require passwords and students are required to manage changes to their own enrolments. Other examples are less prominent, but these days, an ongoing and persistent response I give to students has me tending to say "You need to do this!" whereas in years past I would take the role of facilitator of the bureaucratic processes, and so write the letter or fax to Abstudy, as requested by students. Some issues are still difficult to categorise as either reasonable assistance or unnecessary paternalism.

I have learnt in my role that a high level of empathy is needed to make sense of the emotional atmosphere of education at the workspace. The empathic influences were significant and affected my work relationships (at each workspace), moments of joy and also of sadness, too many deaths at early ages. As a remedy, laughter was an important companion in Indigenous business, like daily bread before the oncoming busy-ness, that was almost never-ending. Humour was writ large by Indigenous observers, e.g., at Clifton, when a Murri friend saw Allan, metaphorically like a question mark, at the bus stop; and as Uncle Harry drew comparisons with the ‘ill fitting suit of Indigenous education policy making’. Such humour was widespread, and a necessity, as many Indigenous educators and students have taught me. As Helene Grover (1996) explains laughter is an instinct, and I think many people forget to live in an instinctual way. I have come to recognise my own layers of control and formality which often prevent an instinctual response.

2. Does the autobiographical approach provide a coherent source of knowledge based on my experience?

The thesis presents an autobiographical thread through the kernel of specific experiences. These caused me to shift and change my position on certain ideological matters. The ideological ‘me’ became pragmatic and privileged, being able to move around from State to State to ensure continuing employment in Indigenous spaces. I tended to take the comfortable role of an
ideologically left and progressive lecturer, but not really challenging the institutional hierarchies. The Research Texts have related experiences through my ideological voice, and as instructive for the non-Indigenous learner these may be, they are yet uniquely my lived experience.

Using an autobiographical approach enabled me to highlight interpersonal tensions and pose questions about the intentions of staff (e.g. to query how Polly carried out her teaching, to reconsider the trust in Kristen advising employment). Such questions remain tentative and unanswered. My learning was not without difficulties; I made mistakes at times forgetting to appreciate certain protocols. I had to listen and re-learn to understand each Indigenous learner’s position, as the life experiences of students have many variables. It involved an awareness of being an academic presence for the students who offers the personal support that emerge from a whitefella ‘trained up’ to work with a diversity of Indigenous communities. It deepened my appreciation of my shifting practices, from teacher to learner, from wanting to empower to learning to listen. It involved me in developing a critical appreciation of the diversity of Indigenous knowledge positions. It requires one to become conscious of learning protocols, even though you may sometimes not remember, through haste or pressure, how to find out or how to be respectful.

The autobiographical approach also enabled reflection over time which problematised my role in relation to post-colonialism. The ‘post’, in my view, remains highly questionable. Similar autobiographical questioning emerged from Jan Pearce (2001) reflecting on her work as a teacher educator, when an Indigenous student questioned the traditional format of the tutorial that ‘normalised’ student behaviour. Such a confrontation of the role of the non-Indigenous educator, enabled Pearce and the students to engage meaningfully about the colonising process. As education systems may continue to be assimilationist, there could emerge exemplars of post-colonialism, but these are difficult to validate in a convincing or systematic manner.

3. Does the application of the narrative inquiry method adequately bring into relation the contexts and analysis of the narratives?

The narratives in each Research Text have presented stimulating accounts of the cultural interfaces. Such representations show my roles and praxis that
aimed to be responsive to each context and specific situations. Although situated in critical incidents, my praxis is evident as a partially vicarious form of learning, being amongst Koorie staff and students in pedagogical experiences. I do not suggest that the roles or praxis can be taught, but each non-Indigenous person engaging the space will develop their own interpretation and meaning to make sense of their role for their immediate context.

The implications for other non-Indigenous educators are that each context requires the individual to learn their role in that cultural interface. As with all groups of learners, the relational matters for the non-Indigenous educator will differ with each group of students. And it needs to be understood that the Indigenous space has commonalities in terms of protocols and acceptance. Appropriate communication is an integral part of being able to work alongside, and learn from colleagues on a daily basis. That might sound like a simple statement, but subtle layers of communication can easily be misinterpreted.

This thesis shows that the Portrayal Method can bring into relation four components of the research process. These were devised as the context, the narrative, the implications and the literature exploring the inquiry. The Portrayal Method has meaningfully and successfully enabled the writing to bring together the complexity of my experience in these Indigenous contexts.

Overall, the narrative exploration has brought a critical and reflexive view of my role as a non-Indigenous educator, looking into my ideological shifts through time. The Portrayal Method nurtured my extended contemplation beyond the obvious matters of any particular critical incident. In coming to terms with each Portrayal I have written in order to comprehend the perspectives and possible meanings, gaining illumination from the interrogative exercise.

4. With critical self reflection can I state the shifts in my praxis?
My praxis is partly a reflection of conforming to each cultural interface, a malleable and constantly shifting set of practices, that unconsciously tries to fit the circumstances of each Indigenous environment. Praxis is partly shaped by the dominant Indigenous discourses, engaging with the operational processes of the Indigenous workspaces.
In critically analysing the Research Texts I recognise that my experiences were bound by my critical and ideological support of Indigenous rights. My ideological stance was to respect self-determination, and that has meant recognising and accepting the diversity of Indigenous leadership. Hence, I respect that some workspaces model a conservative approach to teaching and reconciling; and others appear more radical in establishing an Indigenous dominant space within the academy.

This thesis has presented my ways of engaging at the cultural interface. In confronting my ideological positions I recognise the aims of self-determination in educational praxis that should be privileged over the assimilative intent of maintaining an academic status quo. The structures within institutions require creative solutions to engage adequate Indigenous voice in decision-making processes, especially in relation to curriculum and discipline content. The inclusion of Indigenous content in teacher education is an area requiring vigilance rather than anticipating adequate intent simply by meeting any imposed criteria.49

My praxis aligns with the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives through continual dialogue with learners. Emphasising this relational nature of praxis with Koorie students and staff, Shayne Williams (2007) (an Indigenous academic) provides a critical ‘yarning up’ with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators on the issue of inclusive Indigenous perspectives. Williams reports on research of a dialogic exchange, assessing the experiential knowledge of classroom teachers with the token inclusion that may occur if schools lack Indigenous knowledge bearers to infuse the school curriculum. Further, his research reveals the importance of the learning circle as a central Indigenous method; the circle ensures cultural relevance whilst ‘the student in the circle is not marginalised, hidden or rendered invisible’ (Williams, 2007, p.184). Shayne, a Dhungutti man, reminds us that the core values of autonomy, collectivism, respect and spirituality are integral to the pedagogical praxis inherent with Indigenous peoples.

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49 Alternative structures for implementing Indigenous knowledge are being implemented. Recently, Charles Sturt University creatively embraced Indigenous education for all students, embedding Indigenous knowledge across their curriculum and in all disciplines. Many universities: e.g. University of South Australia, the University of Melbourne, Queensland University of Technology and Griffith University have also implemented Indigenous teaching across ‘mainstream’ programs.
The other emphases noted by Williams, especially relevant to my writing, is that education without those core values will always be assimilationist. This is a core issue for universities seeking to enhance learning for Indigenous students. Perhaps this returns my thoughts, quite logically, to the role of the non-Indigenous educator, wanting to avoid being assimilationist in intent and in practice. Given the outcomes of the Research Texts it seems that supporting Indigenous learners to become ‘mainstream’ teachers (with Indigenous studies as their strength), I cannot avoid assimilationist praxis. Hence, an ideological dilemma or conundrum exists here in the role of the non-Indigenous educator.

The recurrent pedagogical issues may either assist in creating a culturally safe place within an institution (as suggested by Bin-Sallick, 2001), or repel learners away from the chosen learning environment. This is not to suggest that some workspaces threaten learners' self-determination, but may conflict or impinge upon learners' self-esteem, or cultural strength.

5. How have discourses in differing contexts affected my roles?
Through the thesis I recognise the impact of a number of discourses upon my roles and ideological views. My recognition begins with the Coastland and Riverland experiences. Those early discourses were of self-determination, and demonstrate Indigenous community members having power with the tertiary institution.

The experiences at Yarrabool taught me a new way of conceptualising academic roles in relation to community. The emphasis upon academic staff acknowledging Koorie lived experience and engaging, by invitation, with local knowledge in the curriculum, extending the academic role beyond community connectedness. The prominence of community leaders meeting with the Director, and as whitefella observing the close political connections between the institution and the community, was re-affirming of the cultural strength of the workplace. The Yarrabool experience occurred in the midst of a highly-charged Victorian Indigenous struggle for greater political recognition. As stated earlier, these contextual issues were significantly different from the struggles in the north of Australia, where whitefellas were more aware of a higher population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
Discourses around identity for Indigenous students were linked to the pain of becoming disconnected from community. However, the emphasis here is that such anguish becomes part of the learning for the lecturer as counsellor in the workspace, especially engaging with learners in their first year university experience. The diversity of community experience, expressed in unwritten and oral history enriched the ability of educators and learners to ensure relevance in the teaching and learning environment. Consequently, learners were more meaningfully engaged if I demonstrated respect for community protocols. Knowledge became contextualised and recognisable to the learner’s experience.

To act as a non-Indigenous lecturer forced me to take a stand; it positions you and affects you emotionally; it shifts attitudes and roles, alters consciousness. Such shifts are experienced through an immersion with Indigenous students and staff. Communities expect Indigenous higher education spaces to be sites of Indigenous power, to provide a voice for community issues. Working at the cultural interface gave prominence to community interests, the role becoming different to anticipated academic work.

Similarly, Sue Jackson (2000) wrote about the different ways “academic” is constructed in higher education, in particular as "academic life" is experienced by women in a university. Jackson argues in a way that is somewhat parallel to how I would account for the way the non-Indigenous educator learns to work differently in a culturally different environment. It involves another way of understanding the discourse as well as the diverse practices in the institution. These add up to a way of being that is differently academic, with a critical and empowering intent, and thereby gaining an understanding and respect for community protocols. As I gained an appreciation of the community roles of students, my perception shifted with respect to the life situations of students, their lived experiences, their embodied knowledge and consequently my praxis.

This meant a change in the underlying understanding of the academic role and this became evident with the intensity of the residential programs. These weeks created another dimension of the discourse of working with community.

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50 This pain may also be felt by non-Indigenous who are adopted and separated from their family traditions.
This discourse of Indigenous rights brought with it a high level of demands, and was initially confronting in terms of learning to adapt culturally. Other discourses reflected positions by institutions that aim to provide positive support models, e.g., staff embracing the institution's strategies (equity measures that may be compensatory in approach). Yet such models may also diminish the promotion of Indigenous knowledge, and consequently can work against the strengthening of Indigenous aspirations. Consequently the recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge is diminished to give the impression to ‘mainstream’ academics and intellectuals that community-based Indigenous academics are mostly engaged in processes and programs designed to bring the students up to ‘their level’.

Another discourse was ‘to help break through the barriers’; and this viewpoint is important in that whitefellas (including me) need to be able to recognise both the possible barriers that are facing learners and, equally importantly, what steps might be realistic in overcoming those hurdles that block student achievement. This relates to my observation (in section 1.6) that I saw my role as an instrument for Indigenous education, doing service through my teaching. My collective (and Marxist) ideology meant aspiring with Koories and Murris to maintain ‘equality, fraternity, and the struggle for liberty’. Not that I spoke in those terms, but in hindsight, the appeal to emancipatory action was about being beside the mob, with the mob and sharing the emotional highs and the lows. One of the many lows being dying, with too many Indigenous colleagues and friends that have died close to sixty years of age, with only a few Indigenous men that I know living to sixty-five, what is considered to be the Australian worker's retiring age.

A discourse of community-based knowledge emphasised connectedness with the learners’ contexts. Hence, the inextricable links between community, pedagogy and praxis enabled learning and teaching to be an exchange of knowledge from community members, and that enhanced the teaching programs. In this way local knowledge became part of the teaching repertoire, enhancing the cultural knowledge of learners and educating lecturers.

From the beginning of this thesis, I did not intend to attempt to address aspects of Indigenous knowledge or epistemology. Yet I have made mention in
addressing the discourses at the four sites, and made judgements about the place of Indigenous knowledge and course provision, particularly the lack of such knowledge, in the enclaves. There is a logic in linking the promotion of Indigenous knowledge production with the decolonising of the ‘white’ mindset. For until institutions progress in decolonisation, there is minimal hope of Indigenous knowledge becoming embraced within the western institution of the university.

A discourse of decolonising the whitefella mindset was a recurring and underlying theme. Decolonising the mind entails the non-Indigenous educator in applying the lens of colonial intent, and turning it inwards upon one’s own actions. This is what the attitude of decentring is all about. Here was an attempt to remove the layers of assimilative intent that lay within the processes of teaching. The decolonising of the educator’s mind is difficult to grasp; it is more than being out of one’s normal mental space, more than being the facilitator giving up control, and asserting Indigenous self determination. Such a mental shift helps to recognise that unravelling the complexity of the colonised mind may be beyond non-Indigenous educators, and myself. Yet to problematise the impact of colonising, assimilating and whiteness are important issues for my theorising. The term, *decolonising the mind*, was used by Ngugi (1981) to express the African writers’ literature in their own language, also used by Chinweizu (1987) and Ulli Beier (2003).

Decolonising of the mind is distilled from researching for action and meaning, for praxis in education and the role of the non-Indigenous educator. The Indigenous colleagues and students have educated me, assisting me in decolonising approaches to dialogue and work practices. Hence, my praxis has undergone shifts, a little more with each workspace experience, perhaps even somewhat less intense as my routine of work practice becomes habitual.

7.6 Recommendations

To fulfil a role in Indigenous higher education requires an ongoing commitment to the ideals mediated by Indigenous staff and students. Such ideals, as are expressed on a daily basis, go beyond matters of studying a unit...
and successful course completion. The non-Indigenous educator can be prepared for the classroom, and initiatives are being piloted to mentor new teachers by Indigenous teachers, to become more conversant with community relations.\textsuperscript{52} Personal qualities that will make a difference are not specifically outlined in this thesis. The writing in the Research Texts alludes to the need for care and empathy, altruism and commitment, awareness and selflessness, resilience and stillness, consciousness and generosity. However, coping with the intensity of the oft emotional space requires a calm disposition and a preparedness to respond in appropriate ways.

The non-Indigenous tertiary educator develops minimal knowledge of community specific matters, unless and until immersed within a Indigenous dominant tertiary space. It is important to become involved with contemporary community, be it urban, rural or remote, to gain an appreciation of the lived experience of the ‘students’. (If working in traditional settings, similar learning would ensue; but these Research Texts do not relate traditional Aboriginal tertiary experience). Certainly text-based research will assist understanding, but cannot replicate the richness of being part of the Indigenous workspace.

\textit{Knowledge of the workspace}

Knowing the context of the workspace, and negotiating the workspace complexity, must become an embedded element in the resultant praxis and embodied in action, part of the unconscious habits formed in oneself. For the ideologically progressive actor, the intercultural space could seem to be a comfortable and natural fit for the political left, persuaded by the reciprocal values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies. This is a persuasive notion, that is enhanced by Indigenous collectivism, but endangers the reflexive and critical stand that is required to adapt to the cultural interface.

The highly informative literature of the What Works program (2009) focuses upon: building awareness; forming relationships and working systematically. Such succinct guidelines underscore extremely successful practices for educating Indigenous children and youth. These understated three points are

\textsuperscript{52} The NSW DET has piloted a Teach Our Mob scholarship program with universities over the past three years. This is an Enhanced Teacher education program; an evaluation of that pilot program indicates positive outcomes for both the teachers and the Indigenous mentors and the community relationships.
relevant to adult learners, and have emerged in this thesis from the Research Texts as ways to guide the engaging practices of the non-Indigenous educator.

The non-Indigenous educator requires an ability for cultural awareness to be integrally useful to the support of Indigenous learners. Yet a fine balance lies between learning culture and the commodification that may benefit Eurocentric knowledge (Battiste and Henderson, 2000).

Knowledge of advocating and supporting Indigenous aspirations

By placing the emphasis upon knowledge of relational learning as authentic over against organised cross cultural training, makes a shift in which the personal becomes central in (relational) workspaces, where training may be useful, but working and caring within the space, is learning through doing. It is about "being there" consciously in that space. It is about avoiding judgements based on whiteness, and other value systems that may differ, recognising the diversity of Indigenous experience and family structures.

In turning the reflective gaze upon yourself as a ideological and political entity, as the whitefellas, we must suspend beliefs and assumptions. It is to take a place "in between", between not knowing and knowing, and recognizing that equity does not mean treating others the same. Rather, it is about being aware of how to treat others as different with a view to positively discriminate, not merely as some implemented equality without justice.
Chapter Eight: Conclusion

Here is an ongoing challenge,
to be part of cultural education work;
meeting the struggles and tensions
through the institutional and political matters
that oft cloud the view.

Simultaneously, sustaining work practices
getting to know students, teachers, community leaders, parents, grandparents,
the rich and engaging friendships that pervade Indigenous workspaces.

These texts tell tales, foreshadowing the problematic nature of a role,
whitefella roles need to be flexible with backbone, malleable without guile,
shifting but not shifty, making way without being pushy,
cautious with an element of boldness,
in other words vigilant without presumption of assimilative practices.

Being committed, doing the everyday and the extra-ordinary
facilitating, graduating, hesitating, internalising, joyful moments,
learning, motivating, nourishing, questioning, and un-nerving.

Though the sum of my experiences, reflections and theorising cannot be easily
distilled, bringing closure to the years that I have spent compiling this
doctorate provoke me to proffer a conclusion. However, I have not yet reached
the conclusion of this journey. My experiences tomorrow will bring new light,
new challenges and new learnings - just as they did yesterday and the day
before that. It is against this backdrop that I present an outline of the
fundamental principles of my longevity in the higher education Indigenous
workspaces as simultaneously partial, provisional and contextual. It is my hope
that others who seek opportunities to work in parallel contexts might benefit
from this account of my experiences. Forging my professional identity in
Indigenous higher education, I have relied on my propensity to:

- maintain a commitment to the values and aspirations of Indigenous education;
- respect Indigenous culture and knowledge and understand it as
different but equal to Western culture;
- respect the institutional values of the provider (University) but seek
strategic opportunities to advance Indigenous epistemologies;
- be tolerant of structural barriers, but actively seek strategic
opportunities to subvert aspects of dominant bureaucracy that appear
oppositional to the aspirations of Indigenous education;
• earn the respect of Indigenous staff and students, and their communities, by demonstrating the principles of respect, tolerance and equality at all times.

My commitment to these principles is not abstract but aims to be concretely inter-personal. Fortunately, many Indigenous education programs provide opportunities for such connections to be forged with students’ communities. Such experiences nurtured my understandings of the complexities associated with developing meaningful, sustainable relationships between Indigenous learners and higher education institutions.53

When entering into Indigenous communities it is vitally important that non-Indigenous personnel do so with respect (Bin-Sallick, 2003; Ober, 2009; Rigney, 1999). In a report for Australian National Training Authority, Potter (2004) provided the following advice, under the heading: What a non-Aboriginal person needs to understand to appreciate ‘culture’:

Cultural knowledge and understanding are the result of a learning process. Culture is not something that can be easily understood by non-Aboriginal people. It is not something that can be ‘captured’. A person coming into an Aboriginal community should not be paralysed by a need to know the details of the local Aboriginal culture. The main point is that a non-Aboriginal person needs to appreciate that there is a culture and that they need to proceed in a way that shows respect for that culture – whatever it might be.

Most Aboriginal people accept that non-Aboriginal people do not know a great deal about their culture and are therefore prepared to tolerate mistakes. As a relationship grows, non-Aboriginal people may be invited to share aspects of Aboriginal culture and be told what they need to know in order to do their jobs properly. If non-Aboriginal people are instructed about culture, they are expected to respect it by remembering what has been said and by taking it seriously (Potter, 2004, p.12).

It is in following such advice that I believe that dialogic relationships can be built to facilitate meaningful action between Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants in the workspace. It should be considered a privilege to be invited to participate in teaching experiences within Indigenous community-based programs. Being granted a ‘place at the table’ with Indigenous students and staff is a privilege that has greatly enhanced my life (personal and professional) experience. While a border pedagogy is always necessary, each of these sites brings with it new challenges and opportunities to negotiate and

53 These opportunities do not occur as readily in mainstream higher education teaching.
navigate. In some respects my border pedagogy experiences redefine "respect for the privilege" as an integral and active facet that should characterise all tertiary education. The fresh discovery of this respect for privilege in a ‘border pedagogy’ helps to identify what has been lost - because considered unnecessarily "fringe" in the so-called mainstream!

Reflecting back to the diagram (located on pages 19-20) in Chapter 1 (Smith & Maskell, 2001), both the diagram and the set of points remain instructive. However, only through engagement and practice can such negotiated experience become one’s praxis, and hence influential upon personal development.

As educators we work within institutional structures and frameworks that often constrain and control what we can and can’t do. Like most other higher education teachers I have had to work strategically to minimise the levels of bureaucracy that may impinge upon my classes and my learners. Generally speaking, I believe that many aspects of mainstream institutional structures and frameworks work against the recruitment and retention of Indigenous staff. As a self-reproducing cycle, the lack of investment in Indigenous staff undermines the ability of these programs to influence non-Indigenous staff and students and wider institutional practice. To this end, I support the Indigenisation of these learning spaces and not leave it to non-Indigenous staff to re-colonise and re-institutionalise, with dominant theory and practice.

One critical institutional role at the cultural interface is the analysis of the barriers: to recognise the barriers to Indigenous students learning and engage in active education of other staff and students of the institution to see them as part of the learning task itself. Through the writing of this thesis, the interrogation of memory has meant recognition that certain situations have altered my workplace understandings. My life, role and praxis were enriched through learning about the life issues impinging upon the students and hardships facing Indigenous learners at a distance from their tertiary institution.

Earning the respect of Indigenous students and staff is a matter of relationship building. As in any workplace, the relational aspects build slowly, and durability occurs with longevity in the institutional life. My Research Texts are
context-specific and historical, the situations are likely to be very different right now, as I write this aide memoire. The non-Indigenous role has to be fruitful and relational, coming from the heart and the soul, otherwise the non-Indigenous function will be reduced to an abstract and unconnected academic contribution. Such personal and spiritual involvement may not suit every whitefella, but is a feature easily discernible by Indigenous students, and staff. These relational and empathically stirring commitments bind Indigenous and non-Indigenous to the cultural interface, making letting go so much more difficult.

8.1. Addressing the thesis intent

The essence of this thesis, *Educational praxis in various Australian Indigenous higher education contexts*, is captured in the four research texts through an examination of ways of being, knowing and working. At each cultural interface the perception of the whitefella role became more nuanced as I learnt from my own lived experience shared our workspace with colleagues and students. In adapting to differing specific roles, praxis shifted, almost chameleon-like, blending with the ideas of learners, adapting to contexts yet keeping a distance from ‘going native’. The way of working became embodied and embedded in praxis.

Yet as with language learning, in a culturally immersed place the praxis develops, but in a less connected place, the cultural connection and relations may shift away, and such slippage disconnects self from Indigenous lives, placing the whitefella in a more mainstream cultural space. This shift away from Indigenous contexts diminished my connectedness, although memory and renewed conversation enables unexpected reconnection to past.

To anticipate the outcomes of the research was like an evolving form of a mind-game, a cyclical conceptualising of the unconscious memory of incidents that were to become prominent in my mind for textual reconstruction. Initially, I was concerned that the portrayals did not convey sufficient exuberance of the happier times in the workspaces. Those entertaining times of the contemporary cultural experiences included the performing arts, music, sport, expressions of popular culture that had occurred in differing ways at each Indigenous context and workspace. Even small aspects of the academic role, like the celebration of
graduation that I had initially shunned for my own qualifications, have become a highlight in my academic year as a celebration and recognition of student achievement, as well as space for catching up with their families and relatives. The importance of marking the occasion reinforced by the tighter community structures wherein time for others is integral to ‘belonging’.

8.2 Impacts upon the non-Indigenous educator

My pedagogical tact of facilitation in cultural interaction emerged from the consciousness of the teaching and learning environments. Such classroom consciousness was an integral quality of teaching, and essential part of my praxis in Indigenous workspaces. These layers of the collective relationships, connectedness and emotional involvement were also the source of much joy. The shared experiences created many bridges and connections in emotional ways; reciprocal action was learnt, although not usually labelled or named. Community connectedness and group dynamics meant that the workspace had emotional highs and lows and, uncannily, a spontaneity that also brought much humour and resilience in the pedagogical act.

The workspaces that engaged learners with authentic Indigenous knowledge, more meaningfully managed to link learners to the tertiary curriculum. Current Indigenous issues were brought into the learning experience and much was negotiated with the learners. The ideology was clear cut, the struggle was for Indigenous recognition and control, strongly expressed, and the demands upon all staff were high. The chaotic intensity of teaching and managing day-to-day routines, reflected the responsiveness to community action, such closeness would be a rare occurrence in mainstream higher education. Such responsiveness was quite a strength of that space, but also I believe many of the staff found it a great challenge to maintain such sensitivity on an ongoing basis, and that sensitivity is not something that can be switched to auto-pilot just because the hour hand has come around (Maskell & Shelley, 2001).

After virtually two decades in tertiary spaces, the words of my first Indigenous coordinator, Rose Stack, return to me, “Whitefellas, we get you ‘trained up’ and then you move on!” Perhaps Rose was reflecting on the common experience she had of whitefellas moving on, and her questioning was directed at the non-Indigenous level of commitment to the role ascribed to them in
Indigenous workspaces. We non-Indigenous can be like bower birds collecting shiny cultural knowledge experiences to adorn our pedagogical and professional bower, as those, like me, move from one Indigenous centre to another. Sometimes moving by choice, other times as positions dependant upon funding cycles become available, necessitating short term contracts, and giving due consideration of the push to have more Indigenous educators. Educators, and hence the workspace ethos, are consumed with the business of supporting learners, and engaging communities, allowing non-Indigenous educators to avoid confronting the notion of ‘taking an Indigenous position’. Universities are slowly implementing Indigenous employment strategies and initiatives. Surprisingly, experience reveals that some institutions have only established procedures in recent years (early 2000s).

Much of the trials and tribulations I experienced in my roles were in concert with the frustrations and anguish expressed by some Indigenous academics struggling to get recognition for Indigenous knowledges in the institutions of higher education. The workspaces were multilayered areas with a continuum of experience, learning, action, meaning, dialogue and contestation. My subjectivities were disclosed through an examination of my roles and experiences. After careful scripting, I believe my interrogation of memory realistically retells my interpretations of action, and subsequent learning and meaning.

The roles and positioning of the non-Indigenous educator depends on the nature of course provision and a range of other factors. Differing roles are required to support students at universities that house supportive enclaves or access programs. A significantly more complex role is required in working with residential programs: closer connections to learners; meeting with learners in their own contexts; understanding learners situated learning; engaging with learner needs beyond the academic; learning the needs of extended family and community of the learner. The residential programs can also be central to strengthening community-institutional relationships.

These concluding comments relate to my understanding of my own learning trajectories: integrating new learning, realising that every learning experience
begins anew, and remembering that I did not become ‘expert’ but ‘learned up’ to work alongside Indigenous adults.

8.3 Concluding comments:

As McConaghy (2000) suggests:

... at a time when many of my contemporaries are leaving Indigenous education I am more optimistic about the possibilities of a new politics for the creation of work places which are characterised by direct and constructive dialogue (p.7).

Such optimism of improved dialogue may exist in some institutions, although indications from the National Tertiary Education Union (Indigenous working party referred to in the NTEU Advocate, March 2007) show that Indigenous autonomy in higher education was being eroded in the 2000s. There is hope that political changes (i.e. a new Australian Federal Government) may encourage new partnerships for Indigenous tertiary education. Recent evidence of new Indigenous tertiary structures in a number of universities give hope for a future with greater Indigenous involvement, and greater exertion of Indigenous knowings across the faculties.\(^\text{54}\)

McConaghys’ message resonates with my experience, and aligns with my intentions and life situation to write with scholarship around discourse of the ‘workspaces’ and the possibility for constructive and reconciling dialogues. Although Australian university campuses are multicultural spaces, the integration of Indigenous staffing has rarely extended beyond Koorie teaching units or Indigenous support enclaves (NTEU Advocate, 2007).

This thesis explored my roles in Indigenous environments, juxtaposing issues that occur to illuminate the complexity of roles played. My view is that non-Indigenous educators, administrators or researchers can play a beneficial role. My learning trajectory through experience has shown a way to engage and learn, beyond the role of educator and facilitator. Ideologically, I preferred to be working within the control of Indigenous leaders and their programs, but recognise that alternative models exist, and that such programs can still provide a culturally safe experience for learners. Although, I make the judgment, based upon my own experience in spaces with Indigenous control,

\(^\text{54}\) Examples such as Charles Sturt University have embraced Indigenous knowledge within the structures of the institutional hierarchy, ensuring control for Indigenous research and an embedded knowledge for all students.
that such experiences may be culturally less rewarding overall for both students and staff.

This thesis suggests that it is essential that non-Indigenous educators have respect for Indigenous cultural perspectives in the construction and implementation of their teaching. This respect also needs to be present in the curricula and programs that higher education institutions establish to support Indigenous learners. It is essential that Indigenous epistemologies are at the forefront of unit planning. Though I have experienced some celebrated culturally inclusive programs, all-too-often institutions are propelled by goals that in time emerge as assimilationist.

The self focus of this autobiographical approach might seem to some as overly indulgent, especially as the struggle for recognition of Indigenous knowledge in higher education goes on. One role at the cultural interface is to identify the barriers and to recognise and educate other staff and students of the institution to see the barriers to Indigenous students learning. Through the writing of this thesis, the interrogation of memory has meant recognition that certain situations have altered my workplace understandings. My life, role and work practices were enriched through learning about the life impinging upon the student and hardships facing Indigenous learners at a distance from their tertiary institution.

The language of higher education is beginning to embrace the terminology of community and connectedness, and although we should recognise that the language is all-embracing of the broader Australian communities, my experience suggests that the application of this language is without any deep awareness of how it specifically relates to Indigenous matters. In a parallel timeframe, there was a previous shift in the language of Indigenous education towards a neo-liberal discourse of higher education provision, that is simply not attuned to the goals and aspirations of the Indigenous education programs that I worked within.

The implications from this research will clarify the importance of developing a focussed confrontation of ideological beliefs, including one's own understanding of cross-cultural spaces (the place of practitioner interaction), and the potential connectedness between Indigenous and non-Indigenous
professional relationships. This thesis has used an autobiographical methodology to illuminate the development of an inter-personal praxis, and based on these narratives has explored the extent to which these experiences enable empowering pedagogy or tend towards replicating paternalism. This can be identified as my praxis, seeking to indicate how a degree of cultural inclusiveness can have an impact within curricula, or giving emphasis to a sensitivity of staff to cultural practices in education in order to bring about possible shifts in teaching practices. The absence, or presence, of this construction of knowledge and understanding, provides a perspective by which the ‘unconscious’ constructs prove to be barriers to learners from other cultures.

My academic apprenticeship through Indigenous contexts has brought me to viewing work as shared learning, alongside many Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators. Such experiences taught me to connect with aspects of Indigenous community life. This is similar to any engagement, positioning oneself along a continuum that ranges from mere individual to more altruistic communitarian perspectives. This positioning has placed me on the border, and I have not always been able to enhance the power of Indigenous voices, or to shift the dominant pedagogy of other non-Indigenous staff. However, I believe I have shown through this thesis that an educator can act and contribute in meaningful ways.

This narrative writing was a step towards reconciliation-in-praxis with colleagues in these contexts. The research has helped me fulfil what I have for some time confronted as a challenge to critique my own positioning and attitude to the individualist and collectivist agendas that seek dominance over the autonomous educator. My praxis shifted as I was influenced by various Indigenous contexts, and especially as I found myself alongside a diversity of Indigenous learners, who continually made an impact upon my pedagogical and organisational learning. Of future interest will be my collaboration with Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators in terms of my own learning and my involvement with their practices of empowering pedagogy. And so, these will

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55 A playful shift of the term practical reconciliation, albeit a serious re-defining as non-Indigenous educators may live and work in a manner embodying a spirit of altruistic reconciliation (albeit with remuneration).
be further steps along the way to better understand the protocols for respectfully working on the border with Indigenous cultures. There is no claim here to expert knowledge, but rather an acceptance of an invitation to enjoy the journey of ongoing personal experience and cultural engagement, which involves the struggle with others working at the cultural interface.

My life and learning is enriched by the praxis developed, and also from having the opportunity to talk with wise Indigenous Elders and intellectuals, lecturers and community members. There is much privilege in being amongst Indigenous spaces. This is simply being aware that in the apparently incidental conversations that occur, the creative contestations, and humorous interactions, a knowledge of relating is shared. I am indebted to the Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues, for their emphasis upon community and collegial collaboration, that provided an education not readily available to lecturers in mainstream educational teaching.
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