# Aboriginal Education Officers Working at the Cultural Interface: Nguli yoo boy ngoo Yulling Ngunya

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# Keywords



# **Statement of Authorship and Sources**

This thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis by which I have qualified for or been awarded another degree or diploma.

No parts of this thesis have been submitted towards the award of any other degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgement in the main text of the thesis.

All research procedures reported in the thesis received the approval of the relevant Ethics/Safety Committees (where required).

Charlotte Cottier (IPEd Accredited Editor) provided copyediting and proofreading services according to the guidelines laid out in the university-endorsed national *Guidelines for editing research theses*.

Signature:		
Date:		

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## **Abstract**

The role of an Aboriginal Education Officer is complex and is undertaken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the school context. Most of the research in this area has occurred from the perspective of teachers and researchers who are non-Indigenous. There is limited research that focuses on Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) and what they understand their role is in the school context, from their own perspective. Yet, according to educational policies and initiatives (both past and present), this role is to contribute contextual understanding and culturally appropriate support to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' learning. Thus, not only is the role a necessity in addressing Aboriginal students' learning in a Western-dominated world, it is also significant for these students' success.

The purpose of this research is to explore what AEOs understand their role to be in the school context. In particular, it focuses on the challenges AEOs encounter in their role and their identity as educators in the school context. By studying these phenomena, it is conjectured that this study will impact positively on the way AEOs are utilised in schools.

The following research questions and sub-questions emerged from a synthesis of the literature and framed the research process:

What do AEOs understand to be their role as educators?

What challenges do AEOs encounter in their role as educators?

Where does identity as an educator configure into AEOs' understanding of their role?

Given that this study focuses on the ways in which AEOs understand their role and the challenges they encounter in this role, an interpretive approach has been adopted. A constructionist epistemology underpins the study, and Indigenous methodology is the theoretical perspective used. The methodology for this research is narrative case study. Data were collected from four AEOs from regional northern New South Wales using yarning sessions.

Five major conclusions of this study contribute to new knowledge about what AEOs understand to be their role as educators. Contributions to new knowledge highlight:

1. The role of the AEO has shifted over the last 10 years, and particularly for these AEOs in their school context. They have greater authority, provide more input into

- their roles, and are sharing Indigenous knowledges and perspectives with their school community.
- AEOs' role is complex for many reasons. Part of this complexity is switching between two knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western). AEOs do this because they have to talk the talk and walk the walk in school systems to best support Aboriginal students.
- 3. The formulation of AEOs' role is complex, driven by policy and recent changes in the Australian National Curriculum, with implementation strategies. Departmental and school policies guide what AEOs do in their role. Furthermore, AEOs have some input into the tasks they complete in their role. AEOs' roles are based on the needs within the school and community they work in. With that being said, AEOs prioritise Indigenous student well-being.
- 4. AEOs are creating "safe spaces" in the school context to transport Indigenous knowledges. Through informal and formal meetings, AEOs are creating a safe space to transport Indigenous knowledges to non-Indigenous teachers and staff in their schools. However, in the safe spaces there is limited dialogical exchange between the two knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western).
- 5. Working on and off Country has different implications for AEOs and schools do not take this into consideration. There are advantages and disadvantages for AEOs working on and off Country. Working on Country has advantages with respect to local culture being shared within the school context, whereas working off Country traditional owners must give permission to have access to and share local knowledge.

## **List of Abbreviations**

ABS Australian Bureau of Statistics

ACARA Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority

ACU Australian Catholic University

AEA Aboriginal Education Assistant

AECG Aboriginal Education Consultative Group

AEO Aboriginal Education Officer

AEP Aboriginal Education Policy / Aboriginal Education and Training Policy

AITSL Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership

ASSPA Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness

COAG Council of Australian Governments

DET Department of Education and Training

IEW Indigenous Education Worker

MCEECDYA Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and

Youth Affairs

MCEETYA Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs

NAIDOC National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee

NATSIEP National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy

NEP National Education Policy

NSW New South Wales

REC Racial-ethnic-cultural

SERAP State Education Research Applications Process

UNICEF United Nations Children's Fund, formerly United Nations International

Children's Emergency Fund

# **Glossary**

Aboriginal Education Officer (AEO): AEOs work with teachers to assist Aboriginal students to achieve their potential. They also keep the Aboriginal community informed of students' progress and achievements, and of things like parent meetings, school activities, new programs and other changes. AEOs provide role models for Aboriginal students and have a positive impact on helping them achieve their potential (Craven, Yeung & Han, 2014, p.90).

Aboriginal Teacher Assistant: Establish strong links between Aboriginal families, Aboriginal students and school staff. In this capacity the Aboriginal Teacher Assistant shares the responsibilities related to the teaching and learning process of all Aboriginal students. This includes counselling and mentoring the students, providing cultural advice as required, supporting literacy and numeracy programs and acting as a role model for the students.

Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander/Indigenous: Many Aboriginal people in New South Wales (NSW) are offended by the term Indigenous. However, when working in Queensland the term Indigenous is more accepted. For the purpose of this thesis I have switched between the terms. When talking about the co-researchers the term Aboriginal has been used. When talking about the students in the co-researchers' schools Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander has been used and when talking about knowledges Indigenous has been used. Also when referring to the literature Indigenous has been used.

Aunty/Uncle: Many Aboriginal students call AEOs Aunty or Uncle, as this is a sign of respect for older members in the community.

*Coconut*: A term Aboriginal people call other Aboriginal people when they want to express that they have become white on the inside and are no longer considered to be "one of them".

*Country:* In Standard English this may mean nation or countryside (Yunkaporta, 2009a, p.vii). However, to Aboriginal people Country is the term used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for an area they are connected to spiritually and culturally.

Cultural interface: Where two knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western) converge.

**Deadly**: Very good, cool, great or awesome.

*Fulla*: Aboriginal English derived from "fellow". Usually used to refer to other Aboriginal people (Yunkaporta, 2009a, p.viii).

Gammin: Joke, not true or mucking around.

*Gubba*: NSW Aboriginal English term meaning non-Aboriginal person (Yunkaporta, 2009a, p.viii).

*Indigenous knowledge:* Knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. Indigenous knowledge has become the accepted term to include the beliefs and understandings of non-Western people. Indigenous knowledge is based on the social, physical and spiritual understandings which have informed Aboriginal people's worldview. Indigenous knowledge relates only to particular people and their understanding of the world.

*Insider:* Insiders are often closely engaged with their research areas, and there are key advantages to being closely engaged. The advantages include a superior understanding of the group's culture, and the ability to interact naturally with the group and its members.

**Knowledge systems**: Every person has a cultural worldview. This is how we understand and make sense of what happens around us. However, cultural worldviews may not be the same. In fact, they differ as a result of the experiences that affect your life. This in turn informs your knowledge system.

*Koori/Goori*: Generic term meaning Aboriginal person, encompassing many language groups in NSW and Victoria. However, this is applied problematically as many NSW language groups refer to themselves as Mardi (Yunkaporta, 2009a, p.ix).

Moogle: Cheeky, stubborn, naughty.

*Norta Norta workers*: Norta Norta workers (or just Norta workers) are part of a state government program for Indigenous students. It focuses on offering targeted support through small tutoring group sessions during school time.

*Off Country*: Being "off Country" is when you are in an area where you are not the traditional owner. Working off Country means AEOs do not have spiritual and cultural links to the land. There are strict protocols to be adhered to when working off Country.

*On Country*: When you are "on Country" you are bound by protocols for speech, behaviour and thought. For the purpose of this thesis, working on Country is being employed in a position where the land belongs to the AEOs' ancestors.

*Outsider*: An outsider is someone who is not from the Country you are working or living on.

**Protocols**: Some of these are rules that are fixed for behaviour in certain places or contexts on Aboriginal land and in Aboriginal communities. Sometimes they are guidelines for how to live your life and relate to others. Often protocols will change with relationships and

circumstances. You need to maintain strong relatedness to be genuinely responsive to protocol (Yunkaporta, 2009a, p.xi).

**Reconciliation**: Reconciliation is about unity and respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people and non-Indigenous Australians. It is about respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and valuing justice and equity for all Australians.

*Safe space*: A space where both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and students can learn about both knowledge systems.

*Shame:* An Aboriginal social mechanism to maintain balance between independence and relatedness. This Aboriginal English term can equate to notions in Standard English of shyness, embarrassment, or the breaking of a protocol or taboo (Yunkaporta, 2009a, p. xii).

**Sorry business**: Sorry business is a term used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people to refer to the death of a family or community member and the mourning process. It includes attending funerals and taking part in mourning activities with the community.

*Storytelling*: Traditionally Aboriginal storytelling had many functions, and it still does. It reinforced Aboriginal people's ideological beliefs in the Dreamtime.

*Traditional owner:* A traditional owner is an Aboriginal person who has a connection to the local area they are from and has certain rights and responsibilities to their Country.

**Two-way strong**: The use of the term "two-way strong" refers to a practice of drawing on two necessarily separate domains of knowledge. The terms "two-way strong" and "both-ways learning" indicate the acceptance of a mixing of Indigenous and Western knowledge.

Western knowledge: Scientists generally distinguish Western knowledge by claiming it is universal. Western knowledge is the system of knowledge which relies on certain laws that have been established through the application of the scientific method to phenomena in the world around us.

Yarning circle: An informal conversation that takes place in a relaxed, seated circle.

# **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This thesis examines Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) working at the interface of Indigenous and Western cultures. In particular, it seeks to understand what AEOs understand to be their role as educators and the challenges they encounter in their role. It shares the journeys of four AEOs from the commencement of their role as AEOs to the present. Indigenous methodologies provide the theoretical and analytical lens to interpret the data collected in this research. Specifically, the aim of this study was to explore what AEOs understand as their role and the challenges they encounter as educators. This study was undertaken because when working as an Aboriginal educator, I and my Aboriginal colleagues were often left out of professional development, staff meetings and matters pertaining to Aboriginal education.

The purpose of this chapter is to document the contexts within which the research problem is situated and articulate and justify the research problem underpinning this thesis. First, it presents my story and how this led to the research undertaken (section 1.1). It then describes the background and context of the research (section 1.2), and conceptualises the research problem (section 1.3). Subsequently, the research problem and the purpose of the research are defined (sections 1.4 and 1.5). Next the research questions and research aim of the thesis are outlined (sections 1.6 and 1.7), the position of the researcher is introduced (section 1.8), and the research design is explained (section 1.9). Finally, the significance of the research is discussed (section 1.10) and an overview of the remaining chapters is provided (section 1.11). Figure 1.1 displays a diagrammatic overview of the chapter. Figures such as this appear at the beginning of each chapter of the thesis to map out each chapter for the reader.

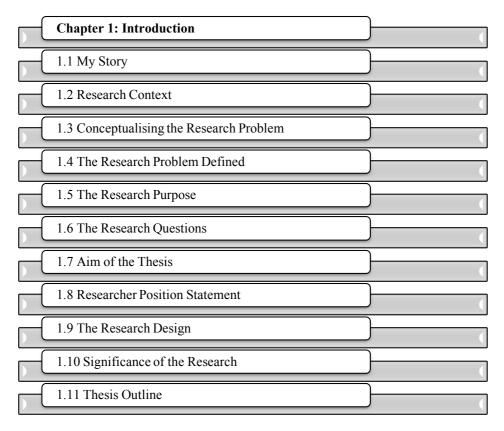


Figure 1.1. Overview of Chapter 1.

#### 1.1 MY STORY

As an Aboriginal person it is crucial that I share my own personal, cultural, and educational background to provide a narrative for this work. My personal story also gives the reader some understanding of myself, as an Aboriginal woman, learner and researcher, and the choices I have made regarding this thesis. Storytelling is central to our cultural heritage, as it teaches us about our past, present and future. From my personal experiences, everyday life is filled with sharing stories of how we are related to land and kin, what our families are doing, and other news. I was asked to write what it is like to be Aboriginal and how this research emerged from my experiences. It is not easy to explain something that you just know. I cannot remember when I first knew I was Aboriginal, but I remember knowing I was Aboriginal for as long as I can remember. My Nan, Isobel Armour (nee Noel), used to reinforce in us all the time that we were Aboriginal through the stories she told.

I am an Aboriginal woman with cultural links to Kamilaroi Country through my paternal grandmother (Nan). The Kamilaroi People have a long history in Australia, with evidence suggesting that we have lived in northern New South Wales (NSW) for 40,000 years. Kamilaroi Country stretches from as far as the Hunter Valley in NSW through to Nindigully in Queensland and as far west as the Warrumbungle Mountains near

Coonabarabran in NSW, sweeping across the Liverpool Plains (see Figure 1.2). My heritage is also of Scottish (my paternal grandfather) and Irish (my maternal grandfather) descent.

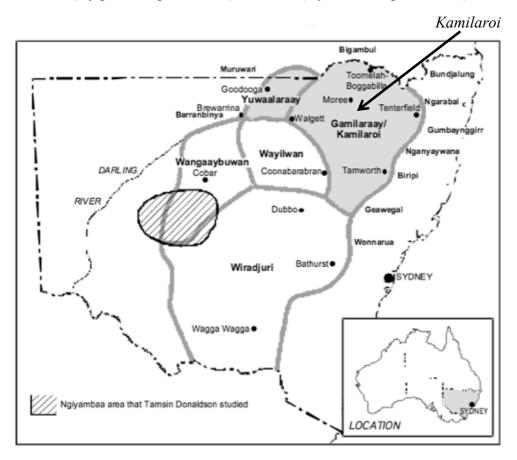


Figure 1.2. Map showing Kamilaroi Country (Giacon, 2001).

My Nan's father Noel Roberts is an Aboriginal man also from Kamilaroi Country. As a young man, he changed his name to Robert Noel so he was able to go into town and seek employment. In those times, Aboriginal people were prohibited from entering town unless they were certified and very few were employed. This certification, known as an "exemption certificate", came under the NSW *Aborigines Protection Act 1909* (McCorquodale, 1986; NSW Government, 1909). Under the Act, Aboriginal people could "exempt" themselves from being Aboriginal, which meant that they had to stop associating with other Aboriginal people, and refrain from identifying as Aboriginal and practising their culture. The pay-off for exempting their identification as an Aboriginal person meant that people like my Nan's father could have the same rights as "White People" (Korff, n.d.). Exemption certificates were enabled by the NSW Aborigines Protection Board (1883–1940), which had an extraordinary level of control over Aboriginal people while failing to protect their rights (Behrendt, 2002). It allowed members of the board to dictate where Aboriginal people could live, work and socialise.

Growing up, Nan lived on her Country for a short time until she and her siblings were forcibly removed and separated. I am not sure when this happened as there are no records available; however, I know this happened through family history. It was common practice for the Aborigines Protection Board to remove Aboriginal children like my Nan from their families without having to identify any neglect or abuse. The removal of thousands of Aboriginal children under the Act is now recognised as the "Stolen Generations". My Nan was taken to Sydney and had no access to her family, her traditional stories, lore or language during that time. As a result, a lot of her traditional culture was lost. This left a lasting impact on my Nan, and there was a period of time that she denied her Aboriginality for fear of her own children being taken. Not only did she lose a connection to her culture but also she lost the opportunity to have relationships with her family members. In a particularly heartbreaking story, my Nan searched for her brother from whom she had been separated as a young girl, but never found him. Her story is similar to many other Aboriginal people of that time.

I was born in the Eora nation at St. Margaret's Hospital, which is located in Darlinghurst, Sydney, NSW. I was born in 1978, and I am the eldest of three children. I grew up on Bundjalung Country living with my Mum in northern NSW. Country is the term used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for an area they are connected to. Bundjalung Country extends from Grafton on the Clarence River in the south to the Logan River in the north and inland as far as the Great Dividing Range at Tenterfield and Warwick. In total, I attended seven primary schools as we moved often during this time. In most of those schools I was one of a few students who were Aboriginal. The curriculum was totally based on Western knowledges. Thinking back, I only have one distinct memory of a teacher inviting an Aboriginal guest speaker to the classroom to teach us about Aboriginal culture. After primary school, I attended three different high schools. Similarly to primary school, there were few opportunities in the school context to acknowledge Aboriginal culture. During this time, I had become disengaged at school despite some teachers encouraging me to continue with my studies. Year 11 was my final year at school.

I have memories of not understanding how to complete work in high school. I never completed an essay because I never knew how to write one and I was often given a detention as reprimand for not submitting the work. But the truth was, I never made it known to my teachers that I could not write the essay. I did not want to be "shame[d]" that I could not write an essay and in retrospect, the teachers never asked what the problem was. While the teachers were nice to me, the expectation was that I was incapable of achieving and therefore I was never pushed to do so. My parents valued education but had limited education themselves.

My Dad completed school in Year 9 when he was 15 years old and my Mum completed school in Year 10. Mum would try to help us with our schoolwork when she had time but she was often busy working.

My involvement in the education system started 15 years ago. Before I started in education I worked in retail hospitality. I worked at the local fish shop and then went on to manage staff at KFC. When I was 22 years old I was offered a job as an Aboriginal Teacher Assistant in my son's school. I took on this role, despite my past experiences in the school system, because I saw this as a way to help students (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous) to achieve and have positive experiences at school. I wanted to make a difference.

When I started in my job as an Aboriginal Teacher Assistant, I was subjected to a number of non-Indigenous people complaining about the role in the school. The school had a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students so it received government funding specifically to employ Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander teacher assistants. Many of the non-Indigenous teacher assistants found this "unfair". However, this funding was included as part of the Aboriginal Education Policy (1989) to employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in schools (Bin-Sallik, 2003). Non-Indigenous teacher assistants thought that this funding should be used to top up their hours to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, as they were already employed in the school. The non-Indigenous teacher assistants did not understand that the role was to support our (Indigenous) students as previous strategies had not been successful. The non-Indigenous teacher assistants also assumed that they had the appropriate knowledge to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. However, an identified position was made so Indigenous students could be supported by an Indigenous person. When I started the role, I supported all students the best way I could, ensuring they all felt safe in the school environment. All students have a story and we need to listen to their stories to make sure they are feeling safe.

However, I did not feel safe in the school environment. I often heard the other teachers and teacher assistants complaining about not getting the extra hours and that they were worried I might take their hours. The office ladies would watch me like a hawk when I came in off my breaks to ensure I was going to class on time. I was not used to such intense scrutiny. Growing up, although I had discipline, I was often left to work things out for myself. But I was also trusted so that if I made a mistake I learnt from it. This is our cultural way.

Some of the teachers would not give me feedback about how the students were going; or, if I suggested work for the students to do when they finished their lessons, I was quickly put in my place and told that I was not a teacher. I felt frustrated and also devalued.

I understood that there is a line between teacher assistants and teachers, and I did not want to cross that line. Nonetheless I would often be made to feel incompetent because I was just standing around, cleaning or given a newspaper to read. After sitting in the staffroom a couple of times I felt very unwelcome, so I decided I would sit out the front of the school on my breaks. I was uneasy about the way students were talked about in the staffroom. I was also made quite aware that if I were not employed in an identified position I would not have been employed at the school. At the time I just thought that this is what it is like to work at a school. However, on reflection and after gaining many years of experience working within the educational context, I now know that this was not right.

Teachers often did not recognise signs that our Indigenous students were struggling. Just because Indigenous students did not approach the teacher to say they were having trouble did not mean that these students understood the work given. As a consequence, as the students became older behavioural problems emerged, because they did not know how to do the work. This drove me to enrol in a Bachelor of Education and to undertake a career in teaching, as I could see Aboriginal students were not being properly catered for in the school context. Following the completion of my degree, I taught for seven years across a number of school sectors (Catholic, State, and Independent) in metropolitan, regional and very remote settings. In these teaching positions I taught in schools consisting of predominantly non-Indigenous students and schools with 100% Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student enrolment. Within my role as a teacher I recognised the value of Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs), and this led me to want to explore and share their experiences through research.

#### 1.2 RESEARCH CONTEXT

This research has been undertaken in public schools within the NSW Department of Education, North Coast Region, Australia (see Figure 1.3). The North Coast region covers the area from Tweed Heads in the north to Taree in the south, and the Great Dividing Range in the west. This region includes 275 public schools educating 63,084 students and 8,524 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2016). This research concerns AEOs working in public schools located in this region.

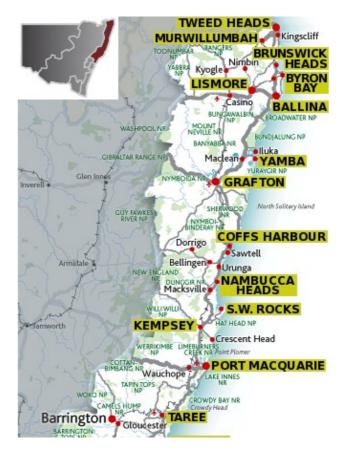


Figure 1.3. North Coast region of New South Wales (http://www.travelnsw.com.au/regions/northcoast/)

#### 1.3 CONCEPTUALISING THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

It is well recognised that AEOs are key contributors to positive Indigenous educational outcomes. Their role within schools is to contribute contextual understanding and culturally appropriate support to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' learning (MacGill, 2012; Pearce, 2011). Additionally, AEOs have a deep concern for their students because of their shared history and cultures, and usually have strong connections with families within the local community (Gower et al., 2011). Aboriginal academic Dr Chris Sarra (2011) consistently points out that "Aboriginal Education Officers are a bridge between the non-Indigenous teachers and Indigenous students, Indigenous parents and the community" (p. 10). Thus, AEOs are fundamental in building relationships with Indigenous students and assisting them, particularly with regard to their physical, emotional, spiritual, social, psychological, and academic well-being (C. Sarra, 2011).

AEOs have been employed in Australia for over 50 years. They were first employed in the Northern Territory in 1953, with all other states in Australia creating AEO or similar roles in schools by 1974 (Winkler, 2006). However, studies have indicated that while this was the first official identification of the role, Indigenous people were working in schools without pay in the early 1940s (MacGill, 2008). The name given to AEOs is dependent on the location in which

they are employed. Thus, they are known under different job titles although the roles undertaken are very similar. For example, in NSW the name Aboriginal Education Assistants was given to emphasise that the teacher assistant was in fact Aboriginal. Other popular terms used are Indigenous Education Worker, Community Education Counsellor, Aboriginal home school liaison officer and tutors. However, many Aboriginal educators are known as Uncle and Aunty. Aboriginal students call AEOs Uncle or Aunty, as this is a sign of respect for older members in the community (Pearce, 2011). It is also part of protocol for Aboriginal people to address respected older Aboriginal men and women as Uncle and Aunty. For the purpose of this thesis, the term Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs) is used as the title of these educators. This term encompasses both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching assistants.

Teachers utilise AEOs in a variety of ways in the classroom environment, some of which are empowering and some of which are disempowering (Watson, Partington, Gray, & Mack, 2006). Government policies state that AEOs may assist teachers in the delivery of planned education programs and promoting the well-being of students (Department of Education Tasmania, 2012; NSW Department of Education & Communities, 2009). Furthermore, AEOs' main focus is to develop, promote and maintain communication networks between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, their parents or carers, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, and the school (NSW Department of Education & Communities, 2009). However, in reality, AEOs are underutilised in their employed roles (MacGill, 2008) and are often used in low-level functional capacities such as photocopying or cleaning (Warren, Cooper, & Baturo, 2004). Furthermore, in many school communities, AEOs often do not have clearly defined roles, which contributes to their sense of disempowerment (C. Matthews, Watego, Cooper, & Baturo, 2005; C. Sarra, 2003). This is despite the fact that they may hold positions of authority within their own communities from which they derive esteem (C. Matthews et al., 2005; C. Sarra, 2003).

Regardless of these challenges, AEOs generally have a long history with their employing school and are often the longest serving members of staff (Beresford, Partington, & Gower, 2012). This is particularly the case in many rural and remote areas where high turnovers of teaching staff occur (Partington, 2002). AEOs are normally recruited locally, and personally know students and their particular backgrounds. AEOs' pertinent knowledge of the local Aboriginal culture, customs and community is important. It assists teachers to develop appropriate learning experiences for their Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) students and helps them build effective relationships with parents and community. This knowledge of Aboriginal

culture and community also enhances teachers' understanding of contemporary challenges that confront Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Teachers often have minimal experience in working in partnership with AEOs, and understanding the role of AEOs in a school context. Traditionally, within a Western education system, teachers are regarded as the authority figure in the classroom. If they are unwilling to share this power, then this can have a negative impact on AEOs. It is conjectured that AEOs often withdraw from school communities as a result of disempowerment in the classroom (Baturo, Cooper, & Doyle, 2007), particularly if they do not feel valued or respected. It has been reported that teachers hold little confidence in their AEOs (Winkler, 2006) and there are a number of factors that contribute to this tension. Reasons include: teachers' inexperience of working with an AEO; lack of teacher training in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; belief that AEOs are incompetent due to lack of formal qualifications; and, AEO shyness that may hinder the communication between them and the teacher (MacGill, 2008). As a result, AEOs may feel their contribution to the school community is not worthwhile, resulting in feelings of disillusionment and disempowerment (Watson, et al., 2006; Winkler, 2006). Yet in spite of these issues, many AEOs remain committed to their role and continue to contribute to the learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their care. Little is known as to why this occurs and what impact the relationship between teachers and AEOs has on their ability to work together.

#### 1.4 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM DEFINED

A fundament of AEOs' role is to facilitate the mixing of Western and Indigenous knowledges (C. Sarra, 2011). This mixing is seen as allowing students to be empowered in both Indigenous identity and Western education (Pearson, 2009; C. Sarra, 2011). While the integration of the two knowledges is deemed important, in reality there often exists a discrepancy between AEOs' intended role in the school and their actual role (Warren et al., 2004). The intended role of AEOs in the school includes supporting Indigenous students in class, building relationships with Indigenous students' families, working with teachers in the classroom, and influencing the educational experiences of Indigenous students (Hewitt, 2000). It incorporates many additional aspects, such as providing support in literacy and numeracy, providing advice on integrating an Indigenous perspective into the curriculum, organising regular meetings with parents and community members, following up student attendance and performance, visiting the homes of parents, and assisting teachers in learning about and supporting Indigenous students (Funnell, 2012; Gower et al., 2011; MacGill, 2008). At times

teachers set up activities for AEOs that have to be delivered the way the teacher instructs it to be (Warren et al., 2004).

In many instances AEOs are employed to provide predominantly "functional support" for the classroom (Craven, Yeung, & Han, 2014). Because they lack any real authority or leverage within the education system, they are given minor roles in the school, such as preparing teacher-directed activities, providing limited supervision to small groups, and cleaning and tidying the classroom (Warren et al., 2004). Obviously, AEOs fulfilling the latter duties negatively impacts on their ability to fulfil their intended role. They are failing to implement their knowledge of the students' cultural, learning and family background within the classroom context (MacGill, 2012). Juxtaposed against this trend is Malloch's (2003) study. The results of this study showed that, in contexts where AEOs were involved in Indigenous student learning, there was an increase in the learning outcomes that these students achieved.

The underperformance of Indigenous Australian students is well documented (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2014), and many strategies have been put in place in an attempt to redress this issue. For example, Indigenous perspectives have been included in the Australian National Curriculum (ACARA, 2015). In schools with large Indigenous student enrolment a strategy used to assist these students was to employ an AEO to provide support. Although, AEOs have been employed in the school context from the early 1970s, their voice on strategies aimed to best support Indigenous student learning is almost non-existent (Armour, Warren & Miller, 2015; MacGill, 2008). Given that the discourse used in the educational arena can in fact further marginalise Indigenous students, particularly discourse of comparison with non-Indigenous students (Harrison, 2008), the lack of representation of AEOs in the literature is concerning. Research generally focuses on teachers teaching in these classrooms (e.g., Jorgensen, Grootenboer, Niesche, & Lerman, 2010) but little has been written about AEOs and their role in the school context. Research pertaining to this issue from an Indigenous perspective is almost non-existent. This is the problem that this research addresses.

#### 1.5 THE RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of this research is to explore what AEOs understand to be their role as educators. In particular, it focuses on the challenges AEOs encounter in their role and their identity as educators in the school context. By studying these phenomena, it is conjectured that this study will impact positively on the way AEOs are utilised in schools.

#### 1.6 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The major research question that focuses the conduct of this research is:

What do AEOs understand to be their role as educators?

The literature review (Chapter 3) generates two specific sub-questions, which focus the conduct of the research design. They are:

What challenges do AEOs encounter in their role as educators?

Where does identity as an educator configure into AEOs' understanding of their role?

#### 1.7 AIM OF THE THESIS

The overall aim of this study was to explore what AEOs understand as their role and the challenges they encounter as educators. The specific aims are to:

- 1. document stories of a small number of AEOs and their journey when working at the interface where the two cultures (Indigenous and Western) meet;
- 2. re-story the AEOs' stories with them as co-researchers;
- 3. analyse common themes from the AEOs' stories and investigate the influence these have on their role:
- 4. construct theories and build new knowledge about how working in these contexts impacts on AEOs themselves as Indigenous people; and
- 5. draw implications for effective participation of Indigenous people working at this cultural interface.

This thesis is designed to build new theories with regard to the challenges of working at the cultural interface of Indigenous and Western knowledges for AEOs. It shares the journeys of AEOs from the commencement of their role to the present. There is limited research in this area, especially from an Indigenous perspective. Furthermore, what remains unheard are the voices of AEOs about how they understand their role and how they switch between two knowledge systems when working in the school contexts. It is acknowledged that not all Aboriginal people have the one point of view. For myself, having started my journey in education as an Aboriginal Teacher Assistant, it is important to recognise the commitment that AEOs have and the challenges they experience in ensuring our (Indigenous) children are supported.

#### 1.8 RESEARCHER POSITION STATEMENT

I locate myself within a cultural framework, based on my values, which establishes my relationship to land and kin (White, 2010). With this, I acknowledge that I have brought my own Aboriginality to the research. As an Aboriginal researcher, I see myself as an emerging speaker for my own people (White, 2010). An interpretivist paradigm has been used through yarning and interpreting AEOs' stories. The process of giving each other voice and telling our stories from the "inside" is essential for Aboriginal people. This has been chosen because our people have been silenced for too long and we need to regain our voices and keep them strong.

I acknowledge that there is a predominant amount of literature that recognises Indigenous people as "Other". In order to counter that dominant literature this thesis is framed by a decolonising theory, Nakata's (2002) cultural interface theory and C. Sarra's (2006) two-way strong philosophy. Cultural interface theory relates to the conflicting approaches in Western academia for Indigenous research so that Indigenous experiences are not restricted. Two-way strong theory emphasises being strong in both Indigenous and Western knowledges. Nakata and Sarra are both well respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academics and educators. The thesis also draws on international Indigenous research pertaining to framing one's identity within an educational context (e.g., Cardinal, 2014).

#### 1.9 THE RESEARCH DESIGN

The purpose of this research is to explore the challenges AEOs experience in their role working at the cultural interface and the understandings they have of this. The explanation and justification for this purpose is explicated in Chapter 4. Given the interpretive approach adopted for this research, the following research design was generated (see Table 1.1).

Table 1.1

Overview of the Epistemological Paradigm, Theoretical Perspective, Methodology, and Data Gathering
Strategies

Epistemology	Constructionism
Theoretical perspective	Indigenous methodologies
Methodology	Narrative case study Co-researcher
Data-gathering strategies	Yarning sessions Arts-based inquiry using artefacts

## 1.9.1 Epistemology

Constructionism has been adopted in this study in order to determine the perspectives that AEOs have about their role in the school context. This epistemology has been used because it is based on people's experiences and interpretations. Indigenous people's interpretations differ from non-Indigenous people because of "their experiences, histories, cultures, and values" (L. Rigney, 1999, p. 114). Indigenous cultures are formed through the nature of their beliefs, values and social practices involving their relationships with the land and each other, and this process is often cyclical. Knowledge and "reality" are constructed through storytelling and connection to the land. As the participants in this research are Indigenous, it is important that the choice of research paradigm and methodology is culturally appropriate.

## 1.9.2 Theoretical perspective

This thesis is different from most traditional theses as it uses a combination of Indigenous and Western methodologies. Perspectives of style and structure of a traditional thesis are embedded in a Western paradigm. Indigenous ways of knowing and Western ways of knowing are epistemologically and ontologically different (Nakata, 2007b). Additionally, the Indigenous perspective of this research incorporates cosmology, worldviews, epistemology, protocols and ethical beliefs that relate to the way Indigenous peoples view the world (Martin, 2006; S. Wilson, 2008). An important part of Indigenous identity is the ways Indigenous people view the world (Martin, 2006; S. Wilson, 2008) and these are a critical component of this study. Furthermore, Indigenous theses following an Indigenous research approach have a special role for researchers (L. Smith, 1999). The researchers reflect on the research they are completing and link their own experiences as part of the thesis (Seidman, 2012). Because I have worked as an Aboriginal educator I can relate to the stories told by AEOs.

The readers of this thesis need to be aware an Indigenous research methodology consists of the author's standpoint. The methods used in this thesis include yarning, participants as coresearchers and constant comparative analysis. The co-researchers also constantly checked their stories to ensure they had been interpreted correctly. This thesis may challenge some readers on what they understand as knowledge, research and a thesis project. My positioning as an Aboriginal woman is prevalent throughout the thesis. I have worked in the informal yet structured way in which Aboriginal people generally communicate (yarn) with one another throughout this study. The co-researchers communicated with me orally but also through their art and poetry. My knowledge was able to assist in noticing the contexts in which words were said, feelings were described and artworks and poetry were storied. This facilitated the process of analysis of the thesis itself and the overall process of this research.

#### 1.9.3 Methodology

The research methodology for this study was narrative case study. Narrative case study allowed AEOs to give their journey of their role in the past, the present and what they hoped their role would be in the future. It also enabled AEOs to voice what they felt impacted them most in their role. AEOs' stories were re-storied in collaboration with the AEOs. This enabled the participants to become co-researchers. The reason for this was to make sure the co-researchers' voices were true to how they as AEOs understood their role.

#### 1.9.4 Co-researchers

This research was conducted in northern NSW with four different participants. The coresearchers in the study were involved in re-storying their stories. Each co-researcher worked in a different school and the schools were located in four towns that were at least 26 km away from each other. Two schools were located inland and two schools were coastal. There were two female co-researchers and two male co-researchers ranging in age from 27 years old to 55 years old. Two AEOs were working on Country and two AEOs worked off Country.

#### 1.9.5 Data-gathering strategies

The strategies chosen for the collection of data to answer the research questions were:

- individual yarning sessions (four sessions x four co-researchers = 16 yarning sessions); and
- arts-based inquiry using artefacts (two co-researchers).

The yarning sessions were held once a term over a period of 12 months. Yarning provides a relaxed method to collect data and allows researchers to obtain important data from the participants (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). AEOs in this study were able to tell their stories and give in-depth data about their feelings and experiences (Fredericks et al., 2011). Conversations with a purpose were held between AEOs and the researcher in this study so the AEOs' stories could be heard. Two of the four AEOs in this study volunteered to complete art in the forms of paintings and poetry. One AEO painted three paintings telling the story of her journey as an AEO in the past, the present and the future. Another AEO wrote a poem about the challenges she faces as an Aboriginal woman. Arts-based research is a form of qualitative inquiry and is an ethical form of gathering data (Finlay, 2005).

#### 1.10 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

Research on the understanding of AEOs' roles is important for three main reasons. First, AEOs are used in many different ways in the school context. In past research, usually the

perspective of an AEO's role has been given by teachers or Principals. This research offers an opportunity for AEOs to voice how they understand their role and the challenges of working at the cultural interface from an Aboriginal perspective.

Second, it is important to appreciate what AEOs understand their role as an educator is in order to provide the best outcomes to Aboriginal students in schools. AEOs developed their views of education as they shared their journeys about the formation of their identity and role as an AEO.

Furthermore, the inclusion of an Aboriginal researcher who herself has been an Aboriginal Teacher Assistant and has relationships with the community in which the research was conducted helps to ensure that the stories told are authentic and representative of how these AEOs perceive their role. Fundamental to Indigenous people is the trust and relationships they have with each other. Yarning is a two-way process. It is storytelling that occurs between all participants, where all participants are seen as equal. Thus it is important that the researcher herself also has stories to share with regard to what it is like to be an AEO.

Finally, this research is important because it contributes to the limited body of research that pertains to the area of AEOs. This research highlights nuances in the cultural interface as previously theorised by Nakata (2002). It also contributes to the limited literature on AEOs' identity as educators. Additionally, this study delineates the implications for AEOs working on or off Country.

#### 1.11 THESIS OUTLINE

An outline of the structure of the thesis is given below:

**Chapter 1: Introduction** presents the significance of the research problem that underpins this thesis. One overarching research question and two sub-questions were formed and directed the data collection strategies and data analysis methods.

Chapter 2: The Historical and Political Context positions the research by providing an overview of the historical and political context surrounding Aboriginal Australia.

**Chapter 3: Literature Review** presents a synthesis of the literature relevant to AEOs' role in the school context. Additionally, identity frameworks relevant to AEOs are examined.

**Chapter 4: Research Design** describes and justifies the research design and methodology used in this study. This includes the data strategies used to inform the research questions and data analysis methods.

**Chapter 5: Case Studies** present the stories and journeys of AEOs in the school context. The findings of the case studies came from four one-on-one yarning sessions with AEOs.

**Chapter 6: Discussion** presents a discussion of the research findings that emerged in Chapter 5.

**Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations** presents a review of the research findings and offers conclusions and recommendations.

# **Chapter 2: The Historical and Political Context**

To understand the ongoing impact of the invasion of Australia by the British, this context section provides a succinct history of invasion and the effects this had on Indigenous people, the original inhabitants. It also presents government policies and Aboriginal education policies and frameworks that have affected Indigenous people in Western school systems. This historical recount provides the context to understand the historical and socio-cultural dimensions that have shaped and impacted on Indigenous people's lives in Australia. Figure 2.1 presents an overview of Chapter 2.

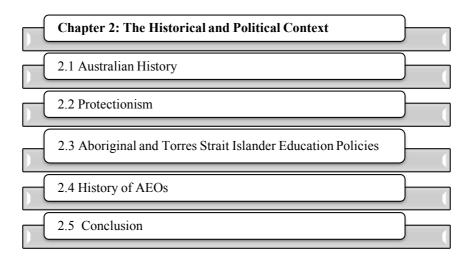


Figure 2.1. Overview of Chapter 2.

#### 2.1 AUSTRALIAN HISTORY

Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been the traditional custodians of the land and surrounding islands of Australia for approximately 70 000 years. Each group has distinctive cultures and deep connections to and understandings of the Australian land and waters. These connections and understandings are passed down from generation to generation through story, dance or art (Blair, 2008). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia lived a nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle with a unique, diverse culture that sourced food made by the local environment. The local flora and fauna were essential food sources for Indigenous people in Australia (Dudgeon, Wright, Paradies, Garvey, and Walker, 2010). Indigenous people maintained a unique culture through their differing traditional languages, which enabled self-identification (Bolt, 2009). The well-documented traits of the hunter-gatherer culture of traditional Indigenous people play an important role in

the accepted truth that Indigenous people of Australia have the longest continuing culture in history (Bolt, 2009).

In 1770, Captain Cook sailed his British boat up the east coast of Australia and claimed Australia as *terra nullius*. He made entries into his diary that he observed smoke from campfires in multiple locations along the coastline (Organ, 1990). Even though he could see signs of Australia being inhabited, Cook claimed the land, now known as Australia, under the title of *terra nullius*. Cook then sailed into what is now called Botany Bay and Sydney Cove. This was the first area invaded by the British, and they claimed sovereignty and ownership. When this happened the process of invasion began in Australia. Invasion is also known as colonisation from a non-Indigenous perspective.

When the British invaded Australia there were many hostile encounters between Indigenous Australians and the British because the British saw Indigenous people as "inferior". The British came to Australia with preconceived ideas that Indigenous people of Australia were "primitive", "inferior" and less worthy (Broome, 2002). The primitive construct of Indigenous people was centred on inferiority based on the appearance (or lack thereof) of development (Bolt, 2009). The British treated Indigenous people with disrespect and dispossessed Indigenous people from their land. There were many violent encounters and massacres of Indigenous people, which saw a dramatic decline of the Indigenous population (Reynolds, 1996). Poisoning of Indigenous people also took place and this contributed to the decline. In the late 1800s, policies began to be implemented that oppressed Indigenous people in their own Country.

Policies were made in Australia after invasion that affected Indigenous people of Australia and their identity. These policies supported Indigenous Australians being excluded and segregated from society. Non-Indigenous people made these policies in regard to Indigenous people which resulted in Indigenous people being forcibly moved to missions both near and far from their Country. Indigenous people in Australia are deeply connected to their Country both spiritually and emotionally. The missions were set up to "save" Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Being moved from Country significantly contributed to the loss of identity as people were separated from land. "Profoundly, the historical exclusion of Aboriginal people from Australian society adds to the construct of a national identity" (Bolt, 2009, p. 25).

### 2.2 PROTECTIONISM

By the late 1800s protectionism was established as a formal policy because anthropologists stated that Indigenous people were unlikely to succeed, and to segregate Indigenous people from non-Indigenous people was the only way to minimise suffering (Ranzijn, McConnochie, & Nolan, 2009). The protectionism policy separated Indigenous people from the broader community. It was thought that if Indigenous people were separated they would die out. However, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people still intermixed. This policy placed Indigenous people in missions and reserves run by church groups and government. It moved Indigenous people away from their Country and made Indigenous people live by a strict regime controlled by the mission or reserve manager.

Missions and reserves were able to place Indigenous people in one area and control and regulate what they did. There were many missions and reserves created in NSW with the Mulgoa Reserve being the first (NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1998). The missions and reserves were supposedly meant to "civilise" Indigenous people and convert them to Christianity (Jacobs, 2009). Indigenous people on these missions and reserves were not able to speak their own language and were made to participate in singing hymns and being taught scripture. Indigenous people were not able to practise any culture as they would be punished. Other tasks Indigenous people were made to do were housework, horticulture and livestock management and skilled trades (NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, 1998). This was perceived as enabling Indigenous people to fit into a so-called "civilised" Australia.

An Aborigines Protection Board was established by 1883 and this board controlled Indigenous people's lives. Indigenous people became wards of the state and their children also became wards of the state, meaning that Indigenous parents had no legal guardianship of their children (Mellor, 2002). The Protection Board told Indigenous people where they could go, who they could marry, what they could eat, and controlled their income, with the majority of income going to the board (Tatz, 1999). On missions and reserves Indigenous people were virtually imprisoned as they could not do anything without permission. Welfare Boards were put in place in towns and continued to control Indigenous people.

The NSW Aborigines Welfare Board replaced the Protection Board in 1940 and controlled Aboriginal people until the 1960s, pursuing policies that destroyed Aboriginal families and society by separating children from their parents (Haskins, 2004). These children became known as the Stolen Generations, and to this day many Aboriginal people are still searching for their families. It is estimated that between one in three and one in 10 children were removed from their families and placed in foster homes, institutions and missions (Augoustinos

& LeCouteur, 2004, p. 237). When the children were removed the state government stopped all contact between the children and their families. Children who were forcibly removed were sent to both Kinchela Boys Home and Cootamundra Girls Home as well as to foster and adoptive families, missions and other institutions (Haskins, 2004). The children who were forcibly removed received almost no education and their labour was exploited. Indigenous children who were sent to these homes were taught farm labouring and domestic work, many of them were sent to the wealthy and became servants in their houses. (Haskins, 2004). In 1997 a report by the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, *Bringing them home* (Wilkie, 1997), pointed out that the treatment of Aboriginal people, including removing children forcibly from their families, was equal to that of genocide.

The Commonwealth Government held a national conference in 1937 and agreed that Indigenous people should be assimilated into the wider community (D. Armitage, 2005). This assimilation policy was created to make the "Indigenous problem" disappear by assimilating Indigenous people into Western society (A. Armitage, 1995). Furthermore, the policy was designed to take away Indigenous culture and it was hoped Indigenous identity would slowly die out (Moran, 2005). A motivation for assimilation was related to the White Australia policy so Australia could maintain national homogeneity (Moran, 2005).

The NSW *Aborigines Protection Act 1909* (NSW Government, 1909) made up a range of regulations that Indigenous people had to follow until it was repealed in 1969. It provided Aboriginal people of "mixed blood" to be issued with "certificates of exemption" (Kerin, 2005). These certificates of exemption meant some Indigenous people were released from the provisions of the Aborigines Protection Act and its regulations. These certificates, were often referred to as "dog tags", and they came at a price as individuals were forced to give up their family connections. They were forbidden to visit their own families and were jailed if caught doing so. Those who travelled away from their base needed an exemption certificate to allow them to leave the mission to go away and work. When they wanted to return home for family business like funerals, they had to get written permission to do so. The Welfare Board saw the increase in the number of certificates issued as proof of the success of its assimilation policy. This policy continued into the 1960s.

In the 1967 referendum it was voted that Indigenous people could now be counted as part of the census. Prior to this Indigenous people were classified as flora and fauna and were not included in the Australian Constitution of 1901. This understanding comes from the "primitive Aborigine" construct emerging from anthropology. It was not until 1967 that a referendum was held and the Australian Constitution was changed because 90% of

Australians voted for Indigenous people to be included in the constitution and counted in the census (Moreton-Robinson, 2009). This signified the beginning of rewriting the national narrative of Indigenous people (Bolt, 2009). However, despite the 1967 referendum to extend the rights of Indigenous people in Australia, the damage was already done. The disadvantages of past policies and treatment of Indigenous people are intergenerational and still impact Australian Indigenous people today.

### 2.3 ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER EDUCATION POLICIES

In Australia in the 1880s there were approximately 200 Aboriginal students enrolled in primary schools in both mainstream and reserve and mission schools. The government was committed to teaching Aboriginal students at this time as the NSW *Public Instruction Act 1880* was in place (Cleverley & Mooney, 2010). The Public Instruction Act allowed all students to attend school regardless of race or creed if they lived within the two-mile boundary of the school. The reserve and mission schools were not opened until the NSW Aborigines Protection Board was put in place in 1883. The reserve and mission schools were run by the Protection Board and staff often consisted of the mission managers' wives who were usually unqualified to teach (Cleverley & Mooney, 2010). This meant that Aboriginal students' literacy and numeracy levels were often limited to Year 3 or 4 level, as unqualified teachers were teaching reading, writing and arithmetic (J. Buckskin, 2012).

The Clean, Clad and Courteous policy was implemented in the 20th century by the Department of Education in NSW for all children attending government schools (Fletcher, 1989). Aboriginal families were offered clothing and rations as an incentive for their children to attend school at this time (Reynolds, 1996). This policy allowed all students to attend school and if they presented to school in a way that did not follow the Department's regulations with regard to health, hygiene and behaviour students were sent home (Reynolds, 1996). Anti-Aboriginal lobby groups rigorously opposed the Clean, Clad and Courteous policy and in 1902 the Exclusion on Demand policy was introduced (Fletcher, 1989). The Exclusion on Demand policy meant non-Indigenous people could ask for Aboriginal students to be excluded from the school (J. Buckskin, 2012). This policy was in place for decades and gave non-Indigenous parents authority to decide whether Aboriginal students in the community could have access to education. Foley (2003) highlights that the Exclusion on Demand policy was still in the NSW Teachers Handbook up until 1972. These policies embedded a sense of mistrust for Aboriginal people attending school during this time.

The sense of mistrust of teachers' attitudes and schools was passed on to successive generations of Aboriginal people in Australia (J. Bucksin, 2012). As a consequence of this mistrust many Aboriginal people limited their children's participation education as teachers often saw Aboriginal students as incapable of learning. This, in turn, saw teachers as markers of colonial oppression (J. Buckskin, 2012; Fletcher, 1989). Furthermore, there was a deficit view of Aboriginal students and their families by teachers (Beresford & Partington, 2003).

In 1978, the Commonwealth Department of Education affirmed that state and territory education departments needed to provide for the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their schools (Price, 2012). These needs were to be catered for in a variety of ways, including (a) employing support teachers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, (b) employing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher aides in schools, (c) providing curriculum materials specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, (d) arranging courses to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and (e) providing assistance for early childhood programs to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These services were made available through the financial assistance provided by the Commonwealth Department of Education.

In the late 1970s the Aboriginal Education Council (NSW) supported an initiative that saw an increase in placements of Aboriginal teacher aides in schools that had a large cohort of Aboriginal students. Today Aboriginal teacher aides are known as Indigenous Education Workers (IEWs), Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs), Aboriginal Education Assistants (AEAs), as well as many other titles. Aboriginal teacher aides provided support for teachers and school leaders as well as supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Price, 2012) However, some schools take advantage of having an extra employee in the school and relegate Aboriginal teacher aides to completing unskilled tasks around the school such as photocopying (Price, 2012).

The first Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP) was implemented in NSW in 1982 and focused on the advancement of Aboriginal communities and appreciation of Aboriginal cultures and societies by other Australians (NSW Department of School Education, 1982). This policy also aimed to address the multiple forms of discrimination in education towards Indigenous people (NSW Department of School Education, 1982). It was constructed in consultation with the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) and had input from the NSW Teachers Federation. There were five mandatory components that the 1982 AEP recommended schools to implement. These were: (a) consult with the Aboriginal community; (b) conduct staff awareness and developmental programs; (c) promote positive educational outcomes for

Aboriginal students; (d) add an Aboriginal perspective to subject areas; and (e) ensure that resource allocation is appropriate to enable Aboriginal perspectives/studies to be meaningfully implemented (NSW Department of School Education, 1982).

Not all schools implemented the 1982 NSW AEP. There were many reasons for them not taking the policy on but one of the main reasons given was that the school had "few or no Aboriginal students and/or community" (NSW AECG & NSW Department of Education & Training, 2004, p. 35). At this time, the NSW education system lacked structure for developing curriculum at the school level in regard to Aboriginal education (Cook, 1995; Perso, 2012; C. Wilson, 2016) and the AEP was not being implemented. This was the first time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives had been acknowledged in curriculum throughout NSW schools and there was a lack of knowledge on how teachers were to do this. Furthermore, policy reviews identified there was (a) insufficient support and preparation for teachers to know how to put an Indigenous perspective into the curriculum, (b) inadequate resources for teaching staff, (c) lack of accountability for schools regarding having to implement the policy, and (d) inadequate collaboration with traditional knowledge holders and communities (Cook, 1995).

In 1987, the AEP was made mandatory for all NSW schools by the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET). It became the responsibility of all NSW public school teachers to include Aboriginal knowledges and perspectives in their classrooms (Kleeman, 2012). Again many school administration teams did not think this policy applied to their school as they had few or no Aboriginal students enrolled in the school (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004).

During 1989, a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) was jointly developed by the states and territories and the Australian Commonwealth Government (Department of Education and Training [DET], 1989). The policy was formed for cooperation and collaboration among educational institutions, states, territories and the Commonwealth, in affiliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and outlined long-term goals for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education (DET, 1989). The policy was developed to "achieve broad equity between Aboriginal people and other Australians in access, participation and outcomes in all forms of education" (Hughes et al., 1988, p. 2). The NATSIEP was agreed upon by states and territories on January 1, 1990 and was supposed to be implemented in education institutions.

In 1996, the NSW AEP was revised (NSW Department of School Education, 1996) and it provided outcomes and performance strategies for all NSW DET staff to use in order to achieve

the NATSIEP goals for Indigenous education (J. Buckskin, 2012). Indigenous student outcomes and educating all students about Indigenous Australia were a priority for this policy. Schools were required to complete annual progress reports on Indigenous education (C. Wilson, 2016). This policy was developed for all staff, students and schools in NSW and was set up so that schools and Indigenous communities could develop strong relationships (Keenan, 2009). However, the policy was insufficiently put into practice as many teachers lacked training to implement it (Keenan, 2009).

During 2003 and 2004 an educational review of Aboriginal education in NSW schools took place. This review consulted with Indigenous communities and families as well as departmental staff, Principals and teachers. It was conducted so both Aboriginal people and non-Indigenous teachers and staff could have a "voice" in the education of Indigenous students (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004). However, the review found that policies in departmental schools were being inadequately implemented, Indigenous perspectives were limited and repetitious and there was minimal consultation with Indigenous families and communities (C. Wilson, 2016). From this review, recommendations were made and they included extending Indigenous perspectives to all subject areas and emphasising the significance of community knowledge. The review also recommended schools consult with Elders and the community, and that there be greater accountability for schools (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004).

A revised NSW Aboriginal Education and Training Policy was written in 2008. It was further revised in 2009 (Burridge &Chodkiewicz, 2012), and is the current AEP (NSW DET, 2008). The current policy focuses on the same areas as previous policies, emphasising the need for all students to learn about Aboriginal cultures and the responsibility for all staff to implement the policy. The NSW Department of Education and Communities, in a document titled *Aboriginal Education and Training Policy, Turning Policy into Action*, stated that the policy was developed "with the intent that it would be a living, organic and dynamic document" (NSW Department of Education and Communities, n.d., p. 1). The policy emphasises that Aboriginal education is everybody's business (NSW DET, 2008). It specifically broadened the accountability for policy outcomes designed to address the inconsistencies recognised in the 2004 review, and required all schools to follow national policy directions (Wilson, 2016).

States, territories and education ministers have produced a number of national Aboriginal education frameworks to work in conjunction with Aboriginal education policies. These frameworks include: *A National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres* 

Strait Islander Peoples 1996–2002 (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 1995), Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008 (MCEETYA, 2006), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014 (Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2011), and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015 (Education Council, 2015). Frameworks help educators implement policies in the classroom, including teaching a curriculum that accommodates cultural differences. However, Nakata (1995) and C. Wilson (2016) suggested that policy coordination and cultural difference clarification for disadvantage and low achievement overlooked the dominant structural and systemic deficiencies of Indigenous education.

# 2.3.1 Closing the Gap

The current Australian federal and state policy initiative is Closing the Gap (Council of Australian Governments, 2008). This strategy is a unified approach to closing the divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. This strategy was put in place because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are more likely to have a socio-economic disadvantage. In 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) committed \$4.6 billion in Indigenous-specific funding over 10 years to drive fundamental reforms in remote housing, health, early childhood development, jobs and improvements in remote service delivery (Russell, 2010).

Although many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have access to a good standard of living and life opportunities, a large proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience unacceptable levels of disadvantage in living standards, life expectancy, education, health and employment (Gray & Beresford, 2008). To break these cycles of disadvantage, research recognises that education is fundamental (J. Buckskin, 2012). Furthermore, Australia's Indigenous people have the worst overall rates of socio-economic disadvantage in the Western world (Gray & Beresford, 2008).

Research with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage indicates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians' life expectancy rates are, on average, 17.2 years less than the rest of the Australian population (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are less likely to own a home than non-Aboriginal people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander households generally have more people living in them compared to non-Aboriginal households, and in 2011 the average weekly income for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was \$460.00 compared to that of non-Aboriginal people at \$740.00 (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2011).

Australian states and territories and the federal government through COAG set up specific targets to try to end Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. These targets were developed for the Closing the Gap strategy and they are:

- (a) closing the life expectancy gap within a generation;
- (b) halving the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;
- (c) ensuring all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years;
- (d) halving the gap for Indigenous students in reading, writing and numeracy within a decade;
- (e) halving the gap for Indigenous people aged 20-24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and
- (f) halving the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade. (COAG, 2008, p. 8)

These targets have seven significant areas in which action is required (COAG, 2008):

- Early Childhood
- Schooling
- Health
- Economic Participation
- Healthy Homes
- Safe Communities
- Governance and Leadership.

These significant areas are interconnected and when improvements happen in one area other areas will be affected.

### 2.3.2 Australian National Curriculum

In 2013, a draft model of the Australian National Curriculum began being implemented in schools all over Australia. Until 2013 Australian schools used different curriculums according to their state. The Australian National Curriculum is targeted at all classes from Kindergarten (or Foundation) to Year 12. The Australian National Curriculum emerged from the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) and was agreed on by state and federal education ministers (Stinson & Saunders, 2016). The Australian National Curriculum specifies content and sequence of content by year level (Atweh & Singh, 2011).

It is mandated in the Australian National Curriculum that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are included in lessons. This is not just for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students but for all students "to engage in reconciliation, respect and recognition of the world's oldest continuous living cultures" (ACARA, 2015, Ethical understanding, para. 5). It is therefore appropriate that every teacher has a high level of cultural competency with regard to how to approach the teaching of Aboriginal content in a way that is respectful and does not reinforce negative stereotypes (Yunkaporta, 2009a).

However, many teachers do not have the cultural competency and knowledge to give an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander perspective in their classroom because of cultural differences between non-Indigenous teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Nakata, 2003). Furthermore, Lowe and Yunkaporta (2013) argued that Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing need to be learned through Aboriginal protocols, processes and systems. Craven, Halse, Marsh, Mooney, and Wilson-Miller (2005) stated that numerous teachers mentioned the need "to learn more about how to teach Aboriginal culture/history" (p. 54). Mooney, Halse, and Craven (2003) found that some non-Indigenous teachers felt uneasy about teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Research studies can confirm that many non-Indigenous teachers are still learning knowledge with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Santoro, Reid, Crawford, & Simpson, 2011; Zurzolo, 2010).

### 2.4 HISTORY OF ABORIGINAL EDUCATION OFFICERS

Little has been written about the role and the history of AEOs in Australia. However, what is clear is that there is no known role statement, policy or any other information on AEOs' role available prior to 1967 (Pearce, 2011). It is suggested that Aboriginal educators have been working in Australian schools since 1940 (MacGill, 2008). AEOs were employed in schools to contribute to Aboriginal students' education and to liaise with Aboriginal parents on behalf of the school (Gower et al., 2011).

In NSW the first AEOs were appointed in 1975 and were required to attend a 12-month training course. NSW was the first state to make training mandatory for AEOs. The training took place at Sydney University and had to be completed as a condition of employment. This training program was the first program for Aboriginal people at universities in Australia (Cleverley & Mooney, 2010). It was known as the Aboriginal Teacher Aide training program. Although the formal training that was given did not allow AEOs to gain a degree, this was not an issue for the participating AEOs. Furthermore, AEOs did not get the financial rewards that

other university graduates received when they completed their course and went into employment. The AEOs did, however, receive community recognition (Cleverley & Mooney, 2010). This training program empowered AEOs and enabled Aboriginal people to attend university.

The current role statement for AEOs in NSW schools was developed in 2010, in collaboration with the NSW Department of Education and the AECG. The 2010 AEO role statement (see Figure 2.2) defines that AEOs are responsible to the school Principal and are to work in collaboration with teachers to assist with Aboriginal students' learning and to work as part of a team to support Aboriginal students (NSW DET, 2010). It is important to note that AEOs are to perform duties as required by the Principal (Phillips, Phillips, Whatman, & McLaughlin, 2007).

#### ABORIGINAL EDUCATION OFFICERS (AEOs)

Responsible to the Principal or delegate for providing assistance to teachers, Aboriginal students and their families to support improved learning outcomes for Aboriginal students.

#### Statement of Duties

Working with teachers:

- to assist Aboriginal students in all school activities including excursions
- to discuss with Aboriginal parents the educational progress of their children
- to identify and develop resources to support the learning outcomes of Aboriginal students
- to assist in the development and implementation of personalised learning plans for Aboriginal students
- to support Aboriginal cultural awareness for all students with particular reference to Aboriginal students
- to help maintain effective relationships between Aboriginal parents, the Aboriginal community and school staff.

Working as part of a school team to support students:

- · in relation to their school participation and programs
- · in relation to their attendance and retention.

Liaising with the Principal and staff:

 on protocols for interacting with the Aboriginal community in relation to staff and Aboriginal students in the school and Aboriginal education activities.

#### Other Duties

Performing other related duties as required by the Principal.

Note: the school must not require an Aboriginal Education Officer to accept responsibility for class management and control, playground supervision or teaching students.

Figure 2.2. AEO role statement 2010 (NSW DET, 2010).

# 2.5 CONCLUSION

This chapter has discussed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander political and historical context since colonisation. The historical and political background in Australia has shaped Aboriginal education policies since colonisation and this has impacted on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the role AEOs play in schools. This chapter also discussed the Aboriginal education policies that have been implemented in schools for both students and AEOs. The next chapter reviews literature relating to the role AEOs undertake in the school context, the dimensions that influence AEOs in schools and AEOs' identity as educators, and theoretical frameworks that link to AEOs' identity.

# **Chapter 3: Literature Review**

The literature reviewed in this chapter is arranged under three themes relevant to Aboriginal Education Officers (AEOs): their role as an AEO; the dimensions that influence the role of AEOs; and AEOs' identity as educators. All three themes are relevant to AEOs and the role they play in schools and the challenges they experience when working between two knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western). Figure 3.1 displays an overview of the chapter.

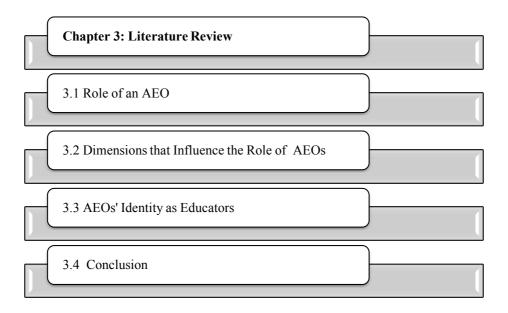


Figure 3.1. Overview of Chapter 3.

The purpose of this research is to explore AEOs' understanding of their role as educators. The role of an AEO is complex, and there is a confluence of factors that influence this role. First, AEOs work in schools that are dominated by Western knowledge systems. Second, nearly all the teachers and Principals working in these schools are non-Indigenous. Third, Indigenous parents, due to their own experiences of school, often feel intimated and alienated by school processes. Finally, most of the current research conducted in this area has predominantly involved non-Indigenous teachers with non-Indigenous researchers, giving their perspectives on AEOs' role and the partnership between AEOs and their teachers. Research pertaining to AEOs from an Indigenous perspective involving an Indigenous researcher is almost non-existent. This study contributes to this body of research as it involves an Indigenous researcher working in partnership with AEOs to explore what AEOs understand to be their role as an educator and the challenges they encounter in the role, and begins to tease out the dimensions that help them form this understanding. Thus this chapter focuses on the literature pertaining to this area, literature that purportedly influences this

understanding, and is relevant to the research problem. Figure 3.2 provides a diagrammatic overview of the themes of the literature review.

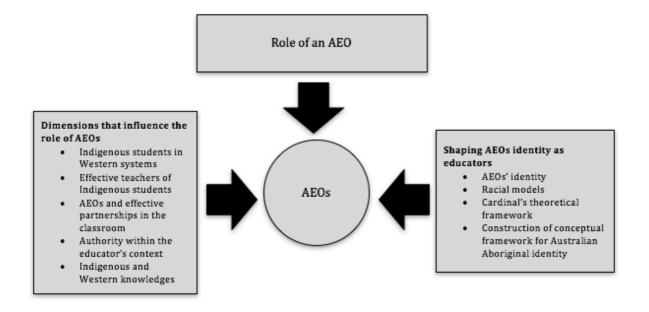


Figure 3.2. Overview of themes of the literature review.

### 3.1 ROLE OF AN AEO

AEOs' roles are diverse, as they are required to respond to the needs of the school in which they are employed. In some instances, their role results in "sundry" work. Even though they are employed to provide classroom support, because of the variety and diversity of tasks they are assigned, often very little time is spent in the classroom (Winkler, 2006). I have observed that this sundry work in schools includes cleaning the classroom (washing desks, washing walls, mopping floors, and cleaning cupboards), handing out school lunches, photocopying, sharpening pencils, setting up and tidying up activities, delivering messages, and escorting students to other areas of the school.

AEOs are frequently expected to manage the behaviour of Indigenous students, which can cause issues between AEOs and the community (MacGill, 2008). MacGill (2008) positions AEOs as working in the "border zones" between the values of schools and the expectation of Indigenous communities (P. Buckskin, 2015; Giroux, 2005; MacGill, 2008). At times AEOs can feel as though they are "caught" between the community and the school. AEOs are the voice for the community (Herbert, 2000). However, the community may even apply extra pressure on AEOs when the AEOs are asked to partake in disciplining Aboriginal students (MacGill, 2008).

The formal role that AEOs are expected to undertake in education contexts has changed over the past 50 years. A major goal since 1989 has been the "involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision making" (DET, 1989, p. 1). Part of this goal was to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisors, teacher assistants, home-school liaison officers, and other positions in education, including community people engaged in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages (DET, 1989). Although the goal was to have more Indigenous staff in schools, it does not necessarily mean that this has happened. Furthermore, it does not suggest that when Indigenous staff members are employed in schools the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff is strong (P. Buckskin, 2015). Additionally, the presence of Indigenous people does not necessarily mean that they have a say in the design and implementation of curriculum in the classroom. While it has been accepted that AEOs are ideally employed to integrate cultural knowledge in the classroom context under the directions of teachers (Funnell, 2012), confusion about their roles in the classroom still persists (D. Rigney, Rigney, & Hughes, 1998).

The role an AEO plays in the school has an important influence on Indigenous students' learning. Cameron (1973) found that the effective use of AEOs in the classroom resulted in: (a) an increase in students' standard of work, (b) a reduction of their language barriers, (c) the elimination of truancy, and (d) an increase in the education of AEOs as many were volunteering to undertake training courses to improve their classroom skills. Although Cameron (1973) described the role of a non-Indigenous teacher aide in positive terms, Funnell (2012) suggested that AEOs, in contrast to non-Indigenous teacher aides, still continually work with students who struggle with reading and writing, and their input into cultural issues has tended to be limited.

In many instances the problematic relationship between teachers and AEOs in these communities impacts on the AEOs' role. Non-Indigenous teachers' perception of the role of AEOs predominantly relates to behaviour management and not to assisting Indigenous students to learn (Warren et al., 2004). This would suggest that AEOs are predominantly granted authority over managing students' behaviour and supervising work tasks, and not over student learning activities (Warren et al., 2004). There are other examples in the literature of how AEOs are utilised. These include:

- supervising individuals or small groups of students;
- offering expertise in parental and cultural matters;

- providing input to curriculum resources;
- conducting orientation for new staff; and
- improving the security and confidence of students (More 1978; Valadian & Randell, 1980).

However, many teacher–AEO interactions are seen as impoverished and unjust (C. Sarra, 2003; Warren et al., 2004). While training is often provided for many AEOs, it is suggested that specific training is also needed for teachers working with AEOs (Salzberg & Morgan, 1995). It is believed that this could help improve teachers' attitudes towards AEOs and the types of tasks they delegate to AEOs in the classroom (MacGill & Blanch, 2013; Valadian & Randell, 1980).

The majority of the research that has been conducted presents data from a non-Indigenous teachers' perspective, and does not give a true description of the AEOs' role from their perspective (Funnell, 2012; MacGill, 2008). The research findings lack both an understanding of AEOs' worldview and an explanation that incorporates how AEOs feel and see their role (Funnell, 2012; MacGill, 2008). In fact, MacGill (2008) argued AEOs become "hyper-visible" in the classroom and are seen as a deficit in the findings when researchers do not use methodologies that incorporate Indigenous knowledges in their research paradigm. Consequently, this has shaped the perception of the role of AEOs in the literature through the "authorised view" of the non-Indigenous researcher (Campbell & Gregor, 2004).

Most of the findings with regard to the role of AEOs in the classroom have been delineated from the work undertaken by non-Indigenous researchers (Warren, Baturo, & Cooper, 2010; Funnell, 2012; MacGill, 2008). The premise that underpins this research is the belief that non-Indigenous researchers have the authority to present their point of view; however, they may misinterpret what Indigenous people say (Martin, 2008; Nakata, 2007a). In many cases Indigenous communities have been exploited and the research undertaken has no value to the community (Dodson, 1998). In addition, some research has been undertaken without Indigenous people's consent nor with regard to Indigenous people's rights (Martin, 2008). Undertaking a decolonised approach to research places the Indigenous voice central; that is, Indigenous people want to be heard and understood in research (L. Smith, 1999). Thus, Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are reconstructing research frameworks. Central to these frameworks is the notion that, "as Indigenous people we want to set boundaries on our engagement in research with non-Indigenous researchers" (Harslett, Harrison, Godfrey, Partington, & Richer, 1999, p. 1). Indigenous authorisation of research implies not only verifying areas culturally identified as important to research, but also validating the research

undertaken. Thus, AEOs should feel supported, comfortable, and empowered by the research completed around them.

Some non-Indigenous researchers have failed to positively impact on the role of AEOs (MacGill, 2008). One possible explanation for this lack of impact is the fact that these researchers have focused on Western ways of knowing that fail to fully reflect the needs of Indigenous communities (Baturo, Matthews, Underwood, Cooper, & Warren, 2008; Kendall, Sunderland, Barnett, Nalder, & Matthews, 2011). AEOs have had a limited voice in understanding their roles in a school context. Having a researcher who is Aboriginal allows for AEOs to give their perspectives of life in the school context. Thus this study contributes to the literature with regard to the role of AEOs in Australia and the effect that has on their identity as an educator from their own perspective. Furthermore, their voices are heard through an Indigenous lens.

# 3.2 DIMENSIONS THAT INFLUENCE THE ROLE OF AEOS

Literature reviewed in this section explores dimensions that influence the role of AEOs. There are many different influences on AEOs' roles. The five dimensions presented in this section are:

- 3.2.1 Indigenous students in Western systems;
- 3.2.2 Effective teachers of Indigenous students;
- 3.2.3 AEOs and effective partnerships in the classroom;
- 3.2.4 Authority within the educator's context; and
- 3.2.5 Indigenous and Western knowledges.

# 3.2.1 Indigenous students in Western systems

Curriculum developers and decision makers in Australia's education systems have been slow to acknowledge the different worldviews Indigenous students bring to school (Hewitt, 2000; Nakata, 2002). Australian educational curriculum developers have only acknowledged the value of Indigenous cultures and included them in curriculum documents in the past 20 years, despite the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education policies have been available in each state and territory for approximately 40 years (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). These recent policies require teachers to embed Indigenous perspectives across all key learning areas (Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013). Indigenous perspectives are still under-represented in Australian schools (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). However, it has been suggested non-

Indigenous teachers find it difficult to give an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective, as they do not possess Aboriginal knowledge (Pearson, 2009). Hence, Indigenous perspectives implemented in schools are rarely a true reflection of Indigenous knowledge as the majority of teaching staff is non-Indigenous. This has often led to non-Indigenous teachers giving their own perspective of Aboriginal people's knowledge (Martin, 2006).

Indigenous educators are seeking to change the way curriculum and pedagogical practices are implemented to cater for the way Indigenous students learn and to improve outcomes (S. Matthews, Howard, & Perry, 2003). Until recently Aboriginal people have not been given an opportunity to voice their perspectives on the educational developments imposed on themselves and their community. This is despite significant research that tells us that Indigenous students' learning needs differ greatly from those of non-Indigenous students (e.g., Harris, 1990; Klenowski, 2009; S. Matthews et al., 2003). In recent times, more attention has been given to the pedagogical practices utilised in Indigenous classrooms (St. Denis, 2010; Yunkaporta, 2009b). This move to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the curriculum has had the additional benefit of enhancing the educational experiences of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Ainsworth & McCrae, 2006; Warren & Miller, 2013; Yunkaporta, 2009a).

In schools the attitudes and motives of Indigenous students need to be taken into consideration when examining the dynamics of the classroom (Groves & Welsh, 2010; MacGill, 2008). For example, sharing knowledge is an important part of Indigenous culture. Thus, teachers may accuse students of cheating when they are actually cooperating in accordance with Aboriginal culture. Also, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are not big risk takers when it comes to their schoolwork (Cooper, Baturo, Warren, & Doig, 2004). They like to ensure their answers are correct, as they do not want to be embarrassed or made a fool of in front of their peers. Thus, often the reason why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students do not provide answers to questions when asked is about the notion of "shame" rather than about them not knowing (Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Gunstone, & Fanshawe, 2000). Shame is an Aboriginal social mechanism used to maintain the balance between independence and relatedness (Yunkaporta, 2009a, p. xii). This term is known in Standard English as shyness or embarrassment. Many non-Indigenous teachers fail to appreciate these nuances of their classroom. Nor do they effectively cater for their Indigenous students' needs (Purdie et al., 2000).

An effective learning environment for Indigenous students has many dimensions. These include Indigenous students seeing the importance of learning, and teachers providing "hands-

on" experiences which convey the social meaning of the idea (S. Matthews et al., 2003; St. Denis, 2010). The connections between symbols on paper and their representation of real-life situations must be made explicit to students (S. Matthews et al., 2003, p. 2). Additionally, classrooms that adopt affection and respect for each other, and provide opportunities that allow personal decision-making for Indigenous students, have greater potential to generate a context for meaningful learning (S. Matthews et al., 2003; St. Denis, 2010). This allows AEOs to use their knowledge and experience from the community and working in the school to establish meaningful, culturally safe learning, and an effective learning environment for Indigenous students (St. Denis, 2010).

This bi-culturalism has a profound significance on teaching and learning of Indigenous students. It requires educators to adopt pedagogies that connect Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous ways of learning (Yunkaporta, 2009a). However, research findings show that most Australian teachers have been unable to properly engage Indigenous students in learning. They have also been unable to use teaching processes that enable Indigenous students to show their strengths (Yunkaporta, 2009a). Furthermore, allowing students to be proud of their identity and cultural heritage is a characteristic of effective teaching (Pearson, 2009; Purdie, Dudgeon, & Walker, 2010; C. Sarra, 2011; G. Sarra, Matthews, Ewing, & Cooper, 2011; St. Denis, 2010). Two of Australia's Indigenous educators, Noel Pearson and Chris Sarra, whilst having differing views on how to support Indigenous learning, both purport that "two-way" learning is imperative to promoting culture and supporting educational outcomes for Indigenous students.

# 3.2.2 Effective teachers of Indigenous students

Effective teachers of Indigenous students understand Indigenous cultures and histories and their place in contemporary life (Harslett, Harrison, Godfrey, Partington, & Richer, 2000). They also develop good relationships with their students and their families and are flexible in adjusting to the needs of the students (Fanshawe, 1976; Harslett et al., 2000; Malin, 1994). According to Fanshawe (1976), effective teachers are warm and supportive; make realistic demands on students; act in a responsible manner; and are stimulating, respectful to culture, imaginative and original. The portrayal of a polite, caring and concerned teacher could be seen as sterile and overpowering in other cultural groups (Malin, 1994). Aboriginal Australians and non-Indigenous Australians perceive effective teaching in different ways and often these views clash (Malin, 1994). Other stakeholders (e.g., Stronger Smarter, 2014; What Works, 2012) have unique views of the characteristics of effective teaching of Indigenous students. These include:

(a) the students themselves, (b) Indigenous teachers, (c) Aboriginal Education Officers, and (d) non-Indigenous teachers.

Gervasoni, Hart, Crosswell, Hodges, and Parish's (2011) study with AEOs from Western Australia evidenced that effective teachers listen to and learn from community members and AEOs. Effective teachers use a variety of strategies to engage students in the learning process, including the use of AEOs in implementing learning activities. They also recognise that students need to be engaged in activities that are (a) relevant to the curriculum, and (b) connected with their learning outside of the classroom (Gervasoni et al., 2011; G. Sarra et al., 2011; St. Denis, 2010). However, to have an understanding of what engages Indigenous students to learn, effective teachers need to communicate with their AEOs (Gervasoni et al., 2011). Effective teachers provide visual, practical experiences that enable students to be successful learners with minimal use of worksheets (Gervasoni et al., 2011). In addition, they use AEOs in the classroom to assist in behaviour management, help students to achieve the learning outcomes, and ensure students' well-being is attended to. It has been evidenced that enhancing these dimensions of the AEO's role has the potential to contribute to teachers becoming more effective educators of Indigenous students (Partington, 2002; Santoro et al., 2011).

Effective teachers of Indigenous students demonstrate pedagogies that are based upon relationships rather than authority (St. Denis, 2010). The importance of teachers taking time to build a positive relationship with students is linked strongly to Fanshawe's characteristics (1976) of effective teaching. Effective teachers "know each student as an individual, as a cultural being and as a learner" (Munns, 1998, p. 178). Moreover, relationships are not the only characteristics of effective teaching. Indigenous teachers in St. Denis' (2010) study supported the notion that the content also needs to be "meaningful" and "real" with hands-on experiential learning. In addition, effective teachers possess passion, patience, dedication and compassion when teaching Indigenous students (Fanshawe, 1976; Malin, 1994; St. Denis, 2010).

However, all these dimensions of effective teachers have primarily been based on Western values in classrooms in urban areas. While there are some similarities between effective teaching of non-Indigenous students and of Indigenous students, there is variance in the contextualisation of learning experiences. Indigenous students often have different worldviews as compared to non-Indigenous students, and some Indigenous students have different worldviews compared to other Indigenous students. Therefore, learning experiences are different depending on the local area in which they occur and how the community is involved (St. Denis, 2010). In addition, there is limited literature written by Indigenous

educators to verify the characteristics of effective teaching of Indigenous students. These characteristics have been ascertained from papers written by non-Indigenous researchers, such as John Fanshawe, Gary Partington, Mort Harslett, Anne Gervasoni and Merridy Malin. Thus, there is a need for Indigenous researchers to have an input into how our people perceive the educational discourse.

In summary, while Indigenous students, Indigenous teachers, AEOs and non-Indigenous teachers have similar perspectives of effective teaching of Indigenous students, there are variances. All four groups agree that relationships with students and community are key characteristics of effective teaching. However, Indigenous students sometimes feel their teachers do not care about them (Godfrey, Partington, Richer, & Harslett, 2001). AEOs identified effective teachers as providing practical experiences that engage the students, experiences linked outside of the classroom (Gervasoni et al., 2011). Nevertheless, these authors do not provide examples of how these practical experiences can occur. Indigenous teachers also agree that effective teachers (a) link practical experiences to the cultural being of the student; and (b) have compassion, patience, passion and dedication. However, there are still many teachers of Indigenous students who do not fit Fanshawe's (1976) criteria of an effective teacher of Indigenous students (Partington, Richer, Godfrey, Harslett, & Harrison, 1999).

# 3.2.3 AEOs and effective partnerships in the classroom

Little is known in Australia about how teachers and AEOs work together or what factors contribute to and impact upon the development of collaborative working partnerships. While research findings show that most teachers are generally satisfied with their teacher assistants (Frank, Keith, & Steil, 1988), there is little evidence with regard to what this actually means. Of the limited literature considering these relationships within an Australian Indigenous setting, Malloch's (2003) ethnographical study highlights the importance of effective working partnerships between both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and AEOs. In his study Malloch (2003) found AEOs held powerful positions that included pre-class preparation with teachers, working independently with students, reinforcing concepts drawing from real-life contexts, and debriefing learning experiences in collaboration with classroom teachers to plan for the next day (Armour et al, 2016). Additionally, the AEOs' ability to facilitate students' learning was enhanced compared to when the teacher worked independently. Once teachers observed the students' success, the status of formal qualifications held by the AEOs was considered irrelevant (Malloch, 2003). One of the key factors to the success of this study was the teachers' and AEOs' collegial working environment. Together they planned the learning

environment within their classroom. It was also apparent that these teachers and their AEOs had a shared ownership of student learning.

In contrast to the aforementioned study, other research studies report that AEOs and teachers have very little time to interact and plan learning experiences. This in turn leads to ineffective classroom communication (French, 1998; Rueda & Monzo, 2002). This lack of communication results in teachers selecting low-level tasks for AEOs, as they have little confidence in the AEO's ability to complete more complex tasks without having prior detailed discussion of the learning experience with the AEO (French, 1998; Rueda & Monzo, 2002). Consequently, this lack of confidence can inhibit teachers and AEOs' ability to have a collaborative working partnership (Warren et al., 2010). In Indigenous settings, non-Indigenous teachers commonly dominate the learning environment. In their study focusing on the interactions between non-Indigenous teachers and AEOs in remote Australian schools, Warren et al. (2004) found that not one teacher acknowledged an equitable partnership with his/her AEO.

Effective partnerships between teachers and AEOs have the potential to improve teachers' confidence in AEOs and learning outcomes for Indigenous students. Armour, Warren, and Miller (2016) suggested that practices allowing AEOs to have equitable input into and roles in the learning experiences of Indigenous students results in better outcomes for all. These outcomes included improved relationships between AEOs and teachers, improved learning outcomes for students, and AEOs' enhanced confidence in their teaching strategies (Armour et al., 2016). An effective partnership between teachers and AEOs also augmented the teachers' knowledge about links to the community and what is needed to engage Indigenous students. Anecdotal comments were gathered from Lola (pseudonym), an AEO in a remote school in North Queensland. It would be morally negligent to present the background literature about Indigenous students and their learning without incorporating the views of the Indigenous educators who work so closely in the classrooms with the students. Lola was 28 years old and had worked at her school for eight years. Her school was a community school with 100% Indigenous students. If her partnerships with teachers were not respected, Lola stated that she "would still come to work but I would just switch off" (personal communication, October, 2012). Thus, in this situation Lola stated that she would not assist the teacher in any way in the classroom and would only help students. If the relationship in the classroom is not working then it may have a negative effect on students, as the AEO is the strong link between the teacher, the community, and the Indigenous students.

It also causes AEOs to not feel empowered in the classroom, if they are not communicating well with the teacher.

Interpersonal relationships can also cause problems when people work closely on a daily basis, especially in high-pressure, complex environments like schools (Salzberg & Morgan, 1995). These interpersonal difficulties may be intensified when, as is frequently the case, there is a large age discrepancy between individuals, and when the teacher and the AEO are from different cultures, socio-economic groups, and ethnic backgrounds. Yet AEOs should be seen as the key to teaching success in schools with Indigenous students (Clarke, 2000; Warren et al., 2004). Limited research exists with regard to how these relationships impact Indigenous students' learning, how AEOs mitigate these difficulties, or the effect working in these contexts has on AEOs' identity as educators in the school context. There is a particular lacuna in the literature with regard to AEOs' perspective on these issues.

# 3.2.4 Authority within the educator's context

There is wide support for the employment of AEOs to help improve the learning experiences of Indigenous students. It is also acknowledged that for this to be successful, educators need to work well together so students benefit positively. When educators do not work well together, students are affected negatively (J. Buckskin, 2012; MacGill, 2008). A lack of recognition of AEOs serves to keep Indigenous students disadvantaged in the education system, and prevents the potential of AEOs to be effective as powerful agents for the transformation of change in Indigenous education (MacGill, 2008). However, there is a paucity of literature pertaining to what enhances AEOs' effectiveness in a school context. In fact, AEOs' views are poorly represented in research in Australia (MacGill, 2008).

Teachers frequently believe that their role is to direct the AEO (Warren et al., 2010). They perceive that they are responsible for determining the duties AEOs conduct in their classrooms. These duties commonly consist of providing administrative assistance, behaviour management of Indigenous students, and providing on-on-one support to students who are identified as at-risk learners (Warren, Cooper, & Baturo, 2009). Thus it can be concluded that many teachers teaching in Indigenous contexts control all the learning in their classroom environments and provide little opportunity for AEOs to have any input into or ownership of students' learning. Warren et al. (2004) reported that very few AEOs were asked by teachers to contribute their ideas on how to best support Indigenous students' learning or asked to be involved in planning for students' learning. These teachers had little appreciation of the contributions AEOs make in other ways to teaching and learning, such as catering for Indigenous learning styles, and enhancing teachers' own cultural awareness and

understanding of their students' backgrounds. When considering teacher and AEOs' interactions, there needs to be an equal partnership, not just teacher-orientated partnerships (Warren et al., 2010). Without an equal partnership in the learning environment, an unbalanced perspective of power and authority in the Indigenous classroom setting occurs.

According to Weber (1978), power is the realisation of will against the resistance of recipients. When considering this definition of power there is usually an authoritative vertical hierarchy system (Warren & Quine, 2013). Within the school context, this hierarchy model consists of five key members of the school community: (a) the Principal, (b) Assistant Principals, (c) curriculum advisors, (d) classroom teachers, and (e) teacher assistants. Within an Indigenous community, dynamics between each of these levels are complex. The leadership team (Principal, Assistant Principal, curriculum advisor) are predominantly non-Indigenous and are usually only in the community for one to five years (Heslop, 2011). Additionally, the Indigenous community often views non-Indigenous Principals as outsiders (Warren et al., 2010). When considering Weber's model of authority, the Principal's position is regarded as having rational-legal authority. This authority is substantiated by the belief that there is a set of rules and that the authority of these rules lies with the leadership team (Weber, 1978). It aligns to a bureaucratic system. Within the classroom, the teacher's position also aligns with rational-legal authority; however, this is confined to within the limits of their classroom (Metz, 1978). Teacher assistants, and in particular AEOs, have little power and authority within the school and classroom setting. Consequently, power differences negatively impact on these relationships due to teacher assistants generally being in a minority group, with the AEOs often being seen as subordinate within the classroom setting (Warren & Quine, 2013).

Leadership within Indigenous contexts differs from non-Indigenous models of leadership, which are based on a Western perspective. Within Australia, Indigenous culture is not homogenous, rather it draws from two cultures, that of Australian Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Even within these two cultural groups there are further distinctions of history and culture (Dudgeon et al., 2010). Therefore, from an Indigenous perspective, it is imperative that leadership reflects the culture in which it is situated (d'Arbon, Fasoli, Frawley, & Ober, 2009). This has implications for the school system. The school hierarchy is predominantly constructed with a Western lens of power and authority. Thus, partnerships between teachers and AEOs in schools are complex due to differing belief systems (Warren et al., 2009). To date, little consideration has been given to the notion of power and authority from an Indigenous perspective within school systems.

Studies of Indigenous leadership paradigms report differing views on power and authority within Indigenous communities. Studies dating back as early as 1804 indicate that there were heads of families (Collins, King, & Bass, 1802). More recent literature suggests that leadership within Indigenous communities is based on kinship (Berndt & Berndt, 1965), and has a hierarchical structure (A. Smith, 1997; Tonkinson, 1991). Further research delineates that leadership is gender-specific, and age and knowledge are important components in defining positions within the leadership hierarchy (Ivory, 2008). From an Indigenous perspective, Aboriginal philosopher Mary Graham (2012) described social structures as a "soft hierarchy". That is, while the Elders are custodians of knowledge, decision-making is collective within the Indigenous community. Women and men both contribute, which results in a shared power and authority. This both aligns with and differs from past research, further evidencing the importance of context-specific leadership.

It is possible for AEOs with strong community authority to have authority transferred to the school context if the Principal provides support through empowerment opportunities (Baturo et al., 2007). Authority within the community can be problematic if there is an imbalance of power in a community where certain groups are marginalised. This in turn makes it tricky for schools to negotiate community politics. Weber (1978) described authority as power legitimised by recipients. Commonly, teachers' authority comes from the school community and AEOs' authority comes from the local community (Baturo et al., 2007; Warren et al., 2004). Furthermore, teachers struggle to allow AEOs to have authority in the classroom, even though they are well respected and have authority in the local community. Principals can change the way AEO authority is viewed in their school by supporting AEOs through professional development opportunities which in turn lead to teachers having higher expectations of their AEOs. Baturo et al. (2007) and Warren et al. (2004) found in their studies that professional development including AEOs affected the authority balance in the school. These effects generally lead to a better AEO-teacher partnership, which in turn balances the power relationships.

# 3.2.5 Indigenous and Western knowledge

Every person has a cultural worldview. This is how we understand and make sense of what happens around us. However, cultural worldviews may not be the same. In fact, they differ as a result of the experiences that affect your life (Martin, 2006). In Australia presently, an Anglo-Australian (Western) cultural worldview is the most dominant worldview (Hanlen, 2009), although this is changing as Australia has become more culturally diverse. However, since invasion Australia's government systems (judicial, education and bureaucratic) have

predominantly been based on a Western perspective and have developed distinctly Anglo-Australian characteristics. To understand the differences between Western and Indigenous worldviews we need to know how some key aspects of cultural ways of knowing in Western and Indigenous societies are viewed.

A researcher in Western knowledge philosophy was Descartes (Meyer, 1998) and he believed in the notion of "I think, therefore I am". This Western philosophy is egocentric in nature and is based on the needs, rights and desires of the individual (Hanlen, 2002; Meyer, 1998). The components that make up one's life in Western knowledges are education, work, leisure, family, health, and housing. These components are viewed as separated and conceptualised into different boxes (Hanlen, 2007). For the ease of understanding, Western knowledges can be described as square or linear (Hanlen, 2009; Yunkaporta, 2009b).

By contrast, Indigenous knowledges can be understood as circular or non-linear (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2012). Indigenous knowledge is learnt through sharing and is developed through interactions with others (Hanlen, 2009; Meyer, 1998). Education is learnt through family and engaging in the regularities in the world around us (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). The learning practice is a lifelong process involving imitation and practice, and others in the community rely on our learning of knowledge to support and pass on new learning. In Indigenous communities, the goals they want to achieve for the group are more important than the goals of the individual (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Hanlen, 2009). Indigenous knowledge allows us to understand the interconnectedness and our place in the community (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Martin, 2006; Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2012).

Thus, Indigenous and Western ways of knowing are two distinctively different knowledge systems. Western knowledge is compartmentalised. For example, Western knowledge is often decontextualised and taught in settings that are detached from the context, such as classrooms (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005). Whereas, Indigenous knowledge is taught through the direct experience as it happens and where it happens in the natural environment (Martin, 2006). These descriptions of each knowledge system indicate why Indigenous people struggle to understand Western knowledge and why non-Indigenous people struggle to understand Indigenous knowledge. Furthermore, Indigenous and Western knowledge systems are both diverse and constantly adapting and changing in response to new conditions.

In Australian schools, Indigenous students have been expected to learn Western worldviews. This happened because the curriculum is biased towards Western worldviews (Linkson, 1999), and the majority of teachers are from a Western background. These teachers have had very little exposure to Indigenous worldviews. They do not know how to implement

an Indigenous perspective into the curriculum (Rose, 2012). Furthermore, because teachers do not have an understanding of Indigenous worldviews, they find it hard to engage Indigenous students (Herbert, 2012). Langton (1993) recognised that historically Australian educational institutions have been entrenched in cultural and racial social engineering theories. L. Rigney (1999) added that Australian education systems' knowledge construction assumed that Indigenous Australians had no systems in place prior to Western invasion. Furthermore, this cultural arrogance in education systems has damaged Indigenous people in many ways (P. Buckskin, 2012; de Plevitz, 2007).

# 3.2.6 Concluding comments

The role of an AEO is diverse and has many dimensions that influence how it should be practised. AEOs have limited input into their role and this can cause some confusion with regard to what they are meant to be practising (P. Buckskin, Davis, & Hignett, 1994). However, Malloch (2003) claimed that Indigenous students have better outcomes when AEOs are involved in their learning. Furthermore, not all research has had positive impacts on AEOs' role; in fact, some research has impacted negatively on their role. Non-Indigenous researchers focusing on Western ways and having little understanding of Indigenous worldviews have given AEOs limited voice in the research, and this has had a negative impact.

Indigenous worldviews are very rarely acknowledged in Western systems. Indigenous educators are seeking to make sure Indigenous perspectives are being taught in the classroom by non-Indigenous teachers (Malezer & Sim, 2002). For teachers to be able to do this they are required to have an understanding of Indigenous culture and the needs of Indigenous students (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Riley & Genner, 2011). Furthermore, there is a necessity for "working with AEOs" to be incorporated in teacher training and professional development of existing teachers. By having training on how to work with AEOs, teachers can ensure they have equitable relationships with AEOs so as to cater for the best interests of Indigenous students from both worldviews. Finally, Indigenous and Western knowledges are two uniquely different knowledge systems, and this needs to be taken into consideration by Western systems.

The next section defines and reviews AEOs' identity as educators. Racial identity models are explored and theoretical frameworks reviewed.

#### 3.3 SHAPING AEOS' IDENTITY AS EDUCATORS

This section is complex as it defines and examines identity and racial development models. The section comprises six subsections that unpack identity and racial identity models relevant to Indigenous educators in Australia. These are:

- 3.3.1 Defining identity;
- 3.3.2 Racial models;
- 3.3.3 Implications for Australian Indigenous people;
- 3.3.4 Theoretical framework;
- 3.3.5 Cardinal's theoretical framework; and
- 3.3.6 Construction of conceptual framework for Australian Aboriginal identity.

## 3.3.1 Defining identity

Personal identity has been defined as personality attributes that are not shared with others (Hogg, Abrams, Otten, & Hinkle, 2004). Hogg et al. (2004) claimed that being part of a group helps to form one's personal identity. For example, one's personal identity develops social behaviours due to the relationships between self and society. People can have many personal identities, which can change quickly in response to contextual changes (Hogg et al., 2004). This aligns with social and identity theories that suggest "the self is reflexive in that it can take itself as an object and ... classify, or name itself in particular ways in relation to other social categories or classifications" (Stets & Burke, 2000, p. 224).

Hence social identity consists of a group of objects that have characteristics for which one is known or recognised (Ashforth & Mael, 1989). These characteristics of a social identity are parts of a structured society and are contrasting according to the social group that one belongs to (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). It is also recognised that each social group can have more or less power or status in society (Hogg et al., 2004). Thus, once in society, people's identities are built from the social categories exhibited by the group to which they belong. Once categorised into the social groups, people fulfil roles and expectations to maintain uniformity and perceptions amongst group members. However, each person has a unique combination of social categories, depending on their personal history (Kickett-Tucker & Coffin, 2011). Furthermore, how people see themselves as members of one group as compared to another group is often classified as one's racial identity. Racial identity is an important social identity to which people belong (Neville, Oyama, Odunewu, & Huggins, 2014).

#### 3.3.2 Racial models

A variety of models have been developed to describe racial identity. Janet Helms (1990) defined racial identity as:

A sense of group or collective identity based on one's *perception* that he or she shares a common racial heritage with a particular racial group ... racial development theory concerns the psychological implications of racial group membership. (p. 3)

Race can be expressed by criteria developed to classify humans into racial groupings. These criteria, according to Carter and Goodwin (1994), comprise skin colour, physical features, and language. Racial identity can also include ancestry, experience, practices, and habits (Alcoff, 1999). Thus racial groups to which you belong can classify you in society (Carter & Goodwin, 1994). These classifications influence where you live, where you are educated, your potential income, and whom you have relationships with. Racial identity is often based on what people look like, which has deep implications for how people are treated (Chavez & Guido-DiBrito, 1999). Additionally, the media, literature, and current events can influence the way society perceives racial identities. To have an understanding of racial identity for marginalised groups it is essential to understand the meaning and structures of oppression (Salazar & Abrams, 2005).

There are many different developmental models regarding racial identity, of which the model of "Whiteness" and "Blackness" is a part. Theoretical racial developmental models are made up of different stages. One such model, Nigrescence developed by William Cross in 1971, is a racial developmental model based on African Americans and their experiences of living in the United States of America (Cross, 1971). According to Cross (1971, 1978, 1991), his black racial development model originally consisted of five stages. As this Blackness developmental model is based on a marginalised group, the mechanisms of oppression have to be given thought when understanding these stages (Salazar & Abrams, 2005). Cross (1971) developed five stages but condensed it to four stages in 1991 by combining stages four and five. Furthermore, Cross and Fhagen-Smith (1996) updated Cross's (1971, 1991) model, and Cross and Vandiver (2001) expanded the Nigrescence identity development model. To gain a better understanding of the Nigrescence racial development model defined by Cross (1971), all five stages have been included below.

Stage 1: Pre-encounter. Initially Cross (1971) suggested individuals in the pre-encounter stage seek to assimilate and be accepted by the white community. Individuals also seek to actively or passively distance themselves from their racial group. They identify with white people and culture, and reject or devalue black people and culture. However, in 1991 Cross concluded that the pre-encounter stage is more complex than originally thought (Vandiver, Fhagen-Smith, Cokley, Cross, & Worrell, 2001). Two pre-encounter identity

clusters were named in the revised model and they are known as *assimilation* and *anti-black* (Worrell, Cross & Vandiver, 2001).

Stage 2: Encounter. This stage is characterised by an emotional personal experience, which fosters a need to change. Individuals in the encounter stage must break the relevance of their ideology and worldview (Ritchey, 2014). The encounter stage comprises two steps, encounter and personalise. In the encounter step an event or treatment individuals experience forces them to acknowledge how they view their race. The personalise step happens once an individual takes action as a result of the impact the encounter makes on the individual's worldview. The encounter does not have to be a negative encounter, but have personal significance and change the individual's thinking. Individuals are forced to focus on their identity as a member of a group.

Stage 3: Immersion/Emersion. Cross (1991) described this stage as "the most sensational aspect of Black identity development, for it represents the vortex of psychological Nigrescence" (Cross, 1991, pp. 201-202). When Cross (1991) reviewed the immersion/emersion stage, it did not change apart from the number of identities involved. In this stage individuals begin to reconstruct a new frame in regard to the new information they have learnt about their race. They change their old worldview. This stage is characterised by the simultaneous desire to surround one's self with symbols of one's racial identity and to avoid symbols of Whiteness. Individuals in this stage actively explore aspects of their own culture and history with support from people with the same racial background.

Cross (1991) defined immersion as "a strong powerful dominating sensation that is constantly energised by rage" (p. 203). This rage sits alongside the emotions of guilt and pride. However, if these emotions are left uncontrolled they can be quite destructive (Vandiver et al., 2001). The rage is centred on white people for deceiving them and themselves for letting the deception happen. Guilt happens because individuals feel as though they were tricked into downplaying the impact of race and for betraying blacks. Pride is developed about one's self, one's people and one's culture (Cross, 1991). Individuals view the way they are perceived through a different lens and decompress all negative stereotypes (Ritchey, 2014).

Stage 4: Internalisation. Individuals are working through a transition period where they are pinpointing the problems and challenges of a new identity (Ritchey, 2014). The individual overcomes effects of racism and develops a positive sense of identity. However, the internalised individual is willing to make meaningful friendships with people from other racial groups and minority groups who are respectful to their self-definition.

Stage 5: Commitment. Individuals maintain black identity while resisting the various forms of social oppression. The individual gains a general sense of commitment to the concerns of their own race as a group.

An individual progressively moves through black identity development from stage to stage, but can revisit an earlier stage as life experiences happen. Moreover, when revisiting the earlier stages it may be totally different to the first time they visited the stage (Vandiver et al., 2001). Moving through the stages helps black people to internalise positive thoughts about themselves and other racial groups (Constantine, Richardson, Benjamin & Wilson, 1998; Ritchey, 2014). Furthermore, people become aware of the history surrounding their own racial identity and can begin to educate their own community about their history. This gives them a sense of belonging and knowing who they are.

Helms (1984, 1986, 1990) adapted Cross's (1971) Nigrescence model in numerous ways. In the adapted model, Helms (1984, 1986, 1990) proposed that each stage be considered as an organisational template that holds racial information in regard to the individual's own worldview. She also suggested that the stages be viewed as having two modes or two forms of expression (Constantine et al., 1998). Helms (1994) further modified Cross's (1971) Nigrescence model by reconceptualising his five stages into what she called "ego statuses" (Constantine et al., 1998). The term ego status refers to the various differentiations of ego and is represented by an internal measure of self-worth and racial identity (Carter, 1996; Constantine et al., 1998). Furthermore, Helms (1984, 1986, 1990) and Cross's (1971, 1991) theories reflect that racial identity development is achieved when black Americans move through cognitive and behavioural processes in order to achieve a healthy racial identity (Constantine et al., 1998).

Whiteness is a social process and a form of racial identity that is embedded in Australia's social practices and institutions (Fredericks, 2009; Moreton-Robinson, 1999). Whiteness is a set of institutionalised practices which privilege certain ways of knowing (Nicoll, 2004). Whiteness is often referred to as mainstream and is a dominant status in Australian society (Moreton-Robinson, 1999). Howard-Wagner (2009) agrees that Whiteness is a position of authority. Whiteness oppresses, discriminates and marginalises non-white people (Case, 2012; Gunstone, 2009; Moreton-Robinson, 1999). It does not give a sense of belonging, especially to marginalised groups including Indigenous people of Australia. Whiteness is normalised through media, such as television shows, magazines, and advertisements only having white people represented (Moreton-Robinson, 1999). People of colour are rarely shown in the media, and when they are, they are shown as abnormal, inferior

or exotic (Moreton-Robinson, 1999). Whiteness as a process has become embedded in academic and political structures in Australia and this produces power differentiation (Haderer, 2013; Levine-Raskey, 2012).

Whiteness gives dominance and privilege to white people. It has been influential enough to uphold Indigenous people at a margin (Hickling-Hudson, 2005; Moreton-Robinson, 1999). Indigenous people and people from minority groups experience being treated as "less" or as "other" living in Whiteness (Fredericks, 2009). As the saying from the 1960s states, "if you are white you are all right, if you are brown hang around, and if you are black stay back" (Holt, 1999). So the inference is that if you had brown skin you were able to hang around and you may be able to conform to Whiteness ways (Holt, 1999). However, if your skin was black you were not allowed to hang around as being black-skinned was unacceptable (Holt, 1999). The whiteness of the skin was a valued quality to white people when judging Indigenous people (Bartlett, 1999). Furthermore, Whiteness is racialising whether it is intentional or not and the treatment of "others" is not equal (Moreton-Robinson, 1999; Yancy, 2012). Whiteness gives privilege and power to white people and promotes the belief that when Indigenous people speak out against Whiteness they have a chip on their shoulder or are too sensitive with regard to racism caused by Whiteness (Fredericks, 2009).

Whiteness studies with regard to educational institutions in Australia have become more prevalent in recent years by Indigenous researchers such as Fredericks (2009) and Gunstone (2009). However, these studies focused on Whiteness issues relating to tertiary education and Indigenous peoples (Rudolph, 2011). There is a paucity of literature in regard to Whiteness in schools in Australia. Fredericks (2009) argued that many institutions in Australia are reproducing privileged attitudes and processes, which continue to marginalise and exclude Indigenous people while claiming they are all about being inclusive of Indigenous people. Furthermore, Gunstone (2009) proposed that Whiteness filters through key areas of universities. These areas are interrelated and include policies, cultural awareness, research, curriculum and student support (Gunstone, 2009). Gunstone's (2009) and Frederick's (2009) studies challenge the policies and procedures universities have in place. Universities claim that they are inclusive environments, and white power and privilege impacts on identity formation (Rudolph, 2011).

Missing from the theories with regard to racial identity is the influence of ethnicity. Neville et al.'s (2014) study probed into the notion of belonging and how it acts as a form of support when it comes to racial identity. Neville et al. (2014) adopted the term racial-ethnic-cultural (REC) identity to help conceptualise racial identity and the interrelatedness that race,

ethnicity and culture share. Racial and ethnic identities have many conceptual overlaps. An understanding of racial identity is thus influenced to some extent by one's ethnicity (Neville et al., 2014).

# 3.3.3 Implications for Australian Indigenous people

Personal identity is developed through social behaviours and the relationships between one's self and society. Personal identities can change within the context one is in, and one can have more than one personal identity (Hogg et al., 2004). One's personal identity may change with whom he or she socialises. It is through this socialisation that one's social identity is formed. Thus, the characteristics of social identity change according to the particular social group the individual belongs to (Abrams & Hogg, 1988). Cross's (1971, 1991) Nigrescence racial identity model demonstrates how you may change your social identity when interacting with different social groups, particularly when the group is of a different race. While this model is based on African American experiences and not on experiences of Australian Indigenous educators, Cross's (1991) four stages still remain relevant. Nevertheless, Whiteness remains a form of racial identity found in most Australian institutions and social practices. It gives privilege to white people, resulting in the inequitable treatment of others (Fredericks, 2009; Moreton-Robinson, 1999). All of the above contribute to one's experience of identity.

The next section presents the development of a theoretical framework, which provides insights into the identity of Indigenous people as educators in the school context. This theoretical framework is used to drive the presentation of the data analysis of this thesis and the discussion of the subsequent findings.

#### 3.3.4 Theoretical framework

Identity is an important dimension of Indigenous people in Australia. It is one of the first discussions to take place between Indigenous people when they first meet. The discussion usually revolves around where you are from, who your family is and your links within the community (Clarke, 2000). These discussions are able to reaffirm your identity and your place within the community (Clarke, 2000). As a member of the Aboriginal community, I have experienced this discussion many times. However, Australian government policies have tried to fracture our identity through derogatory classifications such as "half-caste", and terms such as "nigger" and "coon". As a result many Indigenous people in Australia have not been able to discuss their identity because of the negative terminology associated with it. Many kinship systems have been broken and many Indigenous people are unable to connect with their identity due to government practices, which stripped people of their cultural and family links.

The invasion of Australia has had a significant impact on Indigenous identity. The policies that were implemented by the government and the attitudes of non-Indigenous people in regard to Indigeneity have meant that some aspects of Indigenous culture have significantly changed or have been lost (Clarke, 2000). The forced removal, disconnection, and breakdown of families, kinship networks and culture have hampered the identity formation of Indigenous people in Australia (Clarke, 2000). Many Indigenous people who were forcibly removed from their family have had their Indigenous identity hindered, as they were not permitted to identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. They were told not to identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander because it was thought by non-Indigenous people that they would have better success in life (Cunneen & MacDonald, 1997). The policies that were put in place, such as the protectionism and assimilation policies, have had devastating consequences for Indigenous people in Australia, particularly with regard to our identity.

While these historical dimensions have shaped our identity, research with regard to what Aboriginal identity is and how it is theoretically shaped is beginning to emerge (e.g., Bennett, 2016; Bolt, 2009; Cardinal, 2014). The next section shares the theoretical framework that emerged from Cardinal's research with Cree children from northern Alberta, Canada. The particular importance of this research is that it is framed within an education context, a context not too dissimilar to the one in which this present research took place.

### 3.3.5 Cardinal's theoretical framework

Cardinal (2014), from northern Alberta, Canada, is a Cree/Metis woman and an Assistant Professor at the University of Alberta. Her research areas are based around identity negotiations of Aboriginal children, youth and families in and out of schools. They involve narrative inquiry, Indigenous research, and research pertaining to teacher education. While Cardinal (2014) was completing her doctoral thesis, a theoretical framework with regard to the shaping of one's identity emerged from her data analysis. The data were collected from Indigenous school students in Canada. Narratives were created from the collected data. Four threads emerged from the data analysis. These threads are purported to underpin the development of Indigenous school students' identity as participants in an education context. These threads were named as multiplicity of early landscapes, embodied knowledge, world travelling, and living in liminality. The threads are interrelated and link to each other. Cardinal (2014) defines the threads as follows.

Thread 1: Multiplicity of early landscapes. We are shaped by our early landscapes (Greene, 1995). Caine (2010) recognises our identity formation begins at an early age. The influences of those around us are part of our early landscapes that form our identity.

Indigenous people are shaped at an early age to know where they are from and who their family is. Commonly, the first question asked when Indigenous people meet is "Where are you from?" so we can link geographical locations with family and friends (Yunkaporta, 2009a). Furthermore, the real question being asked is "Who are you?" (Cardinal, 2014).

An early landscape can link to places of belonging. It can link us to our roots such as our family, our ancestors, our relations, home, and place (McLeod, 1998) Geographic places in which people lived as a child can also be a part of early landscapes (Cardinal, 2014). Furthermore, there are multiple early landscapes for people from their childhood memories as they are continually moving. The landscapes in which people have lived, worked and travelled across shape their cultural orientations (Cardinal, 2014). Indigenous people in particular have strong links to their landscapes that help to form their identity (Bird Rose, 1996).

Thread 2: World travellers. Aboriginal people are world travellers and they know how to construct themselves in multiple worlds. They have developed an embodied knowing of how to travel into different worlds from their early landscape experiences (Lugones, 1987). However, Aboriginal people know that they are constructed differently in those worlds. For example, the Aboriginal person constructs one world and others who make stereotypical and judgmental perceptions construct another world (Huber, Murphy, & Clandinin, 2011; Lugones, 1987). Travelling between worlds and living more than one world at the same time is part of the parcel of an Aboriginal person's life (Cardinal, 2014; Lugones, 1987).

Thread 3: Liminality. Liminality is used as a way of classifying people. Noble and Walker (1997) define liminality as significantly disrupting one's internal sense of self or place within a social system. Liminal practices help us to increase our comprehension of our identity (Beech, 2011). Therefore, liminality can be described as a reconstruction of identity. The new identity that has been reconstructed is significantly meaningful for the individual and their community (Beech, 2011). However, Sturdy, Schwars, and Spicer (2006) argued that the uncertainty between boundaries and different landscapes (e.g., Indigenous and non-Indigenous), has been interpreted as liminal space where many of the rules and identities are suspended and there is an increased risk of insecurity.

Indigenous people can often find themselves in liminal space or situations where they feel uncertain about their identity. There is a feeling of lack of belonging and uncertainty of what one should be doing (Heilbrun, 1999). The liminal spaces Indigenous people find themselves in are generally unique and are linked to the multiple landscapes they have experienced (Cardinal, 2014). Liminal spaces occupied by some Indigenous people may at

times be when they are between destinies that are not designed for permanent occupation (Cardinal, 2014; Heilbrun, 1999).

In contrast to the notion of liminal spaces being limiting in nature, Rollock's (2012) British study evidences that liminality can be both limiting and empowering, depending on the educational context with which an Indigenous person is engaging. Rollock (2012) tells the story of how at her local state primary school pervasive racism was affecting both black teachers and black students. Additionally, there was no effort to extend black students in the curriculum. However, even though she was not being extended in the classroom, she felt a part of the school as most of the students lived in the same-sized houses, drove the same types of cars and had the same interests. She felt that the academic dimension was limiting but the school community was empowering. Rollock changed to a private school where she was extended in the classroom. However, she felt like an outsider due to a remark made by her teacher and the behaviour of some students. The words the teacher spoke were "I don't know where you come from but we don't do that sort of thing here" (Rollock, 2012, p. 69). This statement clearly placed Rollock on the outside. Moreover, it was made clear that Rollock could potentially be included if she adhered to the unwritten rules of the school. Hence, although she was empowered by the academic dimension, she felt limited by the school community itself.

Even though liminality can empower black people, there are unwritten rules that need to be abided by to be able to get a black voice heard. To be able to survive in the constructs of education systems that are based on Western knowledge systems, black people are not able to make their white colleagues feel uncomfortable (Rollock, 2012). There are systems that need to be followed in order to have a voice and non-Indigenous people have not set up these systems. The empowerment comes when these systems have been followed and a voice is heard about racially challenging procedures. However, the question for many is, is the voice being heard in an appropriate way?

Thread 4: Embodied knowledge. Our lives embody knowledge from experiences that we have been involved in. These experiences include a variety of interactions incorporating sensory experiences, moods, feelings and bodily interactions (Caine, 2010). It is a way of being and acting in the world without a conscious thought (Peile, 1998). For Aboriginal people, our knowledge is a way of living and it is symbolised into who we are (Cardinal, 2014). Embodied knowledge is passed on when the knowledge holder transfers it through social networks and community practice (Sodhi & Cohen, 2012).

Within this framework, Cardinal came to "an understanding of identity, as stories to live by" (Cardinal, 2014, p. 282), a "process of creating as self, and identity" (Greene, 1995, p. 20). "It is this idea of a process, a process that involves seeking narrative coherence, of always becoming, and of attending to our embodied knowing that shapes the ways I have come to think about stories to live by" (Cardinal, 2014, p. 282). Thus, though Cardinal in her research identified four threads (themes) that emerged with regard to shaping one's identity, these threads are "organic". Their nature is ever evolving, with each shaping each other. In order to try to illustrate this relationship, I have developed a depiction of Cardinal's model in Figure 3.3.

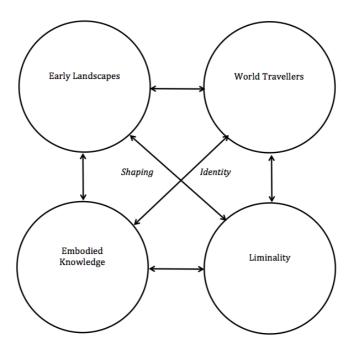


Figure 3.3. Cardinal's framework of shaping identity.

Central to Figure 3.3 is the notion of shaping identity, with each thread depicted as discrete circles. The two-way arrows are present in an attempt to illustrate the organic relationship between each thread, endeavouring to show how each thread influences the other. As our story evolves in one thread, it becomes embodied into who we are. It also impacts on our knowledge of ourselves in other threads. It has to be remembered that this framework evolved from a study set in the Canadian context, with Indigenous students from Alberta. Its applicability in helping us to understand the shaping of identity of AEOs as educators is unknown. Thus, the aim of the next section is to examine this framework from an Australian Indigenous perspective.

# 3.3.6 Construction of conceptual framework for Australian Aboriginal identity

A review of the literature pertaining to Australian Indigenous people identified four themes that are perceived to help shape the identity of Aboriginal people working within educational contexts. The literature was used to develop a conceptual framework using these four themes. This conceptual framework consisted of the themes *Country*, *Two-way strong*, *Cultural interface*, and *Ways of knowing*, *being and doing*. This section first synthesises the literature pertaining to each theme and then examines each theme in terms of the conceptual framework of Australian Aboriginal educators in a school context.

# **Country**

Australian Indigenous people's identity is linked to the interconnected concept of Country (land) and lore. Indigenous people have a story that is connected to their interrelated cultural being (Bird Rose, 1996). However, since colonisation some Indigenous people have lost their stories. While land, lore and story are not always visible for Indigenous people, this does not mean that they are not important. In fact, they are extremely important to Indigenous identity. Furthermore, no single one (land, lore and story) is more important than the other (Ganesharajah, 2009). They are all considered equal and interactive with each other. Connections to Country are a part of Indigenous people and who they are. Indigenous people are related to the mountains, headlands, creeks, waterholes and animals (Bird Rose, 1996). This relatedness determined our bloodlines.

Country has its own people, its own law (lore) and its own way of life. Being connected to Country links you to your stories and spirituality. Country has its own sacred and dangerous places that are different depending on where Country is located (Bird Rose, 1996). Country is cared for by its own people and those who destroy Country destroy themselves. Country has its own array of landscapes and is unique to its people. Other unique countries surround each Country and they work in relationship to ensure no Country is isolated. Each Country has its own way of life, and it strengthens Indigenous people's self-worth, self-esteem, self-identity, belonging and spiritual connection (Kingsley, Townsend, Henderson-Wilson, & Bolam, 2013). However, connection to Country goes beyond words. It is a spiritual and physical connection that guides the way we understand our Country. Spirituality and stories influence our cultural practices.

Country and story possess strong connections to personal well-being, identity and history. Family bloodlines are also connected to Country and story. We have a spiritual connection to our land, as it is a place of belonging and a way of believing. Country, story and family define who you are and give meaning to your existence. Country also encompasses customs and values guarded by our spirit ancestors. Stories from Country make up and empower our identity. Thus, from an Australian Indigenous perspective, our connection to Country is complex (Ganesharajah, 2009). Country makes us who we are and we can link

Country to our family, ancestors and stories. It is part of identity, our spirituality, and gives us a sense of belonging. We have specific knowledge of our Country, and we are embedded within this knowledge as our family and spiritual connection have been built over thousands of years (Kingsley et al., 2013).

Cardinal's (2014) thread of early landscapes links to Country. However, missing from her notion of early landscape is the spiritual connection. Just like Country, family, ancestors and relations are located within early landscapes as they influence our identity of where we are from and who we are.

# Two-way strong

Indigenous educational leaders recommend schools implement a two-way strong approach for Indigenous students and staff (Frawley & Fasoli, 2012; Pearson, 2005; C. Sarra, 2006; Yunupingu, 1991). Two-way strong is the mixing of Indigenous and Western knowledges (Harris & Malin, 1994; Pearson, 2005; C. Sarra, 2006). It does not necessarily entail an agreement of these two worldviews but rather an appreciation of both. In a two-way strong approach both paradigms are appreciated and respected so meaningful exchanges can occur (Frawley & Fasoli, 2012; Frawley, Fasoli, d'Arbon, & Ober, 2010; Marika, 1999; White, Ober, Frawley, & Bat, 2009). Being two-way strong is being able to travel between the two knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western) and being strong in both worlds (Ober, 2009; Pearson, 2005; C. Sarra, 2005; White et al., 2009). While there are many different interpretations of what two-way strong is, Aboriginal researchers have all come to the conclusion that two-way strong encapsulates being able to move and mix between Indigenous and Western cultures (Ober, 2009).

The mixing of Western and Indigenous knowledges allows students to be empowered in both Aboriginal identity and Western education (Harris, 1994; Marika, Ngurruwutthun, & White, 1992; Pearson, 2009; C. Sarra, 2005). The Yolngu people refer to this mixing as "Ganma" or both ways. Ganma is where two bodies of water (fresh and salt) come together. In Yolngu, water is a symbol of knowledge. This metaphor of mixing refers to the coming together of salt and fresh water. When this occurs there is a smooth blending of the two. Thus from this perspective knowledge systems of two cultures need to blend, to work together and respect each other (Marika et al., 1992; Ober, 2009). This approach enables teachers and learners to understand and respect the perspectives of other people and recognise that they are learning about other cultures and knowledge systems (Frawley & Fasoli, 2012). A two-way strong approach also provides opportunities for Indigenous identity to stay strong both at

school and at home (Rahman, 2013). It is developed in a way that is relevant to the learners concerned

For Indigenous students a two-way strong approach to learning must touch on the everyday lives of Indigenous people and be experiential, with a hands-on approach. (St. Denis, 2010). Fundamental to this learning is Elders and Indigenous people participating in teaching students both in the school setting and outside the school setting (St. Denis, 2010). Moreover, non-Indigenous teachers must consult with AEOs to ensure Indigenous students' needs are met, identity is strong and an equal balance of both cultures is being taught (C. Sarra, 2011). Two advocates for "Two-way strong – Orbiting between worlds" in the Australian context, Pearson (2009) and C. Sarra (2011), have differing standpoints on how this can best occur (Armour et al, 2016). Each of these perspectives is explored in turn.

Pearson (2009), the Chair of the Cape York Institute and an Aboriginal man from Cape York, northern Queensland, purports that Indigenous students need to be able to "orbit" between the Indigenous world and the Western world. Pearson implements education programs in his Cape York Institute schools that focus on cross-cultural engagement. "Crosscultural engagement is a distinct type of community-based engagement" (Armour et al, 2016, p. 422). It entails working in collaboration with people whose knowledge does not encourage Eurocentric worldviews (Hassel, 2005). Furthermore, it permits people to have a different way of creating, constructing and understanding knowledge (Nisbett, 2002). In Indigenous education, cross-cultural engagement refers to what Pearson calls "orbiting". Successful orbiting between the two worlds requires one to be confident in his/her own and broader culture and to move proficiently between the two worlds. Excelling in Western education while maintaining diverse languages and cultural knowledge are all part of orbiting between the Indigenous and Western worlds. Due to Aboriginal culture being suppressed since invasion, history has shown that education in Australia has not comprehended how to weave the two worlds (Pearson, 2009). However, Indigenous students need to be able to have the best of both worlds and this includes students keeping their cultural identity and receiving a quality education (Pearson, 2009).

Chris Sarra (2011), a former school Principal and now Executive Chairperson of the Stronger Smarter Institute (raising expectations for Indigenous students), suggests that being two-way strong for Indigenous people involves effectively operating in a Western world while preserving a strong cultural identity. He maintains building Indigenous students' self-esteem and confidence and having high expectations of teachers' and students' improves outcomes for students and contributes to them becoming two-way strong (Ball, 2004;

Greenberger & Padesky, 2015). The philosophy of Stronger Smarter encompasses his stance on two-way learning. It is an approach that involves entire school cultures and community engagement processes. Sarra's philosophy promotes a positive sense of identity, the value of community relationships and leadership that promotes and requests high expectations of teacher-student relationships. An important face of effective teaching and learning is having high expectations of the students you teach (Hattie, 2003). Sarra (2003, 2011) sees the promotion of a positive Indigenous identity as the key to students gaining confidence and effectively engaging in learning. Sarra (2005) also recognises that teachers' low expectations can reflect the negative stereotypes they hold towards Indigenous students. Both of these perspectives are reflected in Red Dirt Thinking.

Red Dirt Thinking is a research project that is investigating how remote education systems can best respond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community expectations and needs (Osborne, Lester, Minutjukur, & Tjitayi, 2013). As part of the Red Dirt project, reimagining of the curriculum in remote locations has occurred. This re-imagining falls into the concept of "blue sky". The blue sky concept is where you can dream about any possibility without any limitations. The curriculum re-imagining was developed in collaboration with Indigenous educators from remote locations. They asked the questions, "What matters for the young people from our area?" and "What would a contextualised, 'red dirt' curriculum look like if we were to re-imagine the core elements of remote education?" Red Dirt Thinking recognises that the Australian curriculum is dominant in mainstream Western outcomes (Osborne et al., 2013), and this is at odds with Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (L. Rigney, 1999). Teaching the Australian curriculum in very remote locations has proven very difficult (Osborne et al., 2013).

Red Dirt Thinking expresses the importance of education for Indigenous students in remote locations so they can gain an understanding of new ways. These new ways are supportive of Western ways. However, before Indigenous students learn new ways, they need to be strong in their own culture, language and law (Osborne et al., 2013). By having strong Indigenous knowledge in culture, language and law Indigenous students know where they belong and can relate to their communities. Furthermore, Indigenous knowledges should not be forgotten when learning these new ways (Osborne et al., 2013). It is suggested that Indigenous students in remote locations first learn to read and write in their own language. When they are confident in themselves they open up their spirits and have the courage to try new ways (Osborne et al., 2013). Thus, the Australian school curriculum needs to be built on top of the Indigenous knowledge (foundation) that is already in Indigenous communities.

So while the Indigenous educators on the Red Dirt Thinking project agree that being two-way strong is imperative, they believe that Indigenous children need to learn about their own Indigenous knowledges first. Once Indigenous children have learnt about their own culture such as Country, language and law they gain an understanding of their place in their own community (Osborne et al., 2013). So contextual learning needs to be implemented in schools with high Indigenous cohorts (Osborne et al., 2013). Once Indigenous students have an understanding of their own world, then they can learn about the wider world and learn Western ways, which are implemented in the Australian curriculum (Osborne et al., 2013).

Indigenous and Western worldviews need to be acknowledged when teaching Indigenous students but the students' cultural identity cannot be jeopardised. Instilling a deep sense of pride in the students' identity is a key component of a successful education (Ball, 2004; C. Matthews et al., 2005; C. Sarra, 2011). However, the Australian education system has not always provided "Indigenous students with positive images of Indigenous people and their culture" (C. Matthews et al, 2005, p. 514)). AEOs have an important role to play in this process. They contribute Indigenous knowledge in schools while non-Indigenous teachers contribute Western knowledge with regard to student learning. Two-way learning is a shared learning journey creating positive understandings of Indigenous and Western knowledges (Ober & Bat, 2007). The shared learning experiences between the two knowledges helps both parties to have a deeper understanding of two-way learning and the ability to move between the two knowledge systems (Miramontez, Benet-Martínez, & Nguyen 2008; Ober & Bat, 2007). It is both a professional and a learning commitment by the AEO and non-Indigenous teachers on the two-way learning journey that strengthen and empower identity (Marika-Mununggiriti, 1998). Thus, Indigenous knowledges have a legitimate place in the classroom, and non-Indigenous teachers can learn from not only AEOs but also their students.

In many school settings accomplishing the notion of Two-way strong – Orbiting between worlds for Indigenous students is burdened with difficulties. Historically Australian schools with large cohorts of Indigenous students are embedded within Western models of operating (Warren & Quine, 2013). Indigenous communities believe that education systems should reflect the culture in which they are situated and thus often see these models as inappropriate (Warren & Quine, 2013). Furthermore, Western models in Australian schools do not completely adopt the theories pertaining to two-way strong as they often do not acknowledge the influence culture has on education. In addition, they frequently ignore Indigenous perspectives and continue to honour and privilege Western perspectives (Frawley et al., 2010). Moreover, these Western models frequently exclude AEOs and community

members from having input in educational decisions for their children (Warren & Quine, 2013). It has been mandated that schools authentically consult and connect with AEOs and Indigenous community members about the teaching and learning of all subjects (MCEECDYA, 2011), but these consultations and connections are often superficial (Warren & Quine, 2013). In turn, this gives AEOs little influence in the decision making processes in their schools.

Thus, the perspectives presented by Indigenous researchers provide insights into what is meant by the term two-way learning. Pearson (2009) promotes fluency in culture and excelling in Western education as keys to success for Indigenous people, but he also shares concerns about how this fluency can be achieved within a Western education. C. Sarra (2011) consolidates a school vision to strengthen pride in Indigenous identity and culture. He also associates Aboriginality with intelligence, and for teachers to challenge their students and have high expectations. C. Matthews et al. (2005) broaden the notion of Indigenous culture to include the present context in which Indigenous people currently live. C. Matthews et al. go beyond the notion of the past and the past ways of learning to suggest that for present-day learning to be relevant to Indigenous students it needs to reflect the here and now. This here and now differs from place to place and from state to state. For example, Ganma is referred to as a "both-ways" education where Western mathematics and Yolngu mathematics are taught together (Jones, Kershaw, & Sparrow, 1996). In this context, Yolngu mathematics reflects Indigenous traditional culture. The context in this instance is Arnhem Land where this culture still exists. By contrast, in many Queensland communities there is a vast array of traditional cultures present due to the establishment of missions and the forced movement of Aboriginal people to these missions. C. Matthews et al. (2005) suggested that in this second instance, the context is the present context in which Indigenous people currently live.

Both ways of knowing (Indigenous and Western) are strongest when they are working together with neither knowledge system being dominant. Two-way strong is when Indigenous people move between Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems. When moving between these two knowledge systems there is no safe space to learn about each system. However, each knowledge system must be respectful to the other.

There are similarities to this concept and Cardinal's (2014) notion of liminality. However, liminality has a construct of space where one may feel "suspended" and no learning may occur. By contrast, two-way strong does not have the notion of liminal space. Thus, Two-way strong – Orbiting between worlds is more closely aligned with the construct of World travellers. In Cardinal's framework, World travellers move between different worlds

that are constructed differently. Although the Indigenous person travelling between the two worlds can be inhibiting (Cardinal, 2014), the notion of Two-way strong – Orbiting between two worlds suggests that this travelling in certain instances is a strength. Additionally, this travelling can come naturally to Indigenous people through their embodied knowledge that was constructed through their early landscapes (Cardinal, 2014).

# Cultural interface (Working at the interface between the two knowledge systems – a contested space)

There have been many studies and papers that have explored working at the cultural interface with regard to curriculum and Indigenous knowledge (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). However, there is a paucity of literature when it comes to AEOs working at the cultural interface in Western school systems in Australia. Generally, in Western school systems Indigenous knowledges and experiences are often positioned and referred to as "other", and Western knowledge systems are the dominant form of knowledge taught in schools (Kearney, McIntosh, Perry, Dockett, & Clayton, 2014; Nakata, 2007a). Furthermore, Nakata (2007a) states that without an understanding of competing knowledge systems, it is impossible to embed an Indigenous perspective.

Indigenous ways of knowing and Western ways of knowing are totally epistemologically and ontologically contrasting (Nakata, 2007b). When knowledge systems that inform people's worldviews are completely different, how things are seen and understood can be very different (Kearney et al., 2014). Within Australian schools, schools which are framed around Western knowledges acknowledging Indigenous knowledges in the school setting, Indigenous knowledges are not often understood and are frequently interpreted through a Western lens (Martin, 2003). Nakata's (2002) framework, based on the cultural interface, provides ways in which we can work around the conflicting approaches used in schools, approaches that often silence Indigenous experiences within a dominant Western framework (Grieves, 2009; Kearney et al., 2014). Furthermore, Nakata's framework does not entail abandoning Western cultural knowledge systems, but rather working within what Nakata terms as the "Cultural Interface", that is, the intersection between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. There are many challenges, permeations and tensions that emerge when Indigenous and Western knowledges come together (Day, Nakata, Nakata, & Martin, 2015). Nakata (2007b) defines the cultural interface from a Torres Strait Islander perspective as:

The Cultural Interface is constituted by points of intersecting trajectories. It is a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space of dynamic relations constituted by the intersections of time, place, distance, different systems of thought, competing and

contesting discourses within and between different knowledge traditions, and different systems of social, economic and political organisation. It is a space of many shifting and complex intersections between different people with different histories, experiences, languages, agendas, aspirations and responses. As much as it is currently overlaid by various theories, narratives and arguments that work to produce cohesive, consensual and co-operative social practices, it is also a space that abounds with contradictions, ambiguities, conflicts and contestation of meanings that emerge from these various shifting intersections. (p. 199)

AEOs are continually working at the cultural interface of both Indigenous and Western knowledges. As Nakata (2002) explains, the cultural interface shapes our lives. It is a place where we live and learn. AEOs in schools working at the interface have to use both Indigenous ways (traditional forms and ways of knowing and non-traditional) and Western ways as a blend of both has become their lifeworld (Nakata, 2002). However, there are many conflicting and competing practices that AEOs have to endure in their role when working at the cultural interface (Nakata, 2007a). Subsequently, there has been limited research into AEOs' roles and what challenges they have to endure whilst working at the cultural interface in Western school systems.

Nakata's (2007b) cultural interface theory represents a contested space in which learning can happen for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This space can have constraints as well as possibilities, where choices are made around these constraints or possibilities (Nakata, 2007b). For people learning at the interface, new knowledge is given priority. Moreover, this new knowledge can be contested, negotiated and wrangled respectfully (Nakata, 2007b). Furthermore, the interface can be a place for unlearning and some people may struggle with this (McGloin, 2009). Indigenous people are challenged to work between two knowledge systems as they navigate and negotiate Western knowledges in everyday life (Nakata, 2007b).

Although schools are increasingly acknowledging Indigenous knowledge systems, there are still tensions and clashes with Western knowledges (Day et al., 2015; Hauser, Howlett, & Matthews, 2009). In addition, little is written about the impact that working in the contested space of the cultural interface has on Indigenous personnel working in schools. Hauser et al. (2009) found that Indigenising the curriculum in some Canadian universities has failed. This failure was seen to be due to the universities not being reflexive enough and challenging the limitations their structures imposed upon Indigenous ways of knowing. The universities upheld practices that continued to embed the hegemony of Western knowledges (Hauser et al., 2009).

Nakata's (2007b) cultural interface is made up of different knowledge systems that have a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space for learning about each knowledge system. There is mutual respect for each knowledge system, and there are many shifting and complex intersections (Nakata, 2007b). These challenges come as different people have differing histories, experiences, agendas and responses (Nakata, 2007b). What one learns from each knowledge system is not just used in one space (e.g., at work or school). But additionally, being at the cultural interface can disrupt your sense of who you are and where you are.

Cardinal's (2014) liminality is made up of different knowledge systems that have a liminal space in between them, a space that people cross over to become part of other knowledge systems. There is no safe space for learning and people may not have an understanding of the knowledge system when they cross over. Thus, the notion of cultural interface as suggested by Nakata is in tune with Cardinal's theme of liminality.

# Ways of knowing, being and doing

Martin (2003) is an Aboriginal academic and Noonuccal woman with family links to North Stradbroke Island and Carnarvon Gorge, Queensland, Australia. Martin (2003) developed a theoretical framework based on her Quandamooka worldview. This theoretical framework has three main constructs. She identifies these constructs as Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being, and Ways of Doing (Martin, 2003). The ways of knowing, being and doing are linked and have a process to follow. The process is related and connected (Martin, 2003). The first establishes through law what is known about the entities; the second establishes relationship between and amongst the entities; and the third acts in ways for continuing and maintaining these relations (Martin, 2003). Thus, Martin's (2003) theory is known as relatedness or ways of knowing, being and doing.

Ways of knowing entails a process that is linked to ontology. It recognises the many ways that learning takes place (Martin, 2003). Indigenous people come to know through stories and knowledges shared by our spiritual beings, ancestors and lived experiences (Battiste & Henderson, 2000). Our learning takes place in many different contexts, times and places and links to the entities of the land, animals, water and people (Martin, 2003). The knowledge passed on must have meaning and purpose (Martin, 2003). If the knowledge is not used then it is not necessary for it to be passed on (Martin, 2003). Furthermore, each person has a role to play in passing knowledge about the entities. No one person or entity knows more than another. This keeps the entities relational (Martin, 2003).

Ways of being are relational and pertain to how people are a part of the world, and exist in a system of relationships amongst entities (Martin, 2003). We share and protect and have

empathy for all living things in our world (Kincheloe, 2006; Martin, 2003). The relationships amongst these entities are reciprocal (Martin, 2003). Today we interact with Indigenous people in many different contexts, whereas once upon a time our ways of being were exercised on Country (Martin, 2003). This interaction with Indigenous people enables us to begin "establishing identities, interests and connections to determine our relatedness" (Martin, 2003, p. 11). Our ways of being are forever evolving as contexts change, and we draw from knowledge passed on from Elders and family as proper ways of being (Martin, 2003).

Ways of doing refers to what we do with the knowledge we learn from our ways of knowing and ways of being. Ways of doing take place in our languages, art, ceremonies, and traditions (Martin, 2003). Ways of doing are representative of our group identity and individual identity as well as the individual and group roles we partake in. Our existence and behaviours construct our ways of being and ways of knowing. Furthermore, even though Western worldviews and constructs have infiltrated through our existence, we have never given away or lost our ways of being and knowing and this is demonstrated through our ways of doing (Martin, 2003).

Indigenous knowledge is a way of living. It is embodied in who we are as Aboriginal Australians (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Cardinal, 2014). Martin's (2003) Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing are from an Aboriginal (Quandamooka) worldview that is embodied into the Quandamooka people from Stradbroke Island. This knowledge is interrelated and is embodied through experiences and actions that occur within our world (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Martin, 2003). There are roles for Elders, family and community members to make these experiences and actions occur. Furthermore, we can only represent our worlds and articulate our experiences learnt from our Elders, family and community members (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Martin, 2003). This is an important part of the process of sharing knowledge (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Martin's (2003) ways of knowing, being and doing align with Cardinal's (2014) embodied knowledge, as they both embody knowledge from experience.

Thus, from the preceding synthesis of the literature I am conjecturing that, like Cardinal's (2014) framework, the Australian Aboriginal framework of shaping identity within an education context consists of four interrelated themes, and these themes are strongly linked to the themes of Early landscapes, World travellers, Embodied knowledge and Liminality. Figure 3.4 presents a summary of the Australian Aboriginal educator's identity framework as educators in a Western system. The themes in the framework are *Country*, *Two-way learning*, *Cultural interface* and *Ways of knowing*, *being and doing*.

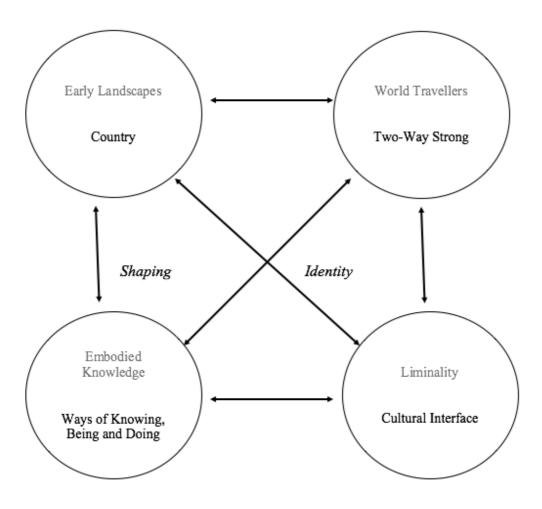


Figure 3.4. Australian Aboriginal educator's identity conceptual framework.

The discrete circles in this diagram depict the notion of shaping the identity of AEOs as educators in the school context. The two-way arrows used between each thread in the Aboriginal educator's framework illustrate the relationship between the circles and how they influence each other. The threads in this framework have been developed by different Australian Indigenous academics as important dimensions of Indigenous education. This conceptual framework helped to drive the analysis of data collected in this study. The data were broken down into individual themes and analysed. These themes were then used to structure the case studies in Chapter 5 using the subheadings Country, Two-way strong and Working at the interface. Ways of knowing, being and doing was also used in the theming and in constructing the case studies. However, they are not necessarily sequenced in this order in the case studies, as the case studies are structured to make the stories flow. There is also a theme of understanding the role AEOs have in schools. Finally, this Australian Aboriginal identity framework was used to assist the discussion of the findings with regard to the literature.

#### 3.4 CONCLUSION

The central object of this research was to focus upon the personal experiences of four AEOs. Through a cyclic process three key themes were identified from the literature. The first two were initially identified as the role of an AEO, and dimensions that influence that role. The Aboriginal educator's identity conceptual framework was developed from existing literature and was used to guide the data collection. The case studies are also themed according to the Aboriginal educator's identity framework.

This chapter has summarised and highlighted the important elements in the literature across three main areas: the role of an AEO, dimensions that influence an AEO's role, and defining and shaping AEOs' identity as educators. A multiplicity of theories and practices have influenced the role and identity of AEOs. Some of these are diverse and contradictory. This is an important area of the literature as this study considers what AEOs understand to be their role as educators and the challenges they face. The review has highlighted the need for further understanding of the importance of AEOs' roles in the school context. Further, the chapter has highlighted gaps in knowledge and understanding of AEOs' roles and the identity of AEOs in the school context.

As a researcher I wanted to give voice to AEOs about their perceptions of their role. In particular, I chose to focus on schools in rural/regional locations. This choice was based on the relationships that I already have in this context, as relationships are a fundament of Indigenous research methodologies. Additionally, in the past a lot of research that has included Indigenous people in the research process has been based in remote settings. A key feature of this study was to listen to AEOs and document their stories about their journey as an AEO. The AEOs and I yarned about their role from when they first started to the present. These yarns included their background stories, challenges and positives that are in the role, what they do in their role and how their role has changed over the years. This led to the formation of the research question and accompanying sub-questions:

What do AEOs understand to be their role as educators?

What challenges do AEOs encounter in their role as educators?

Where does identity as an educator configure into AEOs' understanding of their role?

Finally, the literature that examined the influences on AEOs' role and their identity in the school context provided a background to understanding the role AEOs have in schools. The next chapter outlines the research design required to address the research question.

# **Chapter 4: Research Design**

Building on the review of literature in Chapter 3, this chapter rationalises and describes the design adopted for the research. The research design has been determined by the nature of the research problem. An interpretive research paradigm was adopted as this study explored what AEOs understand to be their role as educators and the challenges they face. The research question and sub-questions, which focus the research, were:

- What do AEOs understand to be their role as educators?
  - What challenges do AEOs encounter in their role as educators?
  - Where does identity as an educator configure into AEOs' understanding of their role?

This chapter provides an overview of the theoretical framework chosen to drive the design of the research and research methodology. It also presents a justification for the data collection strategies and methods of data analysis, and addresses the trustworthiness of the study. Figure 4.1 gives an overview of the chapter.

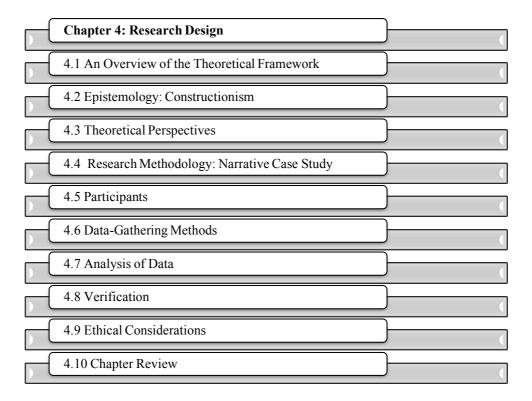


Figure 4.1. Overview of Chapter 4.

#### 4.1 AN OVERVIEW OF THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study adopted an interpretive research paradigm to investigate how AEOs understand their role in the school context. An interpretivist paradigm recognises participants' backgrounds and experiences. Interpretive research accepts that reality is socially constructed on culture, social context and language and this influences the construction of knowledge (Gibbons & Sanderson, 2002). Therefore, the researcher must probe the participants' personal experiences and points of view, and come to an understanding how these views are formed. Schwandt (1994) described this as *sensitising concepts* that steer researchers towards a particular outlook. It allows the researcher to make use of data based on the participants' personal experiences that are provided through interviewing and yarning (informal conversations conducted in a relaxed way).

Most qualitative research comes from an interpretive paradigm, which can be described as relying upon the "co-researchers' views of the situation being studied" (Creswell, 2003, p. 8). The term co-researchers was adopted for this study as the participants were offering their own interpretation of the researcher's findings (Boylorn, 2008). An interpretivist perspective acknowledges and recognises the role of narrating the story between the researcher and the co-researchers. The words the researcher analyses from the text (transcripts) are a *re-storying* of a story told by the co-researchers (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Interpreting yarning and stories that occur between the researcher and the co-researchers constructs new understandings and knowledge about the phenomena. Thus, by utilising the interpretive paradigm for this study, new understandings are constructed with regard to what AEOs understand as their role and the challenges they encounter as educators.

An interpretivist approach includes reflexivity (Creswell, 2012) and accommodates the fact that the narrated story and the analysed dialogue are told from the AEOs' and researcher's perspective (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). By observing and recording AEOs' stories, the narrative case studies reflect the researcher's perspective (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The researcher constructed and reconstructed the analysed quotes, and with the co-researchers constructed the stories that they wanted to tell.

The epistemology that underpinned this study was constructionism. The research design adopted the theoretical perspectives of Indigenous research perspectives and insider-outsider theory. A narrative case study approach was utilised to orchestrate the gathering of data through yarning sessions and arts-based inquiry to build relationships with the AEOs. Table 4.1 presents an overview of the theoretical framework of the study.

Table 4.1

Theoretical Framework of the Study

EPISTEMOLOGY	Constructionism
THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES	Indigenous research paradigm Insider-outsider theory
METHODOLOGY	Narrative case study Co-researcher
METHODS	Yarning sessions Arts-based inquiry using artefacts

#### 4.2 EPISTEMOLOGY: CONSTRUCTIONISM

Constructionism asserts that knowledge is built by, for, and between members of a broad community. As Crotty (1998) argued, meaningful reality is "constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting" (p. 43). That reality can be different for each of us based on our unique experiences and meaningful interactions with human beings (Creswell, 2012). Unlike objectivist perspectives that focus on external reality, a constructionist perspective seeks to understand how feelings and beliefs influence the ways in which humans develop subjective meanings (Neuman, 2006).

From a constructionism perspective, knowledge is created through interactions with others. The relationship between AEOs and the researcher impacted on the knowledge construction in this study. It is acknowledged that the researcher came from a particular understanding of the social world the AEOs were exploring; it is in itself a construction of social reality (Bryman, 2001; Crotty, 1998). The relationships and interactions that occurred between the researcher and the co-researchers allowed "truth" or knowledge to be constructed and reconstructed (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Thus, research from this perspective provided a platform for interpreting the conversations and interactions that occurred between the researcher and co-researchers.

Constructionism was adopted for this study to determine what AEOs understand as their role and the challenges they encounter in the school context. This epistemological stance was utilised for this study because it acknowledges that people's experiences and interpretations influence how knowledge is constructed. As the co-researchers are Aboriginal, it was essential to acknowledge their own experiences and interpretations. Indigenous people's views differ from those of non-Indigenous people because of "their experiences, histories, cultures, and values" (L. Rigney, 1999, p. 114). Indigenous cultures are formed through the nature of beliefs, values and social practices involving relationships with the land and each

other, and this process is often cyclical (S. Wilson, 2001). Knowledge and "reality" are constructed through storytelling and connection to the land (Martin, 2003). As the coresearchers in this study are Aboriginal Australians, it was important that the research paradigm and methodology were culturally appropriate.

# 4.3 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES

Two theoretical perspectives were adopted for this study: Indigenous research paradigm and insider-outsider theory.

# 4.3.1 Indigenous research paradigm

Indigenous methodologies were a necessary inclusion in this study due to the cultural heritage of the co-researchers and the contexts in which they work. By adopting an Indigenous research paradigm, the research design honoured cultural dimensions such as Aboriginal knowledge and ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin, 2003). As such, data-gathering techniques were informed by an Indigenous research paradigm to ensure that they were culturally appropriate.

Aboriginal people think and construct knowledge about the world they live in a variety of ways (Martin, 2008; S. Wilson, 2001). To put all Aboriginal people into the one "basket" is not a true reflection of the diversity of Aboriginal knowledge. Aboriginal peoples have rich and diverse cultures based on a spiritual relationship with their land (Martin, 2008). Depending on the location and clan groups, knowledge differs in the way Aboriginal people view the world (Martin, 2008). Aboriginal people draw upon their knowledges, beliefs, behaviours, experiences and realities of their people and land. Knowledge is taught and reproduced through processes of listening, sensing, watching, waiting, observing, exchanging, sharing, conceptualising, assessing, modelling, engaging and applying (Martin, 2003, pp.207). More than just information and facts are shared in this process.

An Indigenous research paradigm acknowledges that knowledge is essentially relational. Knowledge is not only shared among people but also amongst creation, animals, plants and cosmos (Martin, 2008; S. Wilson, 2001). All entities including Aboriginal groups, the universe, and the earth are interrelated, and these entities influence the way Aboriginal people think, feel, live and learn (Steinhauer, 2002). The Indigenous nature of being is very different from the Western nature of being. The latter tends to show the marginalisation of Aboriginal people by traditional Western methodological research. The guiding principles of the Indigenous research paradigm are to ensure cultural appropriateness. These principles are:

- Recognising [Indigenous] world views, [Indigenous] knowledge and [Indigenous] realities as distinctive and vital for [Indigenous] existence and survival
- Honouring [Indigenous] social mores as essential processes through which (Indigenous
  people) live, learn and situate (themselves) as Aboriginal people in their own lands and
  when in the lands of other Aboriginal people
- Emphasising social, historical and political contexts which shape [Indigenous] experiences, lives, positions and futures
- Privileging the voices, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people and Aboriginal lands.
   (Martin, 2003, p. 205)

Aboriginal perspectives are commonly incorporated into research theoretical frameworks (e.g., Martin, 2003; S. Wilson, 2001). An understanding of Indigenous paradigms is important to move beyond surface level comprehension of Indigenous knowledge. In Western paradigms the researcher is an individual in search of knowledge and knowledge can be owned (S. Wilson, 2001). In an Indigenous research paradigm concepts or ideas are not as important as the relationship between the researcher and participants to the concept or idea (Martin, 2003; S. Wilson, 2001).

The Indigenous paradigm is based on relationship building not only between researcher and co-researchers but also within the cosmos (Martin, 2003; S. Wilson, 2001). In making meaning from these relationships the ways in which participants represent their understanding of the world has an influence on what they are able to say about it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Employing yarning sessions with the AEO co-researchers was one way of investigating their perceptions and attitudes. In addition, an arts-based inquiry was offered as an option to provide a "kinaesthetic balance" for co-researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 686).

Dr Shawn Wilson, a Canadian researcher in Indigenous methodologies and epistemologies, proposed a change from research with Indigenous perspectives to research from an Indigenous paradigm (Wilson, personal communication, November, 2012). He explained there is a paucity in the literature on Indigenous methods of data collection and analysis. Indigenous methods of data collection and analysis are not just the researcher gaining information from people, but building ideas and relationships as well and, in turn, growing traditional knowledges.

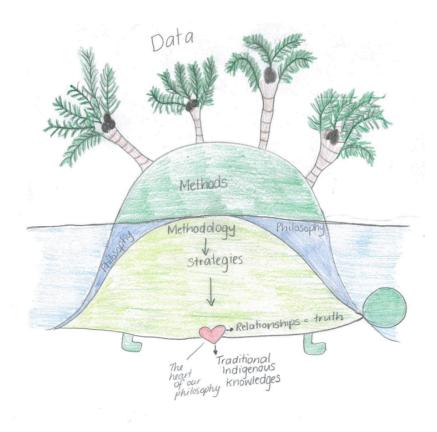


Figure 4.2. Interpretation of Wilson's Indigenous method of research design.

Figure 4.2 displays Wilson's interpretation of his Indigenous method of research design (Wilson, personal communication, November, 2012). The palm trees are representative of data, as data can emerge from the grassroots, they are organic and branch into many directions. The visible aspect of the island is based on the methods used to collect the data. Researchers want their methods of data collection to be visible so the whole story is told. The methods are context based according to the epistemology and framework used in the study. The non-visible part of the island is where the philosophy is made and methodologies are defined. The procedures by which researchers go about their work of describing, explaining and predicting phenomena are the research methodology. The methodology in this research adopted qualitative strategies. The heart in the turtle symbolises relationships. Relationships are the key to ontology – knowledge – and they are built on truth. If the relationship is strong, the knowledge is good, then the truth is told. Relationships and truth are equally important; however, researchers must be careful how they judge a good relationship. Relationships, knowledges and truth are important features to the data gathering and analysis. The turtle heart is also the Indigenous knowledge. Indigenous knowledges are based on relationships and love for growing and living things.

To help the reader make meaning of Indigenous research paradigms this study used the sea turtle as a metaphor for Indigenous research. Figure 4.3 represents the researcher's metaphor of Indigenous methodologies.

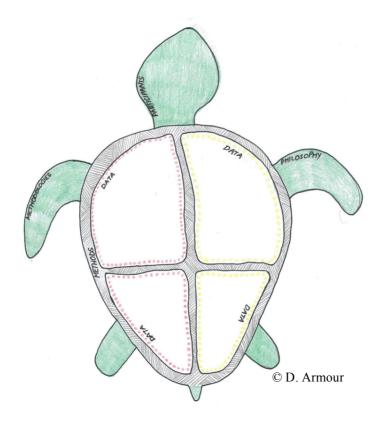


Figure 4.3. Researcher's metaphor for Indigenous research.

Sea turtles are peaceful creatures that travel at a slow pace journeying over thousands of kilometres. Research with Aboriginal people needs to be slow paced so the full picture can be captured and trust is built. The sea turtle has a shell that protects its body whenever it is threatened. The shell represents data and methods as it can be seen on the outside of the turtle. The body of the turtle protected by the shell represents Indigenous knowledges. Connected to the body are the arms (methodologies) and head (participant co-researchers). The co-researchers lead the study just as the turtle's head leads him to where he needs to go. The body contains all the vital organs to keep the system living, including the heart symbolising relationships. They are all vital parts of Indigenous methodologies. Without the heart the sea turtle does not live. Without strong relationships with participants, the data is not credible (Martin, 2003). These strong relationships help the research penetrate the shell. The shell protects the Indigenous knowledges from sight and I had to dig deep to find it. The shell cannot be separated from the body just as data collection, participants, methodologies, Indigenous knowledges and philosophy cannot be separated in research.

# 4.3.2 Insider-outsider theory

Insider-researchers are often closely engaged with their research areas, and there are key advantages for being closely engaged. The advantages include a superior understanding of the group's culture, and the ability to interact naturally with the group and its members (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002). As the researcher for this study I am an insider because I am Aboriginal. I can understand the Aboriginal perspective of the co-researchers. I also have an understanding of the co-researchers' experiences of working as Aboriginal educators in the school context because I have worked as an Aboriginal teacher assistant and teacher in NSW schools. Additionally, I have an understanding as an insider of the context of the research because I have lived close to where the research took place. This understanding of AEOs' culture and roles as Aboriginal educators enabled me to interact naturally with the AEOs in this study.

Insider theory is used in this study to enable the data to emerge without forcing it. Moreton-Robinson (2000) believes that the purity of research is enhanced when Aboriginal people are researched by their own people. However, this does not give an Aboriginal researcher the authority to go in and do what he or she likes. There are still many cultural protocols, which have to be respected and abided by. Using the insider theory diminishes the power differentials between the researcher and participants. It takes away the authoritarian role of the researcher, resulting in unbiased data (Foley, 2003). Furthermore, to do insider research, the researcher has to have a notion of accountability to, and respect for, Aboriginal traditions (Bishop & Glynn, 1999). This is especially important when it comes to yarning with participants to collect data.

From an Aboriginal perspective, I was conducting the study off Country. This positioned me as an "outsider" to the community according to Aboriginal protocols. An outsider is someone who is not from the Country they are working or living on. As an outsider I needed to be respectful of protocols of the community that I was working in (Martin, 2008). As a researcher, honesty, respect and truth are essential and the researcher has to ensure that when conducting research these are put into action (Martin, 2008).

# 4.4 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: NARRATIVE CASE STUDY

This research aimed to gain new understandings and formulate new theories with regard to what AEOs understand their role and the challenges they encounter while working at the cultural interface. Therefore, a narrative case study orchestrated the approach to gathering the data. In keeping with both constructionist and interpretivist approaches, narrative case study methodology lends itself to the construction of stories. In particular, this methodology gave

space to listen, sense, watch, wait, observe, exchange, share, conceptualise, assess, model, engage, gather and analyse (Martin, 2008).

A case study is defined as an extensive examination of an individual unit (Berg, 2007). These units are not limited to studies of individual persons; rather, they can be communities, families or a specific group of people as they are bounded by a system. A bounded system is a thing, an entity or unit, around which there are boundaries (Stake, 2005). A case study involves the exploration of a bounded system through detailed in-depth data gathering using multiple sources of information in a rich context (Creswell, 2012). Narrative case study can be used to "capture" complex situations allowing for a considerable degree of richness and understanding to emerge from the data. Employing a narrative case study provided a platform to give insights into the lives of the co-researchers being studied and the retelling of their story.

Narrative case study can be defined as a method involving gathering enough information about a particular person, social setting, event or group so the researcher can understand how the topic operates or functions (Berg, 2007). Through the use of narrative case study, the reader can be guided towards new knowledge and the confirmation of existing knowledge through someone else's story. In both narrative case studies and Indigenous research paradigms, establishing and building relationships is essential to constructing a deep understanding of the phenomena. Relationships between the researcher and co-researchers are critical, as they ensure that the narrative case studies give a true understanding of the shared lived experiences (Cardinal, 2010; Clandinin, 2006). Importantly, case studies focus on holistic description and explanation (Berg, 2007). This was essential in building new knowledge with respect to how AEOs understand their role as educators and the challenges they encounter within this role in this study.

Narrative case study allowed AEOs to give their journey of their role in the past, the present and the future. It also provided a space where they were able to express their understandings and perspectives of how working at the cultural interface impacted on their lives. The researcher interpreted the stories shared from AEOs and created a *re-story* of their journeys. The re-stories were shared with the co-researchers to confirm the interpretation of the original shared stories was true and accurate and to ensure the co-researchers' voices were true to how they as AEOs understood their role.

#### 4.5 PARTICIPANTS

#### 4.5.1 The co-researchers

Due to past colonised research practices that have been undertaken with Aboriginal people, this study has emphasised having AEOs as co-researchers. Heron and Reason (2001) believe that good Indigenous research should be conducted in collaboration with the participants and not on them. This way a connection can be made between the researcher's thinking and the experiences of the people involved in the research. This is culturally appropriate as Indigenous people share their knowledges between each other (Martin, 2006). The co-researchers have input into the data collection and how their stories are disseminated and shared after data analysis (Seidman, 2012).

There were four AEOs in this study, two male and two female co-researchers from schools geographically located in northern NSW. The names and towns of participating AEOs were given pseudonyms to ensure their confidentiality. These AEOs were purposively selected based on the fact that they were permanent full-time employees working in schools located in northern NSW with a relatively high Indigenous student cohort of 13% of the total enrolment

Two of the co-researchers in this study are traditional owners, Aunty Rowena and Jason. Traditional owners are the original owners of the land (Country) in the area in which they or their family were born and live (Edelman, 2009). They are the groups of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples who have a traditional connection to the land and/or waters relating to the area where they are from (Edelman, 2009; Martin, 2003). Traditional owners are recognised by the Aboriginal community whose lands lie within the region (Marika, Yunupingu, Marika-Mununggiritj, & Muller, 2009). They are the ones who can talk for Country and should be consulted about anything regarding their Country as they have a deep understanding and connection to the land and/or waters (Edelman, 2009). However, traditional owners make communal decisions about their Country, as it is not owned by one particular person (Marika et al., 2009). Traditional owners are the knowledge keepers who care for and protect important spiritual and cultural landscapes in their Country. They cannot go onto other people's Country and make decisions for that Country, as it does not belong to them.

**School** A is located in a rich agricultural area in northern NSW. A river winds through the town and rainforest national parks surround the area. Most of the employment in the town is based around the agricultural industry. The town population is 10,558 people with 936 or 8.9% being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011). There are three primary schools (two public and one private) in the area. There

is also a Kindergarten to Year 12 private school and two high schools (one public and one private). School A is a primary school with enrolments predominantly from the semi-rural and suburban areas of town, with a high proportion of families coming from low socio-economic backgrounds. There are 220 students enrolled with 45% of these students being from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background (ACARA, 2016).

Aunty Michelle (AEO1) is from Wiradjuri Country in central NSW. She is from the Bogan River people of Peak Hill near Dubbo. Aunty Michelle has worked in the Department of Education for 19 years and has worked at School A in a permanent role as AEO for the last six years. Prior to working as an AEO she worked at another public school in town as a school learning support officer. She has completed a Certificate III in Education and she believes this helped her to gain her position as an AEO. She has also completed computer courses, and professional development training (e.g., autism training and AEO training and development). Aunty Michelle is working off Country even though she has lived in the community for many years.

School B is located in a small coastal town made up of 2730 people (ABS, 2011). Of this population, 129 people or 4.7% are of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage (ABS, 2011). The town is positioned between national parks that have a combination of waterways including rivers, freshwater lagoons and beaches. The waterways are ideal for fishing, surfing and relaxing. School B is a Kindergarten to Year 12 school and has approximately 500 students with 13% of these being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage (ACARA, 2016). School B is the only school in town.

Aunty Rowena (AEO2) has been employed at School B as an AEO for three years. She is a 49-year-old Bundjalung woman and traditional owner of the small coastal town in which School A is located. Aunty Rowena has a connection to many of the Indigenous families that live in the area. School B's Principal was extremely happy to have a traditional owner employed at the school because of her close links and relationships to families in town and her understanding of Country.

Aunty Rowena has a background working in aged care nursing, general nursing and dental nursing. She became a nurse's aide at age 17 and then studied to be an endorsed enrolled nurse and a dental nurse. She believes aged care nursing is similar to working with children. "Young people are like old people and old people are like young people. They have the same emotions and they feel the same things."

**School** C is located in a town on the east coast of northern NSW. The town is located on a river and also has over 32 kilometres of pristine beaches. There are 7875 people living in the

town with 288 or 3.7% being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent (ABS, 2011). There are two primary schools (one private and one public) and one high school (public). However, there are also three Kindergarten to Year 12 schools in town (two private and one public). School C is a primary school with 257 students enrolled and 27% of these students are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander (ACARA, 2016).

Jason (AEO3) is a 25-year-old Nyangbal man from the Bundjalung Nation. He has worked at School C for one and a half years. He also worked in a role as an Aboriginal tutor for one year before taking on his role as AEO at School C. He is related to a lot of the students at School C but did not grow up in the area. Once the students realised the links between Jason and themselves he found that they warmed to him. Jason has completed a Bachelor of Sports Science and is currently studying a Bachelor of Education. The Principal from School C is supporting him to complete his studies.

**School D** is located five kilometres east of the central business district of an inland northern NSW town. The town is approximately 30 kilometres from the coastline with the closest waterways being creeks. The population of the town is 12,537 with 803 or 6.4% being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin (ABS, 2011). There is a primary school and two secondary schools (one private and one public) for students to attend. School D is a primary school and it has a high number of Indigenous students; of the 243 students enrolled, 43% are Indigenous (ACARA, 2016).

Uncle Paul (AEO4) is a 53-year-old Nyangbul man from the Bundjalung Nation and has been employed at School D for 23 years. He is working off Country although he has family and community connections in the area. Uncle Paul's Country is approximately 30 kilometres from School D's town. Before Uncle Paul started in his role as AEO he worked at a youth detention centre rehabilitating kids from crime.

#### 4.5.2 The researcher

In my role as a researcher I bring an added knowledge to the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). I have considerable experience in working as an Aboriginal educator as I have worked as a teacher with AEOs in primary school settings. As such, I have an understanding of the issues of the research question related to AEOs understanding their role in a school context from my experience in the roles mentioned (see section 1.1).

My understanding of the research context allowed me to empathise with and relate to the participant AEOs (Patton, 1990). This knowledge enabled me to identify with the AEOs and describe their experiences with an "insider's view" (Patton, 1990). My experience working with AEOs in primary schools was beneficial to the study. It equipped me as a researcher to be part of the situation in a participative way, yet enabled me to observe critically and objectively what was happening (Patton, 1990; Sherman & Webb, 1989). As a result of my professional and personal experiences, I was better able to identify, empathise with and appreciate each AEO's perspective.

While the participants and I were known to each other, we did not have developed relationships. As an insider to the co-researchers there were mutual relationships through family or friends, although I and the participants had not met prior to our first meeting. Martin's (2003) Ways of knowing, being and doing theory encourages researchers to have links, and ensure the research presented is respectful to the participants. Figure 4.4 illustrates the researcher's role in this study.

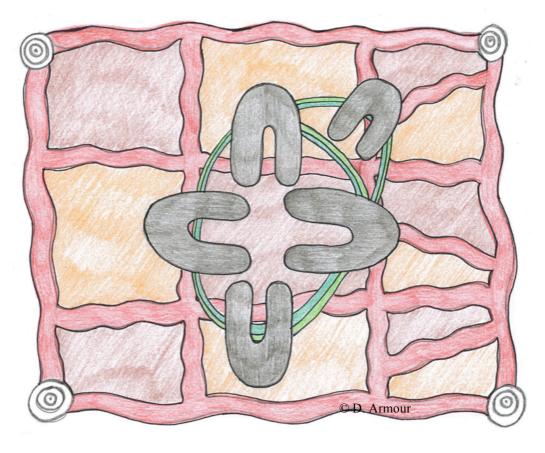


Figure 4.4. Illustration of the researcher's role in the study and the relationship to participants.

In Figure 4.4, the black shapes represent the participants in this study. The four black shapes in the circle are the AEOs and the black shape on the outside is the researcher. The researcher is on the outside as she is observing and listening to the participants. The green lines are journey lines. They are linked through the AEOs and the researcher as they journey through the study together. The green journey lines are intertwined through the AEOs and the researcher, as we helped each other through the study. However, the researcher's journey was

different from the co-researchers' journey. That is why the co-researchers are linked with the researcher but the researcher remains outside the circle. The co-researchers are placed in the middle as they are central to the study. The red journey lines are the paths the researcher followed in the research process. They are very square at the start of the journey as there are so many research rules and regulations that have to be followed according to the university, for example, paperwork to be completed, and gaining ethics approval. The themes from the literature guided the yarning sessions and the analysis of the results. The black circles in the red journey lines are the meeting times (four yarning sessions) with the researcher. The picture represents research as a journey with co-researchers and researcher as one, and shows how they all played different roles in the journey.

#### 4.6 DATA-GATHERING METHODS

The data-gathering strategies selected for this study were guided by the research design. Since case study was the methodology employed, multiple methods were used to conduct data gathering, and to cross-validate and ensure the reliability and validity of the co-researchers' construction of reality (Jonsen & Jehn, 2009). Additionally, since the aim of this study was to explore what AEOs understand their role and the challenges they encounter as educators, the data were collected in a variety of modes. Two data-gathering methods were employed for this study: (a) one-on-one yarning sessions with each participant in settings selected by the participants; and (b) an arts-based inquiry (drawings and poetry). Four data-gathering phases were conducted across one year from November 2014 to November 2015.

The data-gathering procedures were inclusive of cultural factors and ethical issues relating to Indigenous research. In Indigenous research, methods for data collection are expressions of Indigenous people's ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin, 2006). Data-gathering methods followed protocols that allowed changes to behaviour and communication in different contexts with different participants. This ensured that Indigenous cultural protocols and Indigenous methodologies were adhered to in the study. In this study participants were encouraged to use art to share their story as a personal cultural text that presents important experiences, settings and historical moments (Finlay, 2005). Table 4.2 outlines each of the overarching research question and sub-questions and the data-gathering strategies adopted in the study to address these questions.

Table 4.2

Research Questions and Data-Gathering Strategies

Research questions	Data-gathering strategies
What do AEOs understand to be their role as educators?  • What challenges do AEOs encounter in their role as educators?	<ul><li>One-on-one yarning</li><li>Artworks and poetry</li></ul>
<ul> <li>Where does identity as an educator configure into AEOs' understanding of their role?</li> </ul>	

# 4.6.1 Yarning sessions

Yarning sessions were used in this study to align with oral traditions in Indigenous communities (Martin, 2008). Fundamental to the way Aboriginal knowledge is shared are storytelling and creating artworks that represent the knowledge. Yarning is a semi-structured interview in an informal discussion in which both the researcher and participant journey together visiting places and subjects of interest relevant to the research study (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Yarning is a culturally appropriate process that involves the researcher to develop and strengthen relationships. It also helps to ensure that the researcher is accountable to Aboriginal people participating in the research (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Across Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people refer to the term "yarning" as communicating, passing on history or knowledge and telling and sharing stories (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010).

Yarning allows researchers to obtain important data from the participants, as some information cannot be observed but has to come from people's words and stories. However, for this study I needed to mediate the yarning so that it could be applied as a research tool. It needed to meet the expectations of the community and co-researchers as well as the academic arena (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010). Riessman (1993) cautioned qualitative researchers are not the voice, but we do hear voices that can be documented and interpreted for others to hear. Listening to the voices of participating AEOs provided insights into how they understood their role in the school context. Listening is a method practised in academic qualitative research but it is also culturally appropriate to Indigenous people (Martin, 2006). Each yarning session with an AEO provided a story, which in turn can be retold by the researcher (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

The length of the yarning sessions varied from thirty minutes to one and a half hours, and all yarning sessions were voice recorded. The length of each session varied as

participants' responses were explored and probed to gather more in-depth data about their feelings and experiences (Fredericks et al., 2011). Yarning is not about asking questions and receiving answers, it is about having a "conversation with a purpose" (Martin, 2006). As an adjunct to the yarning, co-researchers were provided with the opportunity to express their knowledge in forms of art.

# 4.6.2 Arts-based inquiry

Arts-based research is a form of qualitative inquiry and "the characteristics provide a formula for a radical, ethical, and revolutionary qualitative inquiry" (Finlay, 2005, p. 686). It is best used by researchers doing human social research, and fits historically within a postmodern framework (Finlay, 2005). In arts-based research, meaning making through artistic forms collides with social science research to become intertwined and dynamic (Barone & Eisner, 2012).

Some practitioners of arts-based inquiry argue for the need to establish research tradition (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). However, in doing so individual voices may not be heard and distinctions made between the researcher and the participants. Thus, this research ensured all participant voices were heard by using an Indigenous paradigm in arts-based inquiry where the researcher employed an interpretivist lens to a constructionist approach.

In this study, tools were provided (e.g., paints, paintbrushes, canvasses) for AEO coresearchers to construct autobiographical stories through narrative, drawing/painting and poetry. Two of the four co-researchers opted to make artworks (Aunty Michelle) and write a poem (Aunty Rowena) to complement their case study narratives. These personal cultural texts contextualised important personal experiences and historical moments for the co-researchers (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

### 4.6.3 Data-gathering phases

Data gathering phases in this research were culturally appropriate to the AEOs. Sharing stories about being an Aboriginal educator with the co-researchers was included in the data gathering phases. Yarning sessions and arts-based inquiry were also used. There were four data-gathering phases during the study. AEOs also re-storied their stories collected from data gathered. Figure 4.5 shows an in-depth overview of a data-gathering phase (yarning session and arts-based inquiry).

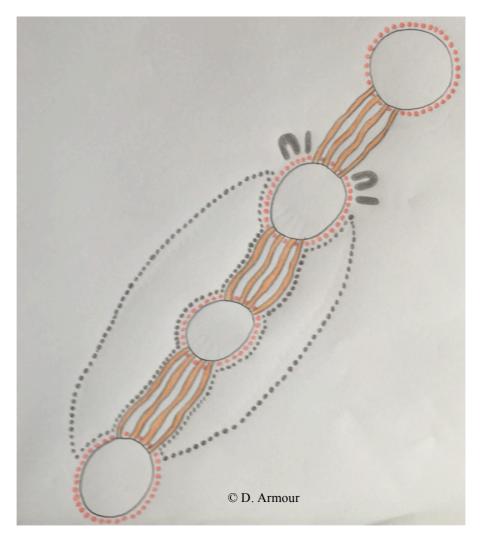


Figure 4.5. In-depth overview of a data-gathering phase.

The first circle (top right) represents me as the researcher sharing my experiences with the co-researchers. I shared experiences with the co-researchers as an insider from working as an Aboriginal educator in the school context. The experiences I shared were related to roles I used to undertake as an Aboriginal educator. For example, one experience entailed being given a newspaper to read instead of working with the allocated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Sharing these experiences with AEOs opened up a space for the researcher and AEO to yarn about the AEOs' experiences working in their role.

The four orange journey lines represent the four different yarning sessions that occurred. The four journey lines link between each collection phase. The second circle symbolises the yarning sessions between the AEOs and the researcher. The black symbols on the outside of the yarning circle symbolise the co-researchers being two females (horseshoe shape) and two males. The third circle represents the artistic pieces by the co-researchers. The artistic pieces made by the AEOs also opened up yarning sessions as the researcher and AEOs analysed the artworks together. Themes for further yarning were then established from the

artwork analysis and yarning sessions. The fourth circle represents the data content analysis. Content analysis allowed for further themes to be established and to shape the next phase.

The black dots linking between the content analysis and yarning sessions represent the member checking by AEOs to ensure the data were analysed and interpreted correctly and placed in the correct theme. The researcher checked with the AEOs to ensure the data collected and stories written were interpreted correctly. Table 4.3 presents the timeline for the research process together with the junctures at which data gathering and data analysis occurred.

Table 4.3

Overview of the Research Timeline

Timeline	Interpretive process	Data-gathering techniques	Data analysis
July 2012 – November 2013	Identify purpose of research and research questions; literature review; research design		
February 2014	Confirmation		
March 2014	Ethical clearance application submitted and approved		
August 2014	Boundaries of establishment	Invitations to participate in the research are sent to potential participants	
November 2014	Phase 1	Yarning session 1 (4 participants) Ask AEOs to do artwork on their experiences in schools	
March 2015	Phase 2	Record their meaning of the artwork (2 participants) Yarning session 2 (4 participants)	Analysis of artwork Analysis of recording and yarning session
May 2015	Phase 3	Yarning session 3 (4 participants)	Analysis of recording and yarning session
October – November 2015	Phase 4	Record their meaning of the artwork (2 participants) Yarning session 4 (4 participants)	Analysis of artwork Analysis of recording and yarning session
November 2015			Analysis of yarning sessions
December 2015			Themes emerge from AEO yarning sessions
January – February 2016	Development of cases for each AEO	Each case verified by participants and sought for inclusion in thesis	Themes represented
March 2016	Validation of data; return to literature for links with the data themes		Data analysis and synthesis
January – July 2016	Report key themes in draft; findings chapter and develop discussion, based on literature and findings		

#### 4.7 ANALYSIS OF DATA

Data analysis is a vigorous process through which researchers try to gain a deeper understanding of what they are studying (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Data analysis is a systemised and continual process in interpretive research with researchers keeping track of themes, reading and re-reading transcripts, and developing concepts to make sense of their data (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Case study work produces a significant amount of raw data, which must be condensed into meaningful information (Bassey, 1999). Because case study is "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single bounded unit", communicating an in-depth understanding of the case is critical in case data analysis (Merriam, 1998, p. 193).

This study adopted two systematic approaches to the analysis of data. The first approach was content analysis. Content analysis is the process of summarising the messages and contents of the data collected (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). A content analysis approach can be applied to any text or symbolic material (Mayring, 2000). This occurred at the end of each yarning session. At the conclusion of each yarning session all data collected in the sessions were transcribed and analysed. The ongoing analysis from the transcription enabled the researcher to shape the next yarning session. AEOs had the opportunity to participate in the analysis of their art at each yarning session. Table 4.4 provides a sample of the content analysis. The coding after each quote indicates which AEO said the quote (e.g., AEO1 was Aunty Michelle), the interview in which the quote occurred (e.g., i1, 2014 was interview 1 in 2014), and the line in the interview where the quote can be located (e.g., L160 is line 160).

Table 4.4

Sample of Content Analysis

	Construct	Theme	Sub-theme	Quote
Aunty Michelle Yarning session 1	Role	Well- being	Social and emotional well-being	So I really worry about the kids' social and emotional well- being first because I believe if you don't take part because we are teaching the whole child and if we don't take care of those needs how can we expect the child to go into the classroom and learn. (AEO1, i1, 2014, L150-155)
			Well-being of the students	So we have a lot of social and emotional well-being here. We have kids that come to school without lunch or without breakfast, and that was a driving force behind the breakfast program. (AEO1, i1, 2014, L145-147)
			Preparing students to learn	And they're going in on an empty stomach or something has happened the night before when they are coming in distraught or distressed you know. So I really, and the teachers are aware of that, am happy to be called up if you know someone's not going into class. I ask, "Have you had breakfast? Are you ok? Or have you had lunch?" Everything. Then I go into the classroom and support them in their numeracy, literacy or whatever they are doing in the classroom. (AEO1, i1, 2014, L155-160)

The second approach to the analysis of data was the constant comparative method. This method enabled the researcher to focus on generating a theory from collected data. Theorising takes place through the constant comparison of data (Coombe, 1995). This method is widely used in qualitative research as it originated from grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1999). Constant comparison analysis is designed to study human phenomena for which the researcher can draw on social processes explaining something of human behaviour and experiences (Thorne, 2000). In this study the purpose of using the constant comparative method was to generate knowledge and theory about common themes that arose in the AEO yarning and artworks. It involved examining various subsets of the initial data, such as responses from AEOs' yarning, to identify and describe their understanding of their role as an AEO and their interpretations of the artworks.

In order to make sense from the yarning sessions, voice recordings were transcribed, analysed and coded (Creswell, 2012). The codes allowed data to be clustered, deleted, examined and integrated into broad conceptual themes (Creswell, 2008). This study adopted open, axial and selective coding. Open coding is unrestricted identification that allows the researcher to identify similarities and differences to create preliminary categories (Creswell, 2012). Once these codes are complete, axial coding is used to examine the codes to determine and identify the links between codes and categories (Cohen et al., 2007). Axial coding involves a process of identifying a category derived at the open-coding phase. Table 4.5 displays a sample of the axial coding process.

Table 4.5
Sample of Axial Coding Process

Data	Reduction	Interpretation	
Beliefs are the same as they were before walking in the gate		Identity at school	
• Identity is strong even though travel between two worlds			
Aboriginal identity comes first			
• Identity does not conflict at the school but has at other jobs			
Some Indigenous perspectives are better than none from non- Indigenous teachers		Indigenous knowledges at school	
<ul> <li>Indigenous knowledges shared by Aunty</li> </ul>			
When it is redistributed it is slightly different			
<ul> <li>Slowly becoming more prevalent in schools</li> </ul>			
More work needs to be done on Indigenous strategies			
• Students feel proud in language classes			
Comparative reduction			
AEOs travel between two worlds and are two-way strong			

The data were then analysed and categories compared to existing theory (Cohen et al., 2007). It is imperative that rich data are developed so that themes become evident. Finally, at the completion of the axial-coding process, selective coding was used to study the interrelationships between the codes to determine theories (Creswell, 2012) at this stage a "storyline" was developed which integrated the categories identified at the axial-coding phase (Lichtman, 2006). During the coding stages feedback was obtained from supervisors to ensure the focus of analysis was relevant to the initial phenomenon. It was important that the researcher conducted a systematic process of data analysis to illuminate the rich description of how AEOs understand their role in a school context.

A cross analysis of the narrative case studies was conducted to identify themes on how AEOs understand their role. This cross-case analysis informed (a) how AEOs understand their role as educators; (b) how AEOs work at the cultural interface (Indigenous and Western); (c) strategies AEOs use to be two-way strong; and (d) how Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing influence the role of AEOs in the school context.

Narrative case studies were sent to individual AEOs and they analysed and reviewed their stories. AEOs sent back the changes they wanted made to their stories and I re-storied their case studies. This happened three times until the final case studies were created and AEOs were happy with the interpretation of their story.

# 4.8 VERIFICATION

Verification within interpretivist research is determined by the credibility and trustworthiness of the data quality. Data quality is ensured through the use of the criteria credibility, confirmability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By applying these three criteria, I claim that the gathered data are trustworthy (Trochim, 2006). Several processes provide evidence of both trustworthiness and credibility (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). To ensure trustworthiness, multiple data sources were used. Written, drawn, and oral texts were collected on four occasions. The process of analysis included re-checking the data and analysis a number of times using analytic modes such as electronic devices, and pen and paper. A cyclic process was used to establish emerging themes with both the literature and the co-researchers' own words. This in turn provided an audit trail to corroborate emerging evidence and ensure dependability and trustworthiness of the themes generated (Yin, 2003).

# 4.8.1 Credibility

Ensuring credibility in data is one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). By choosing narrative case study and the creation of

artworks, the understanding of how AEOs view their role and the challenges they encounter in their role in a school context were illuminated in an honest and interesting way. The use of thick descriptions (Stake, 1995) provides the reader an opportunity to enter the world of the AEO and their understandings of working in a school context and journey with them. This research has adopted a number of techniques to ensure the credibility of the data. They are outlined below.

# Prolonged engagement

This involved me as the researcher spending enough time in the setting to become familiar within the situation so the context is understood and appreciated (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this study, prolonged engagement was achieved by visiting AEOs four times in 12 months, and having extra conversations with co-researchers between visits. The extra conversations transpired via telephone or email. This allowed me to respond to possible areas of misinformation and build rapport and trust with co-researchers. I was not familiar with the schools in which the AEOs worked. However, I already had a degree of rapport and trust with two of the AEOs as we had mutual friends. The AEOs and I had not met prior to the study starting. This trust allowed me to accurately record the AEOs' experiences and understandings of their role as an AEO, and how they are valued in a school context.

#### Persistent observation

Persistent observation identifies elements and characteristics in the study that are most relevant to the issue being pursued. I explored the details of the phenomena of this study to a deep enough level so the relevant and important aspects could be focused on (Guba, 1989). The use of one-on-one yarning sessions in this study allowed me to come to an understanding of how AEOs understand their role in a school context. Persistent observation through these methods illustrated for me that AEOs understand their role and the challenges of working at the cultural interface in the school context. This gave depth to the persistent engagement at the data-gathering sites.

# Re-storying

Member checking is one of the most important techniques for establishing the credibility of qualitative inquiry. In this process, the participants involved in the study are given the opportunity to review the researcher's record of their perspectives (Lacey & Luff, 2001). If the co-researchers agree that their perspectives have been adequately represented and that the conclusions reached in the study are credible to them, the reader of such a study is likely to be convinced that the qualitative inquiry itself is credible. This study used member checking with co-researchers with all data gathered arising out of yarning sessions. This not

only allowed the AEOs to validate their stories, but also allowed for insights into my interpretations of how AEOs understood the role in a school context. When the AEOs gave their feedback to me, I re-storied their stories accordingly.

#### 4.8.2 Dependability

This is another criterion to ensure the data are trustworthy. It involves accounting for all the changing conditions in the study, as well as any changes in the design of the study that are needed to get a better understanding of the context. This was achieved in this study through the use of an independent audit (Cohen et al., 2007). An independent audit of the data by external reviewers, namely, three research supervisors, was conducted at particular points in the study (Cohen et al., 2007). This audit involved the investigation of the processes of data gathering and all other supporting documents.

# 4.8.3 Confirmability

Confirmability of research is concerned with ensuring that the analysis and subsequent findings of the research are grounded in the data, and hence connected with participants and their contexts (Guba, 1989). This study adopted the use of an audit trail to display the systematic collection of the data. Three research supervisors conducted an independent audit concentrating on the data gathering and data analysis stages to ensure data interpretations were traceable to the original sources, and were logical and structured.

# 4.8.4 Transferability

The central aim of qualitative research is the transferability of findings. Guba (1989) referred to it as an "empirical process for the degree of similarity between sending and receiving contexts" (p. 241). Unlike positivist research, the ability to transfer the research is determined by the reader. It is acknowledged that one of the limitations of the case study methodology is that it is bound to both context and time. However, to overcome this limitation the inclusion of rich and thick descriptions by the researcher allows readers to decide for themselves if the results are transferable to their own contexts (Stake, 2005). Thus, the potential for transferability of findings from this study is based upon the assumption that the reader obtains knowledge from the background data to establish the context of the study, and detailed descriptions of the phenomenon in question allow comparisons to be made (Shenton, 2004). The results of this qualitative research need to be clear within the context of the study.

#### 4.9 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

My role as an Aboriginal researcher has involved many ethical responsibilities, including the obligation to present the stories of the AEOs in a way that gives them pride as Aboriginal people. These responsibilities are a significant part of the research design and the implementation of the study so that the research framework, data collection methods, discussion presentation of the AEOs' stories, and findings respected Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. I am also conscious of the importance of reciprocity, a traditional concept by which Indigenous people have obligations in terms of sharing (Berndt & Berndt, 1988), and which also has relevance for the research process (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). It is also acknowledged that even though I am an insider to Aboriginal ways of knowing, being and doing, with the AEOs I am considered an outsider as I am conducting research off Country. I respect the protocols of the Country I am researching on.

In Indigenous methodology the researcher is accountable for all relationships, so rather than focusing on validity or reliability of data, as the researcher, I focused on how I was fulfilling my role in the relationships (S. Wilson, 2001). Proper relationships needed to be established between myself as the researcher and the AEOs as participants. I included arts-based inquiry to help strengthen relationships between myself and the participants. Table 4.6 presents data-gathering strategies and ethical considerations.

The research conducted was consistent with the ethics employed by the Australian Catholic University and NSW Department of Education and Communities. It was approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (ACU 201454Q; see Appendix A) and the State Education Research Applications Process (SERAP 2014029; see Appendix B). The Tweed Wollumbin AECG also gave approval for the research to be conducted (see Appendix C). At any time during the project, participants were free to withdraw their consent and discontinue participation without giving any reason. Confidentiality was maintained during the research by using pseudonyms and coding once data collection commenced. Identity of participants was concealed to provide anonymity. Permission was granted by all employing authorities and Principals to conduct research in their schools. All data were stored in accordance with the ACU guidelines. Access to data was restricted to those people authorised by the researcher. Copies of the transcripts were available to the participants on request. Participants will be consulted with regard to the publication of the study's findings and conclusions.

Table 4.6

Data Gathering Strategies and Ethical Considerations

Data-gathering strategies	Ethical considerations			
Yarning sessions	• Letter of Information outlining the way in which a semi-structured interview is conducted (see Appendix E)			
	• Signed letter of consent			
	• In-person reiteration of the expectations of one-on-one semi-structured interviews (see Appendix E)			
	• Participant coding strategies were outlined to participants. For example, <i>Michelle (AEO1, i2, 2015, L258-263)</i> denotes Aboriginal Education Officer 1 (AEO1), participation in yarning session 2 (i2), in the year 2015, line in the transcript (L258-263).			
Arts-based inquiry	Letter of Information outlining the way in which the arts-based inquiry would be collected.			
	Coding strategy made on the back of the arts-based inquiry. Participants are made aware that their identity is not a requirement of analysis and that the artefacts were coded.			

#### 4.10 CHAPTER REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter was to justify and describe the research design adopted pursuant to exploring how AEOs understand their role and the challenges they encounter as educators. The chapter outlined the theoretical framework and design adopted for the study. Constructionism was an appropriate epistemology for the study, as the study explored how AEOs understand their role. Indigenous research perspectives and insider-outsider theory were employed as the two theoretical lenses for the study. These assisted the researcher to explore how AEOs understand their role and the challenges they encounter in the school context. Data-gathering strategies included one-on-one yarning sessions and arts-based inquiry. Chapter 5 presents four case studies consisting of the stories constructed by the coresearchers and researcher from the data gathered in the yarning sessions.

# **Chapter 5: Case Studies**

This chapter presents the findings that emerged from an analysis of how AEOs understand their role as educators and the challenges they encounter in the school context. The data were gathered through varning sessions with four AEOs from regional northern NSW. The case studies are presented under themes generated from the data. The themes are Early landscapes/Country, Two-way strong, Cultural interface, and Ways of knowing, being and doing. Cultural interface links to the subheading in the stories of working at the interface and Ways of knowing, being and doing is interwoven throughout the role of AEOs. These themes were constructed from the Australian Aboriginal educator's identity conceptual framework (see Figure 3.4). The challenges that emerged for AEOs were reflected across all of these themes. However, themes in the stories are not in any particular order as the stories are sequenced as the data emerged with the AEOs. The stories are sequenced so that they flow and according to how AEOs asked for them to be re-storied. The first two stories are Aunty Michelle and Aunty Rowena's stories. Aunty Michelle is working off Country and Aunty Rowena is a traditional owner. The other two stories are from Jason and Uncle Paul. Jason is working on Country and Uncle Paul is working off Country. The four case studies from these yarns are presented in this chapter. Figure 5.1 presents an overview of Chapter 5.

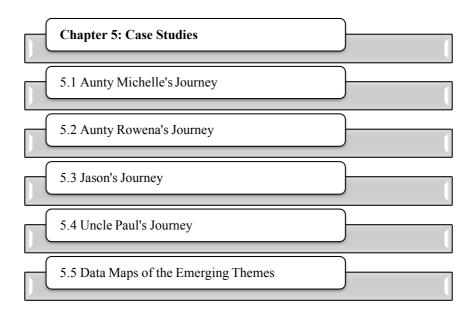


Figure 5.1. Overview of Chapter 5.

#### 5.1 AUNTY MICHELLE'S JOURNEY

#### **5.1.1** Country

Aunty Michelle is a proud Wiradjuri woman from central NSW. She is in her midforties and has worked as an AEO for eight years. Aunty Michelle is one of four children. Growing up, Aunty lived with her mother and stepfather. She grew up on Country, played sport and attended school regularly. Her life at home was not easy due to the domestic violence she faced on a daily basis. The hard lesson she learned from a young age was to be quiet and not "speak up". She did this, as she knew if she spoke her mind there could be negative consequences not just for herself but for other family members. Aunty describes the impact of this when she says "I come from a broken home. I come from a home where there was alcohol abuse and we would be up all night. I come from a home where there was domestic violence." (AEO1, i2, 2015, L80-82). Consequently, Aunty would often attend school tired and emotionally exhausted after being kept up all night. This made it difficult for her to concentrate and participate fully in the learning.

Aunty Michelle was a quiet achiever at school but had little support from her family. She often received awards but did not always have people there to watch her receive them. Her Mum praised her when she received the awards but did not attend the award ceremonies. Aunty Michelle really wanted her mother to be more a part of her education and be there in person to celebrate her achievements and support her at school. However, looking back Aunty Michelle can understand that her mother was not comfortable in entering the school. The fact that she did not feel that family support regarding her school and sporting achievements upsets her as she feels that she did not reach her full potential because of it.

You know I got all the praise and everything at home but you know I would get lots of awards and things like that but I never had much participation from Mum. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L384-386) And I always thought well when I have kids I am going to be really involved in their education. I am going to be a face there for them I guess to fill the gap that I had there. That void that I had. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L389-390).

Although she was smart, to stay in classes with her family members (e.g., siblings and cousins) and Aboriginal friends, Aunty Michelle would often complete her schoolwork at a lower level than what she was capable of. Being in class with other family members and Indigenous friends made Aunty Michelle feel safe because she had familiarity. This is common with Aboriginal children underperforming for that specific reason. She knew that her family would not judge her. At the time, Aunty Michelle did not consider an academic future; she just wanted to stay with people she was familiar and comfortable with.

But then when I was in school I did well academically compared to my cousins. Sometimes I would dumb it down so that I could be in their class. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L382-384) So the reason I wanted to stay with my family is because I felt safe and I felt accepted by them. That was my safety net in the school environment. I knew no matter [what] they accepted me and loved me. And to go on and work at a higher level with kids that weren't my friends or didn't have much to do with there was no connection I guess. It was just foreign and [I was] just scared of being on your [my] own. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L168-172).

During Aunty Michelle's time in primary school she was subjected to racial abuse by other students and some teachers. Aunty Michelle felt that she and other Aboriginal students at her school were not treated the same as non-Indigenous students. This made her feel as though she was not valued and that the teachers had a low expectation of her. There also seemed to be total lack of understanding and awareness of what it was like for her at home. Due to this treatment Aunty Michelle had very little confidence and poor self-esteem growing up. As a result, she would never participate in public speaking or perform in front of an audience.

Well firstly I didn't feel valued in the school so the teacher and the other kids didn't make you feel valued at all. So you were with your group, your cousins or the other Aboriginal students in the class and it felt like we were treated differently. "Oh ok it's your turn get up, have you brought anything today?" [Aunty Michelle is re-enacting a memory of a classroom teacher speaking to her], so the way they would actually speak to you was already a put down regardless of whether you were prepared or had stuff. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L176-181)

Aunty Michelle perceived that there was usually an expectation that Aboriginal students would be ill-prepared for classwork and presentations.

The low expectations that they [the teachers] had on you came across in the way they spoke to you in their body language<sup>1</sup>. If I knew I had a speech coming up and I knew I had to stand up in the class to talk I remember one time I did have an idea of what I was going to talk about but because of that low expectation I just didn't. I just completely backed out you know there was no encouragement and there was no safe environment because I never felt valued. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L181-188)

The teachers would then leave all Indigenous students until last to present their work to the class.

Chapter 5: Case Studies

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Body language is the conscious and unconscious movements and postures by which attitudes and feelings are communicated (https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/body language).

I did notice that in some of those cases they would generally get all the non-Aboriginal kids up straight away to get them done and we were sort of left. I am a big believer actions speak louder than words. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L188-191)

The teachers just assumed that Aboriginal children would not have their work ready to present. However, not all teachers treated Indigenous students like this.

But sometimes I would get the odd teacher that did have the high expectation of me but I always took that as she was trying to challenge me and I took that as a threat. But now I work in the education sector I know that she saw potential and wanted to see more in me but like I said if you don't feel valued you're not going to and you're going to think what is the go with. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L191-195).

Aunty Michelle saw teachers that challenged her as a threat because she was not used to being challenged at school.

There was often conflict between Aboriginal identity and the school (Western) systems when Aunty Michelle attended school. In those days, schools had little understanding of Indigenous knowledge systems and did not cater for Indigenous students.

You know they didn't get our kinship system. And they didn't get that we are in a group. I think it compromises your identity like when you go to school and you wanted to be around your family because that is your safety net and that's your connection and they did not get that so they would deliberately separate it. So on the inside as a child you are thinking should I be doing that. And I know, as a child well I went to a Central School<sup>2</sup> so from Year 6 to Year 7 was 10 steps to the next playground. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L307-313)

There was also conflict when it came to Aunty Michelle choosing her social circle of friends. She was unsure whether it was right to hang around non-Indigenous students as she had only socialised with Aboriginal people.

That [hanging around non-Indigenous friends] started I think it was around Year 8 well they [non-Indigenous students] started to take a bit of interest in me and I always think it was because they got to be their own identity and be strong in their own identity and choose who they wanted to hang around. So I think when they were wanting me to hang around them you question yourself is this alright because I have only ever hung around the black kids. Then when I did start to go off and play with them or whatever then I had my cousins going, "Oh you think you're white. Why are you over there?" You know that tall poppy syndrome trying to pull you down. I think

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> A Central School is a K-12 school in the one location. Most Central Schools now provide formal and informal education opportunities for all members of their community.

it did compromise your identity as a child because you are confused which way to go especially as a young adult. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L313-322)

After leaving school Aunty Michelle moved to Bundjalung Country in northern NSW (see Figure 1.2 presented in Chapter 1) where she believed that there was a wider range of employment opportunities for her. However, it was extremely hard for her to stay there as she missed her family. Despite the difficulties of being away from her Country and family, she believed that if she persisted and stayed in Bundjalung Country opportunities would come to her.

I moved up here when I was 16 and I was just fresh out of school. I didn't go home for the first six months and it was really hard not to go home because I knew that if I went home I would never have came back here. But there was something in me that was yearning for something more. It was like I was at a crossroads and I knew if I stayed here yes it was going to be boring it was going to be yucky and I will miss the family for a while but I knew I had more opportunities. So I pushed past all that. I felt like I was at a crossroads in my life and if I wanted something better for my life then this was the opportunity. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L87-97)

The concept of Country is essential to Australian Aboriginal meaning and culture. The links between Aboriginal people and Country are inseparable and co-dependent. Being on Country indicates living within a tract of landscape involving cultural origins and responsibilities, whereas being off Country suggests living external from this home land. For Indigenous people to leave their Country and live in another area is very hard because when you leave Country you leave part of your spirit there. Aunty Michelle still has strong links to her Country; however, she knew she needed to move away for her best interests. Every time Aunty Michelle returns to Country she gets a special feeling.

When I go home the closer as I get I can tell when I get back to my Country. Even though I am not back in my home-town, because your Country spreads, I can tell when I am on my Country. You know my girls always laugh at me when we go home. As soon as I'm entering Country I explained to the girls when I was little you know as soon as I am entering Country or back on Country my spirit would jump on the inside. So when we go home now they say to me, "Is your spirit jumping Mum?" and I say, "Yes it is now leave me alone." Cause it's excitement. That's how I identified going home to my girls when I was young ... You know I just get past Gunnedah and I get this excitement. You know on the inside as I get older and thought about it and could verbalise properly, it is the only way I could describe that my spirit starts to jump and there's a wave of excitement. I think the more you are away from your Country [the more] you lose that

connection to Country so I think that it is important to visit all the time. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L212-226)

After Aunty Michelle married a Bundjalung man and had two daughters, she became employed at NSW Department of Education and Communities. She has worked for them in many different roles over the past 19 years. Her first role was in the preschool that was connected to the local primary school in town. She often took on the role of relief AEO whilst working at the preschool. Eventually she took on the role of Student Learning Support Officer in the primary school. She was in this role for a number of years before the role of AEO at her current school was available. In 2008, Aunty Michelle was successful in obtaining a permanent AEO position at her school located west of town.

When Aunty Michelle started working as an AEO and for many years after, she would do jobs that she was not officially required to do in her role. She did these jobs as she lacked confidence in herself and did not like conflict. She did not have the courage to tell the Principals and teachers that what they were asking her was wrong. She never questioned any of the jobs that were given to her even if she did not agree that she should be doing them. She was doing tasks such as taking home suspension letters, being involved in meetings when students were returning from suspension, looking after Indigenous students that were misbehaving, and working through her lunch break. However, Aunty Michelle quietly went about her job and tried to make everyone happy, even though she knew what she was doing was putting a strain on herself and her relationships with the students and the community. The unrealistic tasks that Aunty Michelle was expected to complete almost burnt her out.

I think when I started here the expectation was that I had to be everywhere at once all the time. I felt that he [the Principal at the time] expected me to be the disciplinarian of the Aboriginal kids when they stepped out of line. You know he asked me to do lunch duty but he was mindful that it was illegal to put me on the playground duty role. So he said, "Can you go out with the kids at lunchtime and have your lunch afterwards?" But then the kids would muck up after lunch. Then he would come and get me and I would have to go back out. So a lot of the time with this Principal I would only get a 10-minute break the whole day. But we have a new Principal now. (AEO1, i1, 2014, L62-71)

Figure 5.2 depicts an artwork of Aunty Michelle's understanding of her role as an AEO when she first started.

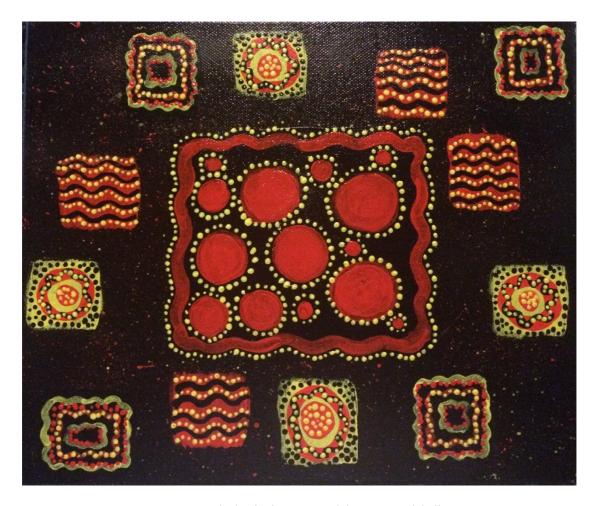


Figure 5.2. The beginning – artwork by Aunty Michelle.

This artwork tells a story about how Aunty Michelle felt when she first started in her role as a permanent AEO. When Aunty Michelle and I discussed the materials needed for the artwork she requested a small canvas, as when she started in her role she felt extremely small. Aunty Michelle was often made to feel that she had no authority and was never given the opportunity to make decisions regarding Aboriginal education at the school. She used the colours red, black and yellow to signify our culture, our people and our kids. But she also used these colours because when Aboriginal people see them we can make an immediate connection. Squares were used in the artwork too because Aunty was made to feel as though she was in a box all the time. She felt as though she could not express her thoughts and this made her feel contained.

At the beginning when I first became an AEO I felt as though I was put in a box all the time. Even though I had lots of different ideas you was still being put in a box. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L16-18)

There were many stereotypes ingrained in some teachers in the school when Aunty Michelle first started in her role as an AEO. These stereotypes included Aboriginal people are poor and do not feed their children, Aboriginal students cannot achieve highly at school and

Aboriginal people come from violent households. Most Aboriginal people who attended and worked at the school were categorised into these stereotypes. This encouraged Indigenous employees and students at the school to stick together to support each other. The larger box in the centre of the artwork is Aunty yarning with her Indigenous colleagues and students.

At times it felt like we would come together you know me and the kids and my workers we were like a little family, like a little circle unit. Many of us. The adults and the kids but we were still contained in a box. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L30-34)

Even though Aunty Michelle felt as though her students and herself were being contained they still had their connection to culture. However, it was not shared amongst the broader school community during this time. It was confined only to Indigenous people in the school. The smaller squares with wavy lines represent being on a wave all the time with a possibility that you may get out. However, you are pushed back in by containment. The other boxes signify a bumpy ride while at school, as it was not a comfortable place to be for Indigenous people.

When Aunty Michelle first started working in the school, there was an undertow of racism. This was reflected in the school not having specific programs for Indigenous students. Although the school had a high proportion of Indigenous students it was not catering for their needs. Despite the institutional racism that was present in the school, most Aboriginal and non-Indigenous staff still got along. However, even though Aunty Michelle got along with her non-Indigenous colleagues she still felt suppressed and could not voice her opinions. This stemmed from witnessing that Indigenous education was not a priority in the school.

[My school] was known as the Aboriginal school as it had the biggest percentage of Aboriginal students attending it and it currently still does sitting at 44%. So when I arrived at the school my expectations of Aboriginal education were quickly shattered as the school only had two Aboriginal workers and there was no Aboriginal education team. (AEO1, i1, 2014, L408-412)

In addition, when Aunty Michelle began her role as AEO there was a lack of interest shown in the education of Aboriginal students by some staff members. Staff (both Aboriginal or non-Indigenous) were not encouraged to attend Aboriginal education meetings, professional development or conferences including the local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) meetings. The AECG gives an insight into Aboriginal education, and provides advice and support on all matters relevant to education and training. The AECG member base is made up of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous volunteers who are Principals, teachers, and support staff such as AEOs. The AECG consists of local, regional and state

networks that enable Aboriginal community viewpoints to be discussed throughout the organisation. It is good for schools to be involved in the local AECG so they have access to Aboriginal perspectives with regard to Aboriginal education.

Aboriginal staff members at Aunty Michelle's school felt they were always in for a battle when it came to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Furthermore, certain non-Indigenous staff members' attitudes toward Indigenous students clearly showed racism. The racism was indirect but it was definitely there – such things as excluding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff from conversations and not engaging in Aboriginal education issues. Often Aunty would feel that she had to go in and fight for the students. Aunty Michelle saw herself as the Aboriginal students' voice in her school so she would get defensive of her students if they were not being treated fairly. If she did not go into battle for her students who would? Furthermore, if she could feel the racism, Indigenous students probably could too, but they were powerless to do anything about it.

When I first started up there you can tell by people's attitudes, body language and vibes. For instance, there were no Aboriginal education meetings when we started. Aboriginal education I felt wasn't a priority. So there was no Aboriginal education team, there was no encouragement to go to AECG meetings, there was just like a core group of people where you could really feel the dislike towards the kids. If kids were mucking up it was always sort of my kids all the time. You know I had one kid, she used to get in trouble all the time and it felt that no one was listening to her story. You know you're just guilty as charged because of who you are. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L39-47)

Trying to get staff to acknowledge and buy into Indigenous culture was a difficult task for Aunty Michelle. Some staff would refuse to engage in suggestions or make up excuses as to why her ideas would not work. A suggestion to purchase National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) day shirts was made to all staff members so they could wear them to school and acknowledge and promote Indigenous culture. However, due to the negative feedback from staff, this did not come about. The opposing staff members were unable to see the big picture that by acknowledging Aboriginal culture by wearing a NAIDOC shirt they would be making connections with students and community. In fact, they were choosing to ignore Aboriginal culture by coming up with excuses as to why they could not wear the shirts, but did not offer any suggestions for changes to colour or design that would be more suitable. They failed to understand that by not wearing polo shirts, it was clear they did not support NAIDOC and what it represents for Indigenous people.

The first time when someone suggested we get NAIDOC shirts, well that was just squashed because some people did not like to wear black or didn't like to wear polo

(shirts). Just really petty sort of stuff and not seeing the big picture. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L53-56)

There were other tones of racism within the wider school community. This became evident when Aunty Michelle organised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents to work in the canteen. Quite a few Indigenous parents showed interest in working at the canteen and this took up a great deal of time and effort for Aunty Michelle to organise. Over time the parents started to gain confidence and were coming in regularly. However, that all came crashing down when Aunty received a call from a non-Indigenous parent notifying her that the canteen convener was asking non-Indigenous parents if they were comfortable to work with Indigenous parents in the canteen. This was insulting not only to the parents who were giving up their time, but also to Aunty Michelle who had worked so hard to support parents into the school. The racist actions by the canteen convener made the involvement of Indigenous parents at the school take a backward step. Aunty Michelle did not want her parents to be subjected to working in an uncomfortable environment with someone who was racist. Furthermore, she questioned why it matters what race the parent volunteer is, and does this affect the outcome of providing a service to the students? Evidently, Aunty Michelle faced opposition from some racist teachers in the school, and also had to contend with racist ancillary staff. At times it was very difficult for Aunty Michelle, the parents and the students to feel as though they were important and valued members of the school community.

As a way to address the lack of racial harmony in the school, Aunty Michelle pushed for cultural awareness training to be completed by all staff members at the school. Aunty Michelle instigated this push as she thought it would reduce the amount of racist attitudes and behaviours. She felt she had to do something about the frequent racist incidents that continued to occur within the school environment. There were many other incidents besides the one described in relation to the canteen convener. Another one included some non-Indigenous staff members thinking it was acceptable to only speak to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff when they felt like it.

You know you would have some staff members that would talk to you in the staff room but wouldn't talk to you in the playground. Then you'd have some that would talk to you in the classroom but not in the staff room. Mind you, that was only a minority but there was just a core group of people that I felt that were really racist. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L224-228)

Aunty Michelle was successful in having cultural awareness professional development training implemented in the school. However, it did not come without resistance from nonIndigenous teachers. Some people voiced negative comments about the cultural awareness training.

I know when the tables got turned and we went down the Aboriginal path I would hear comments you know like, "How much Aboriginal culture do we need?" Or "How much of this stuff do we have to take?" And you know I would say to my workers we need to take advantage of this time because it might not always be there. So we are paving a way now. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L230-234)

Some teachers at the school also held low expectations based on unjust stereotypes with regard to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' capability to learn. Teachers would communicate with Aunty Michelle about how fantastic some Aboriginal students' work was, when it was at the same level or below that of their non-Indigenous peers in the class. It was as if it was a shock that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students could achieve the same results as their non-Indigenous peers. These low expectations were held with respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at the school regardless of what they could achieve.

"Look Aunty Michelle. She [an Aboriginal student] did really well in class. She completed all her ABC." "She did all of this and she did all of that" and I am like "so". You know they were really surprised and they had the low expectation on the kids. And because our intake of kids is from a poorer part of town it felt like they were putting all of us in that one box. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L25-29)

Some teachers also brought their preconceived views of Indigenous people into the school. These views were often based on the way Indigenous people live and do things. Many non-Indigenous teachers have never had contact with Indigenous people before they start their teaching role (Craven et al., 2005). The teachers had stereotypical views of Indigenous students and thought that all or most Indigenous students were being neglected in their home life. However, this was not true.

Also with the stereotypes you know these are teachers that come from white middle-class backgrounds so they have their own ideas and perceptions of what we are as (Indigenous) people. You know [they think] we all come from broken homes, they all need breakfast, they all need lunch. You know just the low expectation sort of stuff. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L29-34).

Furthermore, Aunty Michelle often found herself to be extremely conscious of her own behaviours to make sure she did not fit into the mould of the preconceived stereotypes the teachers had of Indigenous people. She always ensured she was calm when dealing with situations that could have been volatile.

But I was more, it's like learning to contain yourself too. Not fly off the handle and be that stereotypical image that people see you as. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L477-479)

During our yarning sessions Aunty Michelle and I discussed identity and what it means to be Aboriginal. When Aunty Michelle was asked about her identity she responded that being an Aboriginal woman is something that she is extremely proud of; however, she sees it as one of many facets of who she is as a person.

Being an Aboriginal woman means that I carry a "sense of belonging" within myself towards my Aboriginality. It's not about the colour of my skin, as I am a fair-skinned Aboriginal. It's a connection that I have to the whole Aboriginal race in our Country. It's also a spiritual connection that I have to my Wiradjuri Country and its people. But being Aboriginal is only a part of who I am, as there are many facets that make me who I am. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L520-525)

Aunty Michelle's Aboriginality connects her identity to her Country and her people. This in turn gives her a sense of belonging. However, that sense of belonging has not always been there for Indigenous people due to the impacts of invasion on Australia.

Invasion has had major impacts on Aboriginal identity due to the Aborigines Protection Act (NSW Government, 1909, 1943). As discussed in section 2.2, this Act began in 1909 and continued until 1969 in NSW. Our people, such as our parents and grandparents, were classified as flora and fauna and were not allowed to speak language around non-Indigenous people. Children were taken from their families and Aboriginal people had to live on missions unless they had permission to live elsewhere. Aboriginal people were not allowed to enter or leave the mission either unless they had permission as well. Aunty Michelle became quite upset when we yarned about the impact this policy has had on our families. For Aboriginal people to give up their identity and conform to Western ways would have been heartbreaking.

I think you know that just makes me sad that. It just makes me sad that you know that my grandfather wasn't classified as a human being. You know that he had to give up his identity to get the dog tags<sup>3</sup>. I didn't realise that. Back in those days he was a well-respected Aboriginal man. He got the [exemption] certificate, he could go and get this and go and get that but as I got older and realised the impact and what he had to do to get that and having [to] give up that stuff. It just makes me angry and I think that they [Aboriginal people] still had their identity but I think especially for that older generation having to carry that [guilt and shame of being exempted and hiding their Aboriginality] and I guess it did affect their identity because we weren't allowed to

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Dog tags is the name given by Aboriginal people to the exemption certificates created in 1943 in NSW by the Aborigines Welfare Board under the NSW *Aborigines Protection (Amendment) Act 1943* (NSW Government, 1943).

speak language. That is why I answered that other question quick because I know who I am as a person and I have my own identity and I am not going to change for anybody. Whereas, back in them days I am sure they still had their identity but they compromised it. They had to compromise it to get on with society [Western]. We used to go and visit the mission in Condo and we used to wait outside in the car to see if we were allowed to go in because we didn't have a scheduled visit. I still remember that as a kid. You know you just wait here Dad or I mean step-dad's going to go over and see if we can go in and see them [family and friends]. Oh yeah you can go in for a couple of hours and see them and that would be it. Make sure you got no alcohol ra ra ra [There were stipulations on being granted permission to enter the mission]. It was just like we were caged animals but oh well that's a whole other story. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L240-298)

Aunty Michelle's identity comes from her Country and family first and then her experiences. Working in the school and community has also formed part of Aunty Michelle's identity.

First and foremost to me it's [identity] my connection to my Country. Connection to Country and I have said it heaps of times living off Country for years and when I go home and visit as soon as I get out past Gunnedah it's like my spirit leaps. I just feel a difference straight away. I don't know, it's like I am really relaxed. Not that I'm uptight being up here. But anyway, when we get out there my girls go "Is your spirit jumping yet Mum?" (AEO1, i2, 2015, L168-173) I feel connected to the land, my mob. I'm not saying I don't feel connected here but it's just different. Like I said I have got to be mindful of protocol and things like that. Being strong in who I am and being a voice for our people and I guess that's a part of my role. I think there are lots of aspects you know when you see colours like that (red, black and yellow) you identify with that straight away, you're connected there with it. You identify with that. Like I said identity comes in many aspects for me personally, for me Country comes first and my mob and then when you're out in the community. And you see the flag in the community. And if I drive past a school and see a mural and that it's a connection straight away. I think to me what builds my identity especially in the education system is that I am paying the way for the next generation. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L176-183)

Identity is also based on the experiences you have growing up. Aunty Michelle has many aspects in her life that have shaped her identity. Cultural identity fits into Aunty Michelle's identity along with many other things. Furthermore, she credits the belief system that she grew up with as having had a big influence on who she is.

I guess it's the belief system I have been brought up with as a child because I think that shapes your identity. Your family of course and your heritage but I also think it's your experiences in life that shapes your identity as well. I have grown up with domestic violence and all that so I identify with that and I can really relate to those family groups, which have helped shape me. Because I don't want that for my family for my girls and my family and I think your experiences in life whether they are positive or negative help shape you as a human being. I've grown up loving sports. So throughout my life I have always played sports because I love being part of a team and what that represents. Of course I love my cultural identity and what that brings. That helps me especially in my work position. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L198-208)

# 5.1.2 Two-way strong

Our identity is forever evolving and, at times, we use different parts of our identity to enable others to have some familiarity by switching our behaviours and actions. Although Aunty Michelle code switches regularly her identity stays the same. She is the same person with the same values and beliefs and her cultural identity does not change. However, there are behaviours that change according to the people she is associating with. Her behaviours towards non-Indigenous people are different compared to Indigenous people.

It's a bit like code switching. You know you are one way at home [and another way at school]. My daughter was laughing at me the other day [because Aunty Michelle was acting like she would at home]. Saying, "You should've seen Mum she was standing there with her hand on her hip carrying on with the kids." But I was code switching for them [the kids] enough in a way when I am around them to be familiar [so Aboriginal students feel comfortable with Aunty Michelle]. But, you know you are one way at home, and then you're a different way with the kids and, then you have got to be a different way with the staff, you know and society. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L258-263) I think it's forever evolving. I always say it's the clown suit. You come to work and you are Aunty Michelle and this is how you are. And people go "ohh you are just gammin<sup>4</sup>". But to me to lead a productive and effective life you need to [change suits]. You are code switching all the time. My kids and my family and my friends know the real me. But when you are institutionalised you still have a real me but it's a professional real me. I am very strong in my own identity. I know who I am as a person as a human being. I think the way we do things is a little bit different but that is not going to change me as a person and my beliefs and what I stand up for and what I think. We might act professional but it doesn't change your identity. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L267-272)

<sup>4</sup> Gammin is joke, not true or mucking around.

Even though Aunty Michelle knows who she is and her beliefs are not going to change while she is at school, there are still times when she feels she has to compromise a part of who she is to work in the school context.

I guess in a way you have to compromise whether we like to admit or not. You have got to compromise part of your identity. Well not your identity but who you are. Like the language how we both speak. When we are speaking to people who are high up in the Western society we compromise our Aboriginal English to do that. Like we said if you go in there [the school or Western systemic structures] and we are all talking how we would talk normally [some people would think we are not educated or cannot speak properly]. And I get that we all talk differently at home, everyone has their own culture at home whether you are black or white. But for us as Aboriginal people those that can switch back and forth and are really good at switching into the Western world including part of that is the language. It really is. So sometimes I think we compromise different parts of ourselves to not so much to fit in but umm to blend in. There is a learning gap and teachers have to be accountable on how they teach our kids. Yes, we have got to have some cultural part of it and we live in a Western world and our kids to get ahead are going to have to learn how to survive in a Western world. And, unfortunately that means learning different ways of doing things such as speaking. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L328-342)

It is important to code switch when you are working between two knowledge systems but it can cause issues in the community. Code switching can cause members of the Indigenous community to believe that you are not working with them but with the Western knowledge system.

Somebody actually said that to me once. [Referring to question asked at the yarning session – *Do you think because you can switch from Indigenous to Western that is why you got your role?*] I was at a collegial meeting and it was sort of a smack in the face. I thought but it's true so people like us that get these roles because we are really good at switching back and forth in what we do and we do it well. What I was saying we have to compromise who we are. You know when we do that and we talk-the-talk then we get our own mob pulling us down "oh look at the coconut<sup>5</sup>, they are trying to be white". Well no actually I am just trying to survive. (AEO1, i4, 2015 L346-352)

Aunty Michelle believes that if she code switches it is for the best for our people, to ensure someone is looking after our children and knowing what is going on in both

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Coconut is a term Aboriginal people call other Aboriginal people when they want to express that they have become white on the inside and are no longer considered to be "one of them".

knowledge systems. This aligns with Pearson's (2009) and Sarra's (2006) theories of walking in two worlds and being two-way strong.

Well who's going to do it? Do you want to live in a society where the low expectation is there, or do you want to be caught up in that mentality of welfare and live under that? Because that is what government and society says about us. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L354-356)

Aunty Michelle can become very political when it comes to Aboriginal issues. That is something that Aboriginal people have to do in their fight for equality. She switches between both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems if she has to. This helps her to get her point across to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people.

So that was me growing up [Aboriginal]. That's still inbuilt in me because I can become really political and my girls are like "here she goes again". But that drives my political side. I am really good when I am back home I go right back here [points to the Indigenous knowledge section on Nakata's cultural interface diagram; see Appendix J] in all areas but when I am at school to the point of I spoke at a LEAP [Leading Educators Around the Planet] conference last year to over a hundred people and it's very much there [points to the Western knowledge section on Nakata's cultural interface diagram; see Appendix J]. By [Aunty Michelle] co-facilitating this Stronger Smarter to Principals, executives and teaching staff is there [Western knowledge on Nakata's cultural interface diagram] but in saying that I don't leave this behind either [Indigenous]. My cultural identity travels with me I don't leave it at the gate it travels with me. And I know how to code switch I would guess when you are in that role. If I talked to teachers like I talked to Uncle they would be like "Oh my God". (AEO1, i3, 2015, L282-291)

Working in the school can sometimes cause tensions with Aunty Michelle's identity. For example, issues at the school are often sorted differently to the way they would be sorted by Aboriginal people. At times the school does not disclose all information to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents. There are times when Aunty Michelle feels as though she has to "play the game" to get what she needs. By playing the game, she means that she has to give lip service to executive team members and teachers, though this does not resonate well with Aunty Michelle. She is very happy that she can be a part of the process in assisting with issues that arise with families, but this also gives her an insight into when issues are not being dealt with appropriately. In some cases, schools do not consult AEOs to address these types of concerns.

Well I guess it does [compromise me]. I know who I am as a person and what I identify with and that. And to be dealing with people who compromise that and try

and undermine that it is really hard. You play the game. Like I've said before it is just a big game. I knew, I'm sitting in that interview with that parent, and I knew that she wasn't being fully told the information. I knew within myself I'm being convicted. You're not being fully told which I felt a bit of compromising there. I like to look at the situation and make her totally aware that it is totally up to you. You know. If you don't agree with him [Aboriginal student] coming back ra ra ra. Then it is your choice. I am really lucky to have the bosses in this school that I do now as opposed to eight years ago. I will feel confident enough to be able to do that [question their decisions] but I know some AEOs there is no way in the world. Some of them are not even a part of that meeting let alone have a voice in that meeting. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L289-301)

At times Aunty Michelle feels that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students experience conflict with their identity when they come to school. Indigenous students can feel isolated in schools with low cohorts of Indigenous students especially if they have no family at the school. This can leave Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students lost and not knowing who to turn to. Aunty Michelle gives an excellent example of conflict with regard to students' identity and how the AEO at another school had to call her about concerns about a student that used to go to Aunty Michelle's school.

Like the way we do things at home sometimes is a little bit different to the way we do them at schools. So when you come to school the systems are in place and they [Aboriginal students] struggle with it. I'm going to use one as an example. There was this boy that came to our school but just changed to another school. And their [the new school] AEO asked me, "What can you tell me about him?" So, I gave her some information. And she is like, "Yeah he just left the class and he is just wandering around and there are not many Aboriginal kids here." So in my mind I'm thinking he is probably thinking what is going on and where are they [Aboriginal kids] all. What am I supposed to do in this environment and this atmosphere because here [at our school] he had all his cousins and lots of family and friends. Half the school is Aboriginal. Where down there it's probably only 20%. He is still trying to find himself down there whereas, a non-Aboriginal kid would just fit in. So he is going to have to work out how he is meant to act down there. Who he is meant to hang around [with]. And I guess you could say that for a non-Aboriginal kid but for an Aboriginal kid it [the conflict] is stronger because of our connection to our families. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L325-340)

Being off Country is hard for Indigenous Australians because Country is the link between our families, our spirituality and us. It is also hard to be employed in community roles when you live off Country, as you need to gain respect from that community. In order to

gain respect from the community, protocols need to be followed and respect needs to be a priority. Aunty Michelle is very respectful and mindful of protocols working off Country. Some of these protocols include not performing a Welcome to Country (only an Acknowledgement of Country is allowed by a non-traditional owner), being mindful of local stories and who they are passed on to. She ensures that she acknowledges the people who told her the story or where she heard it, and she does not visit "significant local sites" with students without the traditional owners. Furthermore, she believes she is respected in the community after many years of proving herself. She admits it has not always been easy for her to work off Country or in someone else's Country but after living in the same community for 30 years Aunty Michelle has built up good relationships and worked hard to improve things at the school.

I think because I have been here so long, and I came here when I was a teenager, so obviously I partied with some of the people then who are now my age you know, junior Elders, so I have that respect from them. You get the odd one [Elder or community member] where you know where they are coming from and in saying that I am really mindful of protocols on and off Country. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L145-149) They don't say it but I get the respect. I feel like I get the respect for it [following protocols in her AEO role]. Especially being in this school up here because you know 40 something percent of the school is Aboriginal so I am in contact with the parents a lot of the time but then again I go out of my way too to make myself be known to them. There are a few local people that work in the school so I've got their respect so they take that respect out into the community. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L139-144)

Aunty Michelle has become a leader in the school community and also facilitates cultural training days about working off Country in schools for other AEOs. Working off Country and developing strong relationships with the Aboriginal community have developed this leadership. However, it took a reminder from a Department of Education staff member to confirm this leadership, as she did not always consider herself a leader. From then on Aunty Michelle recognised herself as a leader.

I remember going to a meeting at district office in Tilsdale and they said to us who are the leaders in the community and who are the leaders in the school. Not one of us said that we are leaders and you know it was [name omitted] actually at the time and she said not one of you have said you are leaders. Your community has elected you to be their voice in the school. That was sort of a reality check for me. Because I thought well I had a panel and there were like five people on the panel and there was one white person and four Aboriginal local people that voted me in over someone on Country because of my experience and knowledge. So I feel I guess I was accepted. You know

to be given a job; but, then there are other people at other agencies and I would go to meetings you'd get the odd one that would really test your limits but I knew exactly where they were coming from you know. You knew what was ingrained in them. But I always say just be professional all the time. Don't drop down to their level and be professional and your actions will speak louder than what their words are saying. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L120-134) We had an AECG cultural awareness training day and my job was to talk about on and off Country because that is my business and I know my stuff. So people were happy with that and I am really mindful of that. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L149-151)

Working off Country does have its advantages and Aunty Michelle believes it is easier for her being off Country when it comes to community politics. In Indigenous communities there can be families that do not talk to each other because of past conflicts. Aunty Michelle remained impartial to all issues in the community.

I have lived in this community for 30 years and lived here more than my own hometown. I am still off Country but I don't get caught up in those really strong family fractions and community things that go on. I can maintain a neutral ground to some respect. So I do think it gives me a better playing field when I am interacting with different parents. I know growing up there were different families in the community that you just did not talk to. You didn't know why, but you just didn't talk to them. I can just imagine if I was an AEO at home back at Bally and I had to go and talk to these parents. That would really compromise my cultural identity because I have to say no I can't do that because they are not going to accept what I have to say. And also I am probably going to get bashed over the head when I get home for talking to them. So I think that [I] have an even and better playing field [here] and I actually have a bit of evidence to back that up now. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L403-414)

Moreover, Aunty Michelle is very professional in her role and would seek help if the situation were to arise if she had her own family involved.

# **5.1.3** Understanding the role

The role of AEO is slightly different to what Aunty Michelle thought it was going to be. When she started at the school she thought she knew what her role as an AEO entailed but it was not quite as she thought. Aunty Michelle was on high demand from all staff members regarding student behaviour.

When I went for my merit selection and I knew what the AEO role was. But it was different to when I stepped into the actual role. You know like when I stepped into the role I just went straight into a Year 6 class and just stayed with these boys trying to

stop them from being suspended. Just be with them all the time. He [the Principal] used to get me to deliver suspension letters home to their parents, which was very confronting for me. Because in the end you turn up with a big yellow envelope and their parents are like, "What have they done now?" So that sort of put me in a hard situation. And I didn't have the confidence at that time to say that [delivering suspension letter] wasn't ok. (AEO1, i1, 2014, L73-81) They [Principal and teachers] expected me to be the disciplinarian of the Aboriginal kids when they stepped out of line. I would walk past a classroom and I would have the teacher running out at me saying you need to take such and such down to your room because they're doing this and they're doing that. That was a constant yeah you know all the time. Sometimes I would have 10 or 15 kids in here. (AEO1, i1, 2014, L62-63)

The main concern for Aunty Michelle is the social and emotional well-being of Aboriginal students at her school. She is able to sense when students are upset or she may have heard on the grapevine when there are issues at home and is able to comfort students when they are distressed. Often the students calm down after talking to Aunty Michelle and head into class.

We are near the really low part of town, the poor part of town. We get a lot of those kids here. So we have a lot of social and emotional well-being here. We have kids that come to school without lunch or without breakfast, and that was a driving force behind the breakfast program. We have a group of kids that would come in all the time you know and we were lucky we had sponsors on board to run this program. We probably don't need it as much as we used to but we still do it one day a week just so we got back ups there and supplies for kids who do come [without food]. So I really worry about the kids' social and emotional well-being first because I believe if you don't take part [of caring for the whole child] because we are teaching the "whole" child and if we don't take care of those needs how can we expect the child to go into the classroom and learn. And they're going in on an empty stomach or something has happened the night before when they are coming in distraught or distressed you know. So I really, and the teachers are aware of that, am happy to be called up if you know someone's not going into class. I ask, "Have you had breakfast? Are you ok?" Or "Have you had lunch?" Everything. Then I go into the classroom and support them in their numeracy, literacy or whatever they are doing in the classroom. (AEO1, i1, 2014, 144-160)

Aunty Michelle makes the Aboriginal students feel like they are in a safe space with her at school and that she cares for them.

Ensuring Aboriginal students can understand concepts and ideas is an important part of Aunty Michelle's role. Aunty Michelle breaks down ideas and learning concepts for Indigenous students so that they can relate to and identify with them.

I break it [learning concepts and ideas] down to [be] part of their identity. I break it down to their interest. For instance if I am dealing with a moogle [naughty] kid who's just mucking up all the time and doesn't get it. I mean he might be angry with the Principal you know ... and I have used this scenario heaps of times whether it's a boy or a girl and whether it's a netball court or a footy field ... [Aunty Michelle explains] "You play footy on the weekend? *Yeah* ... Who are your teammates? *Dadadaa*. Well that's a bit like school. Who are your friends at school? *Dadada*. Well that's like your teammates on the footy field. So are there rules on a footy field? *Yeah*. Name some of them. Do we have rules at school? *Yeah*. So when you're playing footy are you allowed to do whatever you want? Or do you have a boss on the field? *Yeah you have the ref.* Ok well at school Mr Slatt is our Principal well he is like our ref and he has got to make sure we are all following the rules and making sure everyone is safe dadada". And then they get it. The coin drops. And it's the same with their one-on-one learning in the class. I break it down to their level and their interest. And then they are like *ohh ok ohh yeah*. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L358-372)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives need to be a part of all Australian schools' curriculum for the benefit of all students. This needs to happen so that Indigenous knowledges are not being silenced in a Western system but also so they are given the appropriate respect and value. Furthermore, it is critical that Indigenous perspectives be taught in classrooms, so that more people are educated about Aboriginal culture and negative stereotypical views are no longer perpetuated. Non-Indigenous teachers often find it challenging incorporating Indigenous perspectives but should be encouraged with support and training.

So I think with the Aboriginal perspectives being taught in the classroom, yes there is some truth to that you can't teach an Aboriginal perspective if you are a white person. But what if you have got support from Indigenous community. And what if you're in a school where there aren't many Aboriginal kids and not much community but you have those generalised programs you can teach from. I hate that word generalised and I hate that but those programs would have I am assuming, and you should never assume anything, they would have some kind of Aboriginal input. Then you are better off teaching that than nothing at all. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L215-223)

Aunty Michelle's journey as a permanent AEO started eight years ago and in those years it has changed a lot. The artwork presented in Figure 5.3 depicts Aunty Michelle's journey at her school in the present time.



Figure 5.3. Connections – artwork by Aunty Michelle.

The above artwork represents Aunty Michelle's current feelings about working in her school as an AEO. Aunty Michelle's journey at her school has had a positive change since she started working there eight years ago. However, there is still a long way to go before equality is achieved throughout the school. Furthermore, the school has become more focused on Aboriginal education and there is a better understanding of Indigenous culture. This has come through personnel at the school participating in programs such as the Stronger Smarter program developed by C. Sarra (2011).

So this represents how I feel now. The school has much more of a family atmosphere in the school and with the staff. I feel like there is more of a connection. The colours represent ... so these are our colours obviously [red, black and yellow] and these [blue, white and red] are the school colours. So I feel like we are a family unit and it is inclusive. They [non-Indigenous staff] accept us and we [Aboriginal staff and students] accept them. And this is all of the community in the background [the hand shadows]. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L38-43) The cultural shift has been enormous. I am yet to see the academic side of it. But it has taken a long time because to me this was a racist school. It has taken a long time for that cultural shift in people's minds which is awesome. But before Stronger Smarter<sup>6</sup> well you saw that other painting and you saw that I felt like I was in a little box. And it just feels more open now. It just feels like

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Stronger Smarter is an approach used in Indigenous education which embraces a strong and positive sense of what it means to be Aboriginal in contemporary Australian society (C. Sarra, 2011).

more of a family unit. We are more accepting of each other in what we have to bring. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L49-57).

The word family is written in the centre of the artwork, as the school is more like a family now and the handprints in the background represent the community, as they are also important members of the school family.

# 5.1.4 Working at the interface

The school participated in a whole school Indigenous education program that looked at critical elements of practice to make a difference in Indigenous education using different strategies. The program they adopted is the Stronger Smarter program which is underpinned by their philosophy of promoting a positive sense of cultural identity. It also acknowledges and embraces having positive community leadership. This enables innovative and dynamic approaches and processes that are anchored by high expectations and relationships. Their philosophy has five interconnecting strategies that staff members such as teachers, ancillary staff and Principals can use in their school to promote the philosophy. These strategies are:

- Acknowledging, embracing and developing a positive sense of identity in schools
- Acknowledging and embracing Indigenous leadership in schools and school communities
- "High expectations" leadership to ensure "high expectations" classrooms, with "high expectations" teacher/student relationships
- Innovative and dynamic school models in complex social and cultural contexts
- Innovative and dynamic school staffing models in complex social and cultural contexts

(Stronger Smarter Institute, n.d., meta-strategies)

This program highlights how having belief, confidence and high expectations of students gives students the opportunity to be the best they can be. Since the program started there have been many progressive changes in the school. It has enabled Indigenous education to be a priority in the school instead of on the backburner. Indigenous education is now a whole school approach and everyone now contributes instead of Aunty Michelle being the main driver. This has also made Indigenous staff and students feel valued at school.

I think before that program came into our school we never had an Ab[original] Education] team. It was non-existent. So myself and the AP [Assistant Principal] that I share my office [with] would have a little meeting down by the photocopier. So there was no Ab Ed team. I was basically it. Then we slowly started one. But when Stronger

Smarter came that is when we got a strong one. But in the beginning it was a lot of Western ideas and I guess with the Stronger Smarter it helped them [the teaching staff] have a look at themselves and change the way they look at things. You know people and relationships. But now when we run our meetings, it's run in a yarning circle and everyone takes turns in putting our point across and I don't feel like they are looking to me for all the answers anymore. Whereas, before it was, and I would say you know "this is not Aunty Michelle's Ab Ed team, it is everyone's business". You know now NAIDOC is coming up and in the past people would look to me and I'd throw them ideas and I would just jot them all down and do them. Now I am happy to say if you have that idea are you happy to run with [it]. So I get input from them [non-Indigenous staff] but I think the way I see it now is people having input for what is best for our school community. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L125-140)

Aunty Michelle plays an important role alongside teachers in closing the gap. The term "closing the gap" makes Aunty Michelle feel as though she is contained. However, Aunty Michelle acknowledges that there is a gap but there could be a different name to describe it.

Yeah. I don't like the terminology for "closing the gap". That sort of gets my back up and I have said it before. Straight away closing the gap puts me in a box. You know I hate it but the reality is there is a health gap and there is a learning gap. Whether we like to acknowledge it or not, data says that's what it is. I do see that I am playing a role in I guess closing the gap I guess to support the kids in their learning and education. But not just with Aboriginal kids. I see myself as supporting all of the kids in the school and parents in the community. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L149-155)

There has been a lot of input by Aunty Michelle into closing the educational gap in regards to her school but she is cautious about not telling teachers how to do their job. Aunty Michelle makes up resources to help teachers in the classroom and they are greatly appreciated. By doing this, it is giving teachers some insight into Indigenous knowledges without stepping on their toes and telling them what to do.

I know with the school plan my boss is pretty good with that. He will come to me about different things with the school plan and liaise with me and what I think about the Ab Ed side of it. So I get to have an input into the school plan. I am on the executive team and I assist teachers when they come and ask me. Sometimes I do give advice about the Aboriginal perspectives in the classroom. I don't go and be forthcoming and tell them what to do because I don't want to impose on them and their teaching. There is a fine line but on the flip side of that I think a lot of them would feel comfortable to come to me. Every now and then I have resources that I make up myself. When I started actually the first year I started I did up this NAIDOC

resource book. Where I just got local stories and pictures from, like a picture of a turtle, which is a binging [in Bundjalung language]. You know the flags and just what it means. Just like a general one and I was a bit nervous to introduce it to staff. I was thinking "oh I wonder how they are going to feel" when I handed that out to them. Well I put it in their pigeon hole and we had a staff meeting and one of the staff members said to me, "Aunty Michelle I just really want to thank you for that book. What a breath of fresh air to have something else to look at instead of just doing the same thing every year." So I am really mindful of the feedback I got and every now and then I will do a cultural resource that I think is appropriate. Or if I get something I will give it to them. Or I will give it to new scheme teachers that come into the school about personalised learning plans. I have a booklet made up on that and how you would incorporate that into the schools and who you work with. I have a great one about terminology. Some people find the term Aborigines offensive. Me being included. I cringe. It was good terminologies. And about sorry business and reconciliation ones. Just as a teaching resource for them. I guess that is one way of embedding my cultural perspectives in the classroom as well. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L170-190)

The racial gap in the school is also closing and Aunty Michelle has contributed to this through lots of hard work and working closely with staff and students to embed Indigenous knowledges and learning perspectives.

I feel like that is what I have achieved in this school. Closing that racial gap and opening up a more cultural perspective. When I started at this school, I started and did acknowledgement of Country. So I introduced it into the school and even though it is only a small thing it will be one of the things that I will be proud of when I retire is introducing that but not just a tokenistic thing. The meaning behind it because when we actually introduced it into the school Steve [cultural teacher] and I would go around to the classrooms and when he would do his cultural program I would tap into it and talk about acknowledgement of Country, welcome to Country and the meanings behind it and the historical meanings behind it. I think I am closing the racism gap and broadening the cultural. Not that it is a gap but trying to broaden the culture. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L157-167)

Aunty Michelle recognises it can be political and hard for teachers to implement Indigenous perspectives in the classroom especially if they do not have connections to Indigenous community members. Teachers are often scared that what they are doing is wrong or they do not have permission. However, the philosophy of the Stronger Smarter program that has been implemented in the school has helped non-Indigenous teachers to understand

they can teach an Indigenous perspective as it is moving forward and getting Indigenous perspectives out there.

Yeah and that is like the language of this area. It is really political and Steve does a little bit in our school because he says I would rather do a little bit and still get caught up in the politics of it all then just losing it. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L113-115) In that program [Stronger Smarter] I have had a lot of teachers say that it has given me permission to actually go ahead and teach this stuff without having to worry about treading on that fine line. It has given them permission and courage to have a go at it and not be too scared. Whereas, you know if you're too scared and worried and you don't want to go you are not going to get anywhere. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L200-205)

Aunty Michelle highlights the importance of strong relationships to ensure a safe area where both Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people can learn and teach each other without judgment. These relationships open the way for people to learn without causing offence. There is still a lot of work required to get establish and maintain a culturally safe space and Aunty Michelle does not think that she will see it happen in her school before she retires. However, Aunty Michelle is heartened by the many changes she has seen from when she first commenced at the school. She attributes this to the quality of relationships that have been built over time.

To me I think it all builds down to relationships. You think about relationships well good relationships they are built on trust and respect and integrity and out of that relationship comes respect and acceptance. So I think for the two to gel together especially us Aboriginal people we invest so much time in our relationships so I think with that relationship comes understanding. So I think if the two could work on their relationships together then this here will go out to here [a bigger space will form]. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L303-309) I don't think I will ever see it in my lifetime. People like me and you we are on a journey and sometimes we are going to come across hot burning coals but we are driven to get a better education for our next generation coming through and our babies. There is something in us that drives us that we slowly walk through those fires. So I don't think I am going to see it in my lifetime but it is better than what it was. Definitely better than what it was 10 years ago in my experience. I think in another 10 years I envisage that it is better than it is now. I say that to the kids and the community, people that I talk to and the parents. We need to capitalise on these times now with all the support they are giving us. Some people look at it as handouts but you know at the end of the day whether we like to acknowledge it or not there is a learning gap. You know and we have got to try and

decrease that and close it. Who is to say that it is always going to be? (AEO1, i3, 2015, L311-323)

Having Indigenous students attend Western schools has had an impact on Indigenous identity, Aunty Michelle believes. It teaches and expects different outcomes compared to Indigenous communities. Western education strategies are predominantly used in schools and the curriculum comes from a Western perspective. Again, Aunty Michelle believes relationships are heavily involved in helping Indigenous people to be more accepted in a Western society.

I think if we go back to that relationship thing you have a good relationship you have an understanding and acceptance of each other but especially because we live in a Western society. So going through schools, it's a Western curriculum they are teaching us how to live in a Western society. You know that is what I say to the kids. You think this isn't important now to learn all your spelling and all that now but when you get older do you want to get your licence and do you want to drive a car. Yes well you have got to do all this stuff to get it in place so yeah I do think it does compromise our cultural identity to some extent. Western [education strategies are used] absolutely and I think every school just about does. Because like I said we are governed by a Western curriculum. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L454-467)

Indigenous students and Aunty Michelle generally work between two knowledge systems while they are at school. To be able to work between two knowledge systems is a strength. However, there are some Indigenous students that are better at working between the Indigenous and Western knowledge systems than others. The students that are better at working between them usually engage better with school.

I think they have to. And I think the kids that do that well are the ones that just go on ahead and the ones who don't are the ones that have hiccups with their behaviour and engagement. They are the ones that are really trying to get their heads around it. I think it is a strength. Because knowledge is power and when you, and like I have said before people in our positions, we learn to code switch. We learn how to have a foot in both worlds. We do it really well. Like I said we live in a white society so we need to learn to operate in a white society. The curriculum is taught in a white society. So whether you want to or not accept that, that is the reality. We operate on our own Indigenous world but we also operate in a white society as well and bring[ing] that together is just going to make you more powerful. You see those ones that are stuck in either [worlds] and that can build up racist attitudes and this stops them from moving forward. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L345-353)

Aunty Michelle likes to empower Indigenous families in the school by giving them all the information they need to know about their children and their well-being with regard to school life. "I just try to empower families and that when the opportunity arises I give them the right information that they need." (AEO1, i4, 2015, L68-69). Figure 5.4 represents what Aunty Michelle would like to see schools looking like in the future.

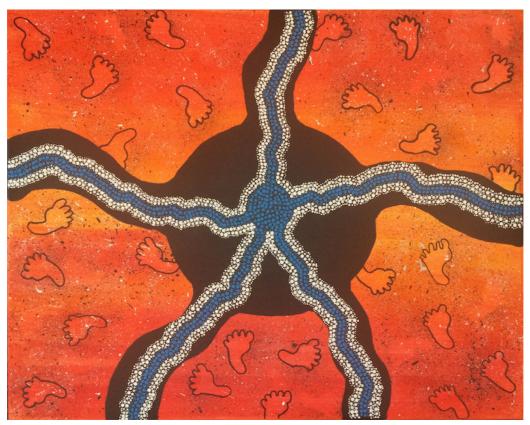


Figure 5.4. Togetherness – artwork by Aunty Michelle.

This artwork is what Aunty Michelle hopes to see in the future for her school – having community and the school working together so our children gain knowledge in both Indigenous and Western systems.

This one is more about where I see us in the future. I see this so this [circle in middle of picture] is my meeting place symbol so this is the school. And where I hope to be in the future is us [Aboriginal people] having many roads in and out. Hence, the footprints of the community coming and going. I feel like we started on that path [blue path]. But the dark shadow in the background, I would love to see all of that overflowing with ideas. That is what I see in the future. The school is an integral part of the community and a meeting place where people can feel free to come and go whenever they want to. Both the kids will come here and they will learn to overflowing abundance and they will go back out. But the community will also bring their knowledge as well. So we are overflowing with their presence as well and what they have to bring to the school. That is my future one anyway. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L61-68).

# 5.2 AUNTY ROWENA'S JOURNEY

#### **5.2.1** Country

Aunty Rowena is a traditional owner and custodian of Bundjalung Country. She has been an AEO at her school for three years. She is married and has three children and lives in town. Growing up she lived on the mission on her Country and attended school in town. Aunty Rowena is proud of who she is and is happy to share her stories with the students at her school, because she believes it makes it more real for the students to understand, as they can connect her stories to history.

When I was born in 1964 I was part of flora and fauna. I wasn't classed as human and put on the animal and plants list. And then I became an Australian citizen in 1967 and that gave my mum and dad permission to vote in 1967. (AEO2, i2, 2015, L125-128)

Identity comes from many different parts of our life but Aunty Rowena believes her identity is from her family and Country. Her family name is well known in both Aboriginal communities and non-Indigenous communities. Lots of people know her family, and if people do not know Aunty Rowena personally they usually know her family. Aunty Rowena has strong family values and this is also a part of her identity.

What makes me me? I think my family name and where I come from. My family name is well known. My grandparents and my father because when you say their name people know who I am then. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L51-53)

Aunty Rowena's connection to Country and traditional ownership is also part of her identity. She is an advocate for the protection of her Country as it is a part of her.

This is my Country, my father's Country, and my grandmother's Country. It was always our Country before white man stepped on this Country. I don't just go around and say I own this Country; I am part of this Country. And I might not have paid money for this Country, but that is my connection. And that is where my heart is. There is a whole difference to owning something because you bought it with money you know. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L344-349)

Growing up Aunty Rowena lived on the outskirts of town on the mission until she was 8 years old. There were many unfair rules for Aboriginal people who lived on the mission compared to people who lived in town. These rules and restrictions were similar to living in detention.

You know the welfare board, living on a mission and my Mum and Dad had to sign off when they left and sign back in when they came back. They had to get permission from the boss, the missionaries [to do things]. And the school was on the mission

when they were kids. My parents weren't allowed to go to school with the white kids you know. Dad was not allowed down town after dark. (AEO2, i2, 2015, L140-147)

Aunty Rowena went to a high school that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students attended. High school was very different to primary school and Indigenous students were not treated inclusively. All Indigenous students were put into the one room, no matter what their age was. All Indigenous students stayed in the classroom all day and unlike the non-Indigenous students, they did not move to different classroom for different subjects. Aunty Rowena was often made to feel worthless at school, because at school her voice was suppressed. However, Aunty Rowena knew it was wrong that all Indigenous students were in the same class regardless of their age, so she told her father what was happening and he went to the school to sort it out. But Aunty Rowena had to be careful what she wished for because when she was taken out of her class she felt very uncomfortable, as she did not know anyone.

It's funny .... I learnt from my father, cause I went home complaining to Dad. I went into Year 7. "I am in the same class as my brother who is in Year 9 Dad" ... But it didn't click until second term or the middle of first term. And it was like well what the hell is this. I remember him [Dad] coming into school and saying, "What's going on here? You are treating these black kids like they are cattle. My daughter is actually very clever." I was around 11 or 12 then and you know what we mostly did in that class? We'd draw pictures. They [non-Indigenous] think we all deadly at art. You know. I can draw stuff but you know what I mean. And whilst still in that we all had the same science class from Year 7 to Year 9 kids and we played that, we had buzzers and you had to answer science questions and they had two teams. And I would study on the bus going down all the questions and I'd study on the way coming home because we had to come from [my town] which is 25 minutes each way. And I got every question. I'd be there going bang, bang [getting all the questions right]. We did our exam and I got 100% in the exam. It was because of that game and I tried to show them we weren't stupid. And they put me in another class the following term and I thought all my Christmases had come at once but I was too scared to go in there. I realised there was no black fullas in there. What's going on here. And then [disruptive] behaviour started. You know what I mean. I ended up leaving that school halfway in Year 10. But I thought oh god this is what you wanted. But I never thought of that until I left and I thought about it all. You know. When I reflect back. (AEO2, i2, 2015, L266-287)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> Deadly is very good, cool, great or awesome (https://www.macquariedictionary.com.au/resources/aus/word/map/search/word/deadly/Darwin%20and%20Nort h%20Coast/).

Aunty Rowena believes the school failed their duty of care by segregating Indigenous students from non-Indigenous students. When Aunty Rowena started high school she had non-Indigenous friends but these friendships dwindled because she was isolated from them. So when she was moved into the class of non-Indigenous students she was terrified. It made her feel isolated and she did not know how to cope and started to get into trouble.

After doing that and thinking about that it was the school's fault. They made us too scared to go into class. If they would have just did when we come from primary school when we finally got to go to big school and finally got to be with other kids. Don't wait until we get to high school and teenagers and then separate us. Back then it was unheard of for Aboriginal kids to go to Year 11 and 12. And I think it was because of something like that [separating the two groups]. I had white friends when I went to high school and Aboriginal friends. But we grew apart because we were locked in this room. We weren't allowed to see each [other]. (AEO2, i2, 2015, L289-297)

Being taken out of the Indigenous student class also caused socialising problems for Aunty Rowena. Her Indigenous friends gave her a hard time. Her Indigenous peers started calling her names.

I started getting called a coconut. But it wasn't my doing they put me in there. Not as if I chose to go in there. My best friends all the way through [were black fullas], growing up with them all through primary school. Then one year at high school, getting called a coconut because I had no choice but to make white friends. I had no one. I started playing hockey because some of them [non-Indigenous] girls lived in Barren so I played hockey with them. And going to the pool with them. Then I started getting called "uptown nigger", "white dog", white this and that. I started having fullon fistfights with them, standing on the street saying come on then. I was a real tomboy too. I played all sports known to man and it was sad because I had to fight my way through school after that. It ended up in Year 10 I left and went to Banley High and I just thought oh my God these black fullas down here are different, they go to classes. And I had Aboriginal friends down there. It was different. Also having my mob you know your best friends saying you coconut and you uptown nigger and all that sort of shit. That started making me stronger. [I thought] I'm going to get a job and you watch I am going to be better than you. I'm going to show you it didn't break me. It built me up. It made me more determined. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L18-230)

Aunty Rowena gave an overview of her experiences of attending both primary school and high school.

Barren was a community [primary] school but it had a lot of Aboriginal kids and it still has a lot of Aboriginal kids cause of the mission there. Smith High was more [of

a] white high [school], [there] was more white kids than black kids. They only had a handful [of black kids]. And Lansville High was more white and there was two Aboriginal girls there and one Aboriginal boy and we were best friends, all of us. It was probably because there was that many white fullas down there, but we are still best mates today. Smith High made me feel like I was cattle. You know I'm in there with my brother and he started high school three years ago. What the hell. You know. But it didn't worry me because I felt comfortable because I was in there with everyone I knew. Then when I started to show them [teachers] that I didn't like this because at Lansville High you had to do the work and then you go up there and it was like what the hell. We had constant excursions where we had to go to the teachers' house. They were teaching us how to cook and live like white fullas. I remember it now. Back then I didn't realise what they were doing but as an adult and I have to talk about it I remember it. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L232-246) That's how I learnt how to make apricot chicken. That was my favourite you know and I made it all the bloody time. Now I don't make it at all. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L249-251)

From the rules and regulations of growing up on the mission and going to school Aunty Rowena has endured issues with regard to trust. This has come about because she was often blamed for incidents growing up because of her identity as an Aboriginal person. To be stigmatised because of your race is likely to create profound issues with trusting people and unfortunately for Aunty Rowena this is exactly what happened. She does not like to be in crowded areas and is always watching over her shoulder. Aunty Rowena is constantly on guard and watches what she says and does.

I have trust issues. I don't trust a lot of people and that goes on whether they are black or white. I watch where I am and I don't like meeting new people especially and I don't like crowds. I think that's got a lot to do with that trust thing growing up. Because if something went wrong and there was two, three non-Indigenous and I was there I was the one that got the blame or it was my fault that it happened. So I grew up thinking whatever happens I am to blame for it. So I don't trust anyone. You watch what you say and do around people. I think being Aboriginal that's how we grow up. Then you got people telling you that you are not worth it when you [are] at school. (AEO2, i2, 2015, L244-252)

Aunty Rowena believes that non-Indigenous community members and work colleagues look at her differently and sometimes she feels as though she does not fit in because she is Aboriginal. She also believes that some non-Indigenous people do not understand Indigenous people and that they do not try to. Non-Indigenous people have made her feel different even though this may not have been deliberate.

The first thing in my mind was "I am different". I already know that not only where I work but different in the community, different when I go out, and sometimes I feel like I don't even belong here. I'm alien you know what I mean and you know I grew up my grandparents were full blood<sup>8</sup>. I'm still trying to prove to non-Indigenous people who I am and what my place is. And where their place is when it comes to me. (AEO2, i2, 2015, L20-25) They [non-Indigenous people] make us complicated when it comes to us as Aboriginal people. There are the ones that have got that line drawn down the middle. (AEO2, i2, 2015, L34-35)

The line down the middle between Indigenous and non-Indigenous causes racism in society.

Indigenous people are still subjected to racism and Aunty Rowena was exposed to a racist incident at the end of 2014. This incident happened in a local shop in her community and it made Aunty Rowena feel like a second-class citizen. It also involved a teacher from Aunty Rowena's school and at first the teacher did not understand what was happening but after it was explained she was extremely upset that this could happen to Aunty Rowena. The incident also really upset Aunty Rowena when she reflected on it. When retelling this story to her children she was reduced to tears.

Since we last met, I had a mmm how would you put it? A racist thing happened to me. It was lunchtime and it was the last day of school or the second last day of school. And everyone [the students] was done having lunch. And I was in here [the classroom] cleaning and everything and I thought oh well me and the Norta workers. And I thought I will go down and get us some sandwiches or chips and that. Then I thought no I will get some sandwiches [from the town]. So I walked into the bakery and there was this little blonde girl there. And I thought there is no one in there. And I looked around and I went over to the counter and I thought no it's too hot I will get a sandwich. So I said, "Look I will have that egg and lettuce sandwich there." And before I went there I went to the fridge and grabbed a drink and went to the counter and she said, "ohh ok." Then she went and grabbed the sandwich out of the counter. Then she looked past me and a teacher from the school was behind me with another lady. And she [girl behind the counter] said, "Do you want this sandwich, this egg and lettuce?" (AEO2, i2, 2015, L36-49)

By the girl in the shop asking the teacher if she wanted the egg sandwich after Aunty Rowena had ordered it made her feel like a second-class citizen. Aboriginal people are often discriminated in shops or refused service like they are invisible. Aunty Rowena was alone in

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Full blood means an Aboriginal person who has only Aboriginal heritage.

the bakery when she ordered her sandwich and when another customer (teacher from the school) came in, the girl behind the counter asked the teacher if she wanted the sandwich.

And I went "excuse me" and I turned around and looked and looked back at her [the girl behind the counter] and said, "You know exactly what you can do with that sandwich. I don't want it." And the teacher [other customer] said, "No I don't want it." And I said "How fucking dare you." I swore and I said, "I am no second-class citizen." She [girl behind the counter] said, "What is your problem?" I said, "This shop was empty." I pointed out how it made me feel.

Aunty Rowena was made to feel as though she did not deserve to have the sandwich. She felt as if the other customer was superior to her because Aunty Rowena had ordered the sandwich when there was no one else in the shop and it was offered to someone after she had ordered it.

I said to the teacher, "The thing is that young lady thought you were better than me. And that you deserved that sandwich over me." I stood outside the shop and watched her and then we walked away. It was big long sliding doors so we stood there and I made it quite clear and very loudly I said, "How dare she make me feel like this. This day and age this sort of racism is in of all towns in my Country. I'm the custodian here and this has gotta happen to me." And I made it quite clear so the shop owners and everyone could hear me. Not shouting but talking to that teacher and she was nearly in tears saying "I can't believe that happens and I am so shocked." And I said, "Welcome to my world. See you don't get it, this still happens to us today." (AEO2, i2, 2015, L36-81)

Although racist incidents like the one detailed above do not happen as regularly as they used to, it is still very emotional when it happens. It recalled past traumatic experiences for Aunty Rowena. However, Aunty Rowena was relieved that non-Indigenous staff members at her school were able to witness the treatment Indigenous people have to put up with and how it is different compared to the way non-Indigenous people get treated.

Something like that well it has been a long time since something like that has happened to me but it is still emotional and it was still upsetting. I was so angry I was on the verge of tears. You know what I mean. It just brought back all those memories. Just like I said we are different. People can't say we are all the same [and] this is Australia we are trying to do this. They don't get it. We get treated differently every day, that was just blatantly straight out but I am so glad it was a teacher who was behind me when she [the shopkeeper] looked past me and I was not good enough for that damn sandwich. It might have been just a sandwich to the average Joe Blow, but to me it was more about not being good enough to have the bloody sandwich over a non-Indigenous person, and that, that sort of treatment is still happening in 2014, you know at the end of last year. (AEO2, i2, 2015, L84-92)

As a traditional owner and custodian in the area, Aunty Rowena believes that her role as an AEO is different to someone who is working as an AEO off Country. If you are not a traditional owner you cannot dictate how cultural things occur. Aunty Rowena has a voice in how issues in the local Aboriginal and school community are dealt with. It is disrespectful to try and tell her how to organise events and deal with issues in her Country without her asking you to. She often finds Aboriginal people from her town or who are in touch with their culture will see her or the other Aboriginal teachers at the school. But the people who are new to being identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander do not know who to talk to. The newly identified people will often go to the non-Indigenous teachers. Aunty will give her time to Indigenous Australians who are learning about their culture. She takes great pride in her role as a traditional owner, and if she is disrespected by people who do not know the protocols of being off Country she gets frustrated with them.

The difference is me being a traditional owner and also a custodian from here. A lot of parents [from the school] can't come here and tell me what I can do and can't do in my Country. So I sit on the real good side of the fence here. If someone tried to [tell me what to] do I would say, aye don't you come here talking to me like that in my Country. I am very traditional and they know that. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L316-319) So I find those people who are not from here some of them on this side [pointing to the Indigenous knowledges side of the diagram; see Appendix J] [they] still come and address me and talk to me and sis this and that or talk to another Aboriginal teacher that's not from here as well. But these fullas here [new to identifying Aboriginal] it's strange because they don't know who they talk to because they don't know their [each person's] way. Yeah they are still learning. But I still feel like being a traditional owner and custodian I can talk to these people. If they don't like it my way and they don't like it and they get ignorant and too Westernised, I tell them to get out. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L316-326)

Furthermore, Aunty Rowena will not have anything to do with Aboriginal people who are not willing to learn about the local culture and the protocols of being off Country.

I say you are a very ignorant person and don't call yourself Aboriginal if you don't want to know about the culture and if you are too ignorant for me now go away. They [are] thinking what did I just say. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L327-330)

The people often don't understand why Aunty will say this to them.

## 5.2.2 Understanding the role

Like most other AEOs, Aunty Rowena does a lot more than she is supposed to in her role as an AEO. She does this on her own accord because she is dedicated to her job. She knows how to communicate with Indigenous students and has good relationships with both

Indigenous students and their parents. Furthermore, she attends all meetings with regard to the welfare of Indigenous students. In her role Aunty Rowena checks on students' attendance and why they are not at school. She can relate to Indigenous parents and they trust her. Her role has multiple dimensions concerning Indigenous education including working with other Aboriginal educators.

I feel I do a hell of a lot more. But that's my choice. I didn't get told that I had to. That's my choice because I feel that I need to change ... because I know Aboriginal kids. Aboriginal kids are different to non-Indigenous kids. They are different in every which way. [Different] lifestyles outside of school. And they know me and if I can help in any way to make things better for them I do it. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L74-80) I am included in the welfare meetings, I'm included in all that and with the IM [students who need support] and special needs kids. We've got a few kids, well not a lot, some kids in the special needs class with behavioural issues like ADHD and mental health problems. If they're not coping in classes I actually separate them and bring them in to the student room and help them with their assessments at their pace. Not only those kids but all kids from Year 7 to Year 12 come in and utilise this room. If in any way there is something I don't know about we will find a teacher and we will find out what to do and I will take notes and we will get it right. I can also check attendance (AEO2, i1, 2014, L115- L121)

Aunty Rowena is able to question parents as to why Indigenous students are not at school because she has good relationships within the community. She can ask parents and guardians where the students are and why they are not at school. She can also explain to the parents that there is lunch available for the students at school so you do not need to keep them at home if you have no food to send with them.

Because I know the families and the families know me I can actually say to Mum, "Where was that kid? Why has that happened? Well I got lunch at school, you know that, just send them." [Aunty says to a student] I think I did that with your mother on Monday. I said to her [mother], "She's pulling the wool over your eyes I got lunch at school." Yeah so because all the families know me and we have, well I have a good relationship with the families. It's pretty easy for me to say that. But I don't think it would be easy if it was a teacher or non-Aboriginal person. They'd probably think well that's none of your business. And also it's the way we talk to each other too. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L150-156)

When Aunty Rowena began the role as AEO at her school she thought she would be working mainly with Indigenous students; however, she is working with Indigenous students, non-Indigenous students and staff. Furthermore, Aunty Rowena took on the role because she

wanted to work with Indigenous students to make sure they were keeping in touch with their culture and being respectful. As Aunty Rowena is a traditional owner in the area she thought it would be a great way to bond with Indigenous students from the local area and connect them to their culture. Aunty Rowena has many different tasks she does in her role.

Well when I first started here I had a list of duties I had to do. No discipline. I was not to discipline any kids .... No playground duty, which I don't do anyway. Home visits (not meant to do them). I still do home visits. But sometimes because I am related to most of the kids I take off the AEO hat and put on the Aunty hat. When I used to say that's not right, don't do that you know. So three years into it I find it's a lot easier now. Plus, I do what I feel is right. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L53-58) Being here for the kids. I took this job because I wanted to work with Aboriginal kids. I took this job because our Aboriginal kids are losing their culture and losing their respect. And Saintly is in my Bundjalung area. So that's what I thought it was, just working with the kids and that is exactly what I am doing. But I changed a few things. Aboriginal culture was not on our curriculum so I added it. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L60-65)

In her role as AEO, Aunty Rowena's main priority is her Indigenous students. Often she will miss recess or lunch to help her students out. Furthermore, Aunty Rowena will often sit with Indigenous students at recess and lunchtime. At these times she can find out what the students need help with, or identify any problems they are having. Talking to the students in a relaxed environment helps her to understand which students are having issues. Aunty Rowena prefers to find out this information from them rather than talking to the teachers in the staff room. She believes that if the students are able to discuss any concerns in a relaxed environment then that will make them feel happy and allow them to focus on their learning.

I have got a kid here with issues like something is going on and that kid is my first priority over my recess. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L438-439) I always have my recess here with all the kids. And cause of [that] I've got a lot of seniors [students] in here, it gives them a chance to tell me what they are struggling with or need help with. Then I take notes and listen to the gossip that is going around. Oh what happened with him is that why he is not here? Ahh now I know why Joe Blow's not here. Better give mum a ring. So that is more important to me than sitting up there [the staff room] listening to the teachers talking about what they got. Happy kids is good learning and then the teachers are happy with them [Indigenous students]. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L445-451)

Aunty Rowena spoke to the Norta Norta workers (Aboriginal educators – see Glossary) at her school about why she stays with Indigenous students at recess and lunchtime. She explained to the Norta workers that during these informal discussions with students you are able to pick up how the students are feeling and whether they are struggling. As a result, the

Norta workers now have lunch with Indigenous students too. Aunty believes it is easier to sit with the students in a relaxed atmosphere and ask them directly how they are feeling than asking other students how certain Indigenous students are going. It is also better to identify the problem before it gets taken into the classroom.

Well I spoke to the Norta workers about why I don't go up and now they come in here too because they learn a lot from the kids too. So they will sit in here and have their recess and lunch in here. Because it's better than asking a kid about a kid when that kid is there telling you themselves. This is what is happening to me. Better than a teacher saying "I wonder what is wrong with that kid." You get it from the horse's mouth in here. I find it a lot more proactive to be in here than reactive. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L442-458)

The discussions between Aunty Rowena and her students are often based around needing help with assignments and talking to teachers about what the students are struggling with. Tangible support is always offered to these students.

You're in here working together and when they say, "I just don't get that assignment, I tried and I don't know. I just feel like giving up." You go look at the timetables, I always keep them on the table. "So how about we go and find out and talk to that teacher about the assignment and then let's work on it." (AEO2, i3, 2015, L458-461)

If the students know they are supported, then they are happy. When the students are happy the school runs smoothly and everyone is happy. "*Happy kid then happy school, happy days, happy AEO*." (AEO2, i3, 2015, L461-462)

The support students have received from Aunty Rowena has resulted in Indigenous students taking on more responsibility for their own work. Aunty Rowena pushes them to make sure their work is being done at a high standard, completed and handed in on time. She does not want any of her students to fail. She really emphasises the point to students about handing work in, as a lot of the time her students have nearly finished the work and they do not hand it in because it is not finished.

[Aunty Rowena asked a student] "You sort of more interested in your work now that you got someone around like me and Mr Kennedy around like that hey?" [Student: "Yep"]. We push yous [students]. Go and get that, sit down, you got a time limit. We're like their human diaries. But the kids know now. I think they take more responsibility for their schoolwork now because of the work we do with them and we push them. And the importance and we rub off how important it is because we don't want any of our kids with N [fail] awards. If you are going to do most of the work, hand it in. It is better to get a small score than none at all. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L162-168)

Aunty Rowena found out as much information as she could about her students before going into classrooms with them so she knew the best ways to support them. This helped her to pinpoint exactly the areas in which her students needed help. With the knowledge of students' backgrounds, she was able go into the classroom and target the areas where students required most assistance. She also attended sport with them. This helped her to form good relationships with her students and not "shame" them out about their weaknesses. From her observations, some students need help academically while others need help with their wellbeing. Aunty Rowena does whatever it takes to make her students successful learners and ensure they take part in all activities at school. Aunty Rowena also works in partnership with the Norta Norta workers.

Well we got Norta workers; two trained teachers and we had two untrained [teachers]. Now we only got one at the moment. But when I first started I got to know the Norta people who were the trained teachers and sat down and got them to go over a list of kids that basically they spent their time with and why. I actually did a bit of research first. And so I got to know the kids in that way. Then I started going to the classes where those kids were. Going to sport because they like sport and inviting them into the student room. And now I not only do that with Aboriginal kids, if they've got a white friend with them and they feel comfortable I actually let them come in too. Well-being meaning providing lunches. We've got girls group, boys group. We get the neighbourhood centre youth workers to come in and check on them. If the kids have got any issues and they want to talk to me they actually know they can come down here. I also help them with stuff to do with outside the school, with notes that have to be signed and stuff by teachers and by the Principal. So I try and get that [done] so they are not coming in stressing because they needed that [note signed] to do something with sport you know. I do everything to keep their health and their mental health in a good way. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L111-125)

#### 5.2.3 Working at the interface

At the start of the school year, Aunty Rowena and other Indigenous staff members held a professional development day with the teaching staff at the school. The aim of this day was to help staff have cultural awareness about Aboriginal issues in the local area. Two Aboriginal teachers at the school organised a staff development day because the Principal suggested there needed to be more education in the school around local Aboriginal knowledge. The day was a huge success. Aunty Rowena and the other Indigenous staff members educated the non-Indigenous staff members about Aboriginal spirituality. This gave them an insight into why Indigenous students exhibit various behaviours. The professional development also enabled

teachers at the school to gain an understanding of the way our people do things and therefore gave a better overall understanding of Aboriginal culture. Feedback from staff was very positive and encouraging.

And one of the best things at this school is it might've been at the start of Term 2 we ended up having our staff development day on Aboriginal culture. And all the teachers had to get involved in it. It ended up going all day. I spoke most of the day. It was organised by a head teacher who is Aboriginal and my cousin who is sometimes the Deputy Principal of [the] primary school. It actually opened up the teachers' eyes. I talked about how our kids are different, how the lifestyle is different, what spirituality actually means to us and why kids say or are feeling shame. I talked about all this sort of stuff and the reviews at the end of the day towards the Aboriginal Education team were overwhelming and very positive. It's just unbelievable. I said to the other Aboriginal staff they should be doing that in every school. It was a learning curve for the teachers. And I opened the development day in [Aboriginal] language and then told them why I did that. Leading up to that staff developing day I was like, yeah just count me in. Very laid back about it but I didn't know I was going to be doing most of the talking. But I loved it in the end. It was a good day. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L216-233)

During the professional development both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal educators had discussions in regards to Indigenous education. These discussions and processes enabled relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members to become stronger. They also assisted teachers to gain a better understanding of Indigenous cultural protocols. At times teachers were getting frustrated as they did not understand why Indigenous students would not go to certain areas of town. Aunty Rowena informed the teachers as to why the students did this. The students would not go to certain parts of town because they were not allowed to as they were either sacred areas or areas where massacres had occurred. This is part of Aboriginal protocol. Aunty Rowena has also ensured that non-Indigenous teachers felt comfortable with asking her any cultural issues that arose in their day-to-day teaching. She reminded teachers that it is always better to ask questions.

One of the things that some of the teachers were upset about were kids not being able to go in certain areas of town. Me being from here a traditional owner custodian it was good to have me on staff because then I could explain it and then it started to make sense. I found [that] from then onwards it made it even easier to work in the school. And, I also made it quite welcoming for them at any time, "Come down if you don't understand it. Come and ask me. Don't dwell on something or assume because assuming can get you in a lot of trouble." (AEO2, i3, 2015, L183-189)

Aunty Rowena reflected on how the professional development that focused on Indigenous issues created a safer space in the school for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members to learn about each other's knowledge systems. It also generated mutual respect.

We all had to go around and people ask questions. We got nine Aboriginal people that work here in this school. We had people crying. I have been here for four years. This year has been the best year because people got to know us [Aboriginal staff] on the first day after being here for many years. Then they [non-Indigenous teachers] go, "oh my god we know you now". I have had teachers come up to me and who were a complete stranger to me. And I have that much respect now but not only to me but to the nine other Aboriginal staff members. They are not from here the other eight Aboriginal people [staff]. But they [Aboriginal staff] were starting to feel "oh my god thank you for doing this" ... I think the more staff development days we have the more we become better staff. Your knowledge is being transformed. It is letting people see that. I said, "We are allowed to be honest here. Let's be honest." And afterwards, towards the end, there was still things that white teachers didn't want to say because they were frightened of offending people. One of them I said, "Come in. Come in to my room afterwards if you want to ask anything." They had this idea of who that Aboriginal person is because that is how they grew up and this is what this Aboriginal person is. This Aboriginal person wants this and wants that. They want everything given to them. We talked about that and now [for the teachers] it is like, "I was so wrong". That is what they said. They said, "I was so wrong and I am sorry". I was getting people coming in and apologising to me. I said, "Don't be apologising to me. Make it easier for them kids now that you know them and not in an angry way. But what I do need you to do is not assume you [non-Aboriginal people] know Aboriginal people. Listen and look and learn because we are just the same as you. Stop stereotyping us. When you stereotype one of those Aboriginal kids you are stereotyping every one of them. Hence, painting [them] with the same brush." When we finished that one [staff development] at the end of January, word got out [about] what we did. Other schools thought, "Oh my god. We have to do that." We also had prac teachers involved on the first day and they went back to uni thinking, "Oh my god". What a powerful day. Now we got other schools that want to do it (join in) in the next staff development day. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L347-354)

Being more relaxed and open is what Aunty Rowena believes makes a safe space between the two knowledge systems. Also, having time to talk to each other truthfully. The more educated people become about one another's cultures, ways of living and knowledges, the more these ways become accepted and the barriers are broken down.

Being more relaxed and making people come to me. Those staff development days. By having that and making people aware. Like I said people paint us with the same brush. We got to break down those barriers by talking. You have to talk. You have to let them know how it makes you feel being Aboriginal. Or people are putting you in that little area because they think they know everything about you because they are reading shit or whatever. They are not bloody well asking. Come and see me if you want to know something, come and see me, I am not going to chew your heads off. I think it goes both ways too. Because you got Aboriginal people that look at people and go, "They are white. They don't like me and they're racist blah blah." It goes both ways. If you are not going to learn to sit in a room with each other [Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal] then we are only here for the kids. We work in this school and to do that don't judge me and I won't judge you. I find the more I started doing that the easier it is for me now. I am more open minded now. One of my sayings, and I am constantly saying, even if I hear one of the kids snigger at another kid, "You don't know what that kid has been through today. Don't assume." And I am saying this to my kids constantly and they are adults, young adults. Don't assume. If we all assume the worst from somebody we are the bad person. So I am actually more open minded now and I think a kinder person because I care more now. I care more about non-Indigenous people that I have made friends with because I realise they were just as ignorant as we were assuming about them. My dad used to always say that you know. "White people taught me how to read, and white people wrapped my knuckles if I spoke my language. But, then I went and worked on the farm and these nice white people taught me how to read, taught me how to do the wages and I ended up being the boss." So there is good and bad in every culture. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L387-411)

However, there can be limitations to sharing knowledge systems. Aunty Rowena believes that the knowledge holder must be willing to share their knowledge with other people. Also Indigenous people need to not be intimidated by non-Indigenous people and vice versa. People should also never make assumptions about anyone else's knowledge.

It's got to be someone who feels like sharing their knowledge with you. You know, if you would have asked me before I started here I probably would've said, "Go away, no. I don't want to talk to you." But, when I came in to the school and realised how many of our kids have no idea about our culture. I personally took it upon myself to do yarn time. I thought, right I am going to talk to this guy our Principal. He is fantastic. That's all he wants and then when we got more people doing Stronger Smarter that made it easier for us because the Principal did it before me. Him and some staff members and that I think opened up a world of we can do this and all together. For him allowing me to do that, I was very happy with him. We have got one of the best

Principals. Oh look he used to scare the crap out of me. But see that is that assuming again. I wouldn't walk down the same sidewalk as him in this school because I was assuming. You know, and after getting to know him and realising he only wants what the best is for our students, everything changed for me and that is the sort of person I have been for the last two to three years. For the last two years I have been a different person. I try my hardest now. I am even saying it to my adult sisters. You know, don't go assuming and they [my sisters] go, "Eyya what?" And I go, "If you're going to start doing that I am going. You don't know where that person [has] been and what's gone on in their life."

See the way I talk now if a teacher came in here. Now I would be different. Because you know I am sitting here with you and I feel comfortable with you. We can't assume that teachers, what is the word I am trying to say, you can't expect them to know us if we don't give anything to them. Once I gave who I am to them and they did the same to me we are a closer school and a better school. (AEO2, i4, L416-435)

Asking appropriate questions provides an area where people can learn about different knowledge systems. Aunty Rowena believes that asking questions in an environment where you feel comfortable establishes a safe area where you can learn about different knowledge systems, as had occurred on the professional development day.

In a way where, now that I think about it, that safe area is. Say I am here and there is a learning area over there. To get to that area I have people in the middle there that help me make that transition, to help me work things out and put things together. I have people in the middle there to work things out to go to that [middle] area before I go to that [far] area. Does that make sense? If I didn't have anyone that I could go to and ask questions, I would never get to that side. Well that is what that safe area is to me. I feel comfortable now in speaking to people that I need to in this work environment, to get to where I need to be. And the same with the kids. I always keep that every day, it's working now. I always say to them, "You need to ask questions." "Don't let anything stress you out, come and see me and I will try and sort it out." I am like their safe area. (AEO2, i4, L309-320)

When it comes to the knowledge system used at school to teach Indigenous studies Aunty Rowena believes she predominantly uses her Indigenous knowledge system. What she teaches is from her own experiences and feelings so that it comes from an Indigenous perspective.

I tell it as it is and how it feels and my experiences. With me, there is no way would I say that I was near the Western side. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L209) I talk about how when I

was born I was part of flora and fauna. That is a little bit Western because I would never accept myself that way. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L211-212)

However, when Aunty Rowena is teaching her cultural awareness program she uses both Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems. She positions herself as working at the cultural interface for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people.

I would say in here is my cultural stuff [safe learning space], cause I use that a lot you know. I use that a lot more. But in saying that, I carry that forward into the Western stuff, so I would say here and in the Western side. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L221-222)

Furthermore, it is still predominantly coming from her own Indigenous knowledge.

I still take my culture into their [Western knowledge system] because of my Friday cultural and because of explaining too, like I said on our staff development days that goes from there [Indigenous knowledge] to there, [safe learning area] to there, Western knowledge, they [are] all joined. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L223-224)

When it comes to behaviour when working at school it starts to become a part of the Western knowledge. "But when it came to the Western side that is where the behaviour's coming in and I am trying to explain to them with behaviours I have to act more Western." (AEO2, i3, 2015, L225-226) The welfare of students and culture are closely aligned. Aunty believes that the welfare of her Indigenous students is linked to their Indigenous knowledge. However, she has to explain to the teachers why certain things are happening so again she positions herself at the cultural interface. "Welfare. I don't, I have to be more Western when it comes to the welfare. But I think welfare and culture, they border line, because I have to talk also about the cultural side." (AEO2, i3, 2015, L231-232) The reason for being positioned at the cultural interface is because the welfare of Indigenous students is different to non-Indigenous students and she needs to explain this to teachers. "And why the welfare is different from white kids." (AEO2, i3, 2015, L233)

## 5.2.4 Two-way strong

The Indigenous students at Aunty Rowena's school do code switch. However, it is more likely to happen when Indigenous students are in the minority. Aunty Rowena has observed her Indigenous students code switching regularly. She believes her students code switch so they are accepted in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities and can be two-way strong. Aunty does not see a lot of discrimination from Indigenous people for code switching but it does happen. Some Indigenous people may put down another Indigenous person who is code switching.

Actually yes [they code switch] when they are with their non-Indigenous peers more so. If they have to get into groups and just say there is two Aboriginals to 10 white kids you see them code switch. But, if I am around they will act normal ... But, if I am sitting back watching them like at a sports carnival and they are walking around together and I am listening and your binungs [ears] seem to get in on edge [sharper for listening]. You are taking note and you are more protective of the kids [to make sure they are not being harassed for code switching]. When you are sitting out there and that sort of stuff. And rightly so because they have got to learn to get on with their peers and it doesn't affect me in any way [code switching] as long as they are happy. But if I hear an Aboriginal kid laughing at another Aboriginal kid, I make it my job. It's personal then and I will pull that up straight away. I don't care if non-Indigenous kids do it but I expect all our [Aboriginal] kids at this school to look after each other like I had to when I was young. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L513-525) I don't think I have seen that [discrimination for code switching]. When I was younger it was that coconut stuff and all that shit. But it is different now because all Aboriginal people have got to work. Actually wait a minute let me pull back on my horses here. There is a difference when you got people who, I have relatives that live on a mission and they see me differently because I drive a 2008 Mazda 3. That I worked hard for. People say "oh look at her" but when they want something it's all "sis". It's different, I do see that. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L528-534)

Working between two knowledge systems is a strength according to Aunty Rowena. She wants Indigenous students to be able to be comfortable in both worlds, and know about their culture.

I think that is a strength. If I would not have been able to do that I should not be in this job. It is part of my being in the community and being in the school. I have got to learn to work with everyone to help those students that need it. How are we supposed to make things better if we don't ask questions? That's what I say to the kids. No question is a stupid question. I tell them about that [when we were young] we weren't ever allowed to ask questions. My grandmother got taken in Stolen Generation and if us kids ever asked questions she used to say to our mothers, "Now you answer that question because when a kid asks you a question and you answer them, that's when they keep that in their head because that is what they wanted to learn". My grandmother picked that up you know. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L290-296)

Aunty Rowena herself naturally code switches as the situation requires. She has had people and family tell her that she acts differently when she is at school as compared to being at home. "My kids have got a lot of non-Aboriginal friends and they go 'Your mum is different at home.'" (AEO2, i2, 2015, L186-187). Aunty Rowena's children's friends are also students

at her school and they do not think she is the same person at school compared to home. "She is just not the same person." (AEO2, i2, 2015, L187) Curiosity got the better of Aunty Rowena and she had to ask her children whether their friends thought she was better at home or at school. "When my son said that I said ask them if they like me better at home or better at school. I just want to see. You know." (AEO2, i2, 2015, L187-189) The students thought that she was more relaxed and funnier at home than at school. "They said I'm more funnier and fun at home." (AEO2, i2, 2015, L189)

Aunty Rowena acts differently at home because she is in her own home and she can do and say what she likes there. "I said if they say anything tell them that I am more relaxed at home because that is my little cave and I get to do what I want when I want and say what I want." (AEO2, i2, 2015, L189-191) The students think that if Aunty Rowena had a television show it would be one of the funniest shows. "But that kid said if your mother had a TV show it would be the best TV show." (AEO2, i2, 2015, L203-204) Furthermore, Aunty Rowena talks differently at home as compared to at school. "But even the way I talk is different from when I'm at home." (AEO2, i2, 2015, L204-205) "At school it is, no we didn't do that, and at home it's, na I never. I haven't bloody done that ya bloody tellin' lies." (AEO2, i2, 2015, 205-206)

Aunty Rowena was unaware that her behaviour is different at school as compared to her behaviour at home. "It's just an automatic thing you do. I'm not conscious of it only until that kid pointed it out to my son. And my girl's friends say your mum is so different." (AEO2, i2, 2015, L212-214) Her different behaviour at school as compared to at home comes down to relationships. Aunty Rowena does not have the same relationships she has with the non-Indigenous teaching staff as she does with close family and friends. She is a private person and only wants to share what she does in her life with people that she can trust. When Aunty Rowena is with her family and friends she feels more comfortable in this safe environment.

When I leave here I'm a different person is that what you mean? Yes. Because we are not best friends with people we work with. They are our work colleagues. I don't want them to know my life out of here unless I like these people and unless I trust these people. They are not my friends. They are work colleagues and I am a different person when I leave here because I am more relaxed and I don't have to worry about how people see me outside of work. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L55-61)

Aunty Rowena is closing the gap not only in education but also in culture. She works with a cohort of Indigenous students on a weekly basis and teaches them about their culture. The reason she started doing these cultural lessons is because Aunty Rowena believes Indigenous students are missing out on their connection to culture for a number of reasons.

You know how I go in to do my cultural stuff with the Aboriginal kids. The reason I started and I am going to do cultural talks is because these kids are missing out on all the stories, and some of the language. They're not getting taught that because of alcohol and drug abuse and money and poverty and all that. Parents are forgetting who they are and forgetting to teach their kids respect. So that is why I took that on. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L338-341)

Aunty Rowena was also getting regularly called up to the Deputy Principal's office to sort out issues between Indigenous students.

Teaching the kids because I used to get called into the DP office because a black kid my colour or darker would say to another Aboriginal kid your colour or fairer, would say "who do you think you are" and really hassle them. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L341-343)

Indigenous students were giving each other grief about their Aboriginality. They would say, "You not black you gammin black." (AEO2, i3, 2015, L344) When these issues started arising, Aunty Rowena knew she had to engage theses students in cultural discussions. "I thought, I got to do this and I got to close this gap so that's when I started doing that cultural stuff." (AEO2, i3, 2015, L344-345) She started the cultural discussions by getting the students to disclose where they were from and their family links.

Saying, "Now look around the room. Have a good look at each other" and I made them introduce themselves. I said, "Now do you think that kid over there is Aboriginal?" and they would say "no". This is the first day and I'd go, "Are you Aboriginal?" and they'd say "yeah" and then I would say, "Tell this kid what the connection is." (AEO2, i3, 2015, L345-348)

Aunty Rowena taught the students that the colour of your skin does not impact on your Aboriginality.

I taught those kids it doesn't matter how damn black you are. If you add milk you are still an Aboriginal. Tea is still tea. And how dare you and I know this fair kid's mother from out west. I know her family very well and you have no right and I did that in a group session so that the other kids could hear it and see it. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L349-352)

Since the cultural lessons started, the bullying about Aboriginality has stopped. "They wanted to bully them but that doesn't happen anymore." (AEO2, i3, 2015, L354-355) Aunty Rowena also thought that the non-Indigenous students also needed to engage in discussions about cultural awareness.

Aunty Rowena volunteered her time to teach in Australian Aboriginal studies classes about the Indigenous history in Australia. When she teaches in these classes she believes she

works between two knowledge systems. She does this, as she believes the students get a greater feeling for past history in Australia when they actually can see someone that is a part of it. She tells her stories and this enables the non-Indigenous students to gain insights into the Stolen Generations and racism that Indigenous people have had to continue to endure in their lives. One of Aunty Rowena's goals is to reduce racism in the school.

So I volunteered in HSIE [Human Society and Its Environment] classes when they had Australian Aboriginal studies or Australian studies. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L356-357) Yes I do work [between two knowledge systems]. Going into those classes working with the Aboriginal cultural stuff and then going into classes and doing Aboriginal studies (AEO2, i3, 2015, L404-405). Telling the kids this actually broke down the barriers. Because one of the achievements I want for this school is to not have so much racism. I talked to them in the last class. I spoke how at the end of term last year I went down to a shop and there was one egg sandwich. I spoke to them about asking for that egg sandwich and what happened to me and I got emotional. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L371-375)

The non-Indigenous students were so angry about what had happened to Aunty Rowena. She wanted to share with them how it made her feel and that even today she still has everyday encounters with racism.

They were so damn angry that this happened to me in our town. I wanted the kids to know how that made me feel as a 50-year-old who has had to endure this all my damn life and now I am 50 and look what happened to me. I believe everything happens for a reason that is probably why I got this job here. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L375-379)

Sharing that story obviously had an impact on the students, helping them to empathise with her but also to be angry that such an injustice was happening right on their doorstep. Since then teaching the non-Indigenous students about these racist actions Aunty Rowena has non-Indigenous students who will speak to her, whereas, beforehand they would not. "I got that way where the kids are, hey Miss, and white kids, hey Aunty, [I'm] breaking down those barriers." (AEO2, i3, 2015, L377-378) Aunty Rowena teaches the non-Indigenous students about the things that have affected her through her life and she teaches Indigenous students about culture. In that she is breaking down the barriers and closing the gap with both Indigenous students and non-Indigenous students. "So the barriers are being broken down both ways with the racism within our community, our kids, and the racism outside it." (AEO2, i3, L381-382)

Non-Indigenous teachers at Aunty Rowena's school are trying their hardest to incorporate an Indigenous perspective into their teaching. This is important but there is still a

great need for this knowledge to come directly from an Indigenous person and to hear personal stories to have full understanding and appreciation.

No I don't think it is the same. That is why they get me to go into HSIE [classes] and Indonesian [classes]. You can see when I get new students and I get new classes and you can see it's like they're, "Oh my god does this really exist? Is that what really happened?" Because these kids are only listening to what their parents have seen and heard or [what] their grandparents [say]. They have never seen it from a black fulla's perspective. So when they do it as "I was part as flora and fauna" they go "what's flora and fauna?" "Animals and plants. I was not an Australian citizen until I turned two." They're like "what?" It is different ... It's coming from their ways and their ideas and their beliefs. There is a whole different thing about truth and telling a story the way they hear it. There is a different way to someone [who's] heard it and someone that has lived it. That's what I mean. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L321-333)

When Aunty Rowena talks to Indigenous parents, the majority of the time she will draw on Indigenous knowledges. However, there are a small proportion of Indigenous parents with whom she will use Western knowledges to interact. She chooses to do this because some parents may not be strong in their identity and cultural protocols. This is particularly when some have just found out about their Indigenous background and when they do not yet have a complete understanding of their own Indigenous culture and family history.

Now I go back here [Indigenous knowledge] with parents because this is where I have my connections because I am working with Aboriginal kids. I would say eighty percent are Indigenous and they are the Aboriginal people that I know okay they're the ones I know. The ones that have just discovered that [they are Indigenous] we're different. You can add milk we are still the same but in saying that when it comes to the knowledge, the Indigenous knowledge we are not the same. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L238-242) Because some people are still learning who they are because their grandparents/great grandparents were taken away and they were raised different[ly] to 90% [of the other Indigenous parents at school] because I come from here [Indigenous] and I know most of the people and I would put ten percent [of parents] here [Western] (AEO2, i3, 2015, L242-244)

Furthermore, some people who do not know Aunty Rowena and have just come into contact with their Aboriginality may not understand what Aunty Rowena is trying to get across to them.

I can talk real black fulla way here. My way, the way that other Aboriginal people understand me, you know like broken English. But with these fullas just discovering [their Aboriginality], they [are] more Westernised people. They [are] not [knowing

their Aboriginality] to me. Know[ing] what I [am saying]. [They] will have no idea what I am talking about. If I talk broken English black fulla way to them they will have no effin idea what I am saying. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L245-248)

Aunty Rowena uses Western knowledges for Indigenous parents she does not know well and for Indigenous parents she does know she uses Indigenous knowledges and communicates with them a lot more.

I put my Western hat on for 10% of the parents and 90% for [the rest of the parents]. I know who they are. I know they are black fullas and I grew up with them. That is my black fulla hat. I will reveal a lot more to these people [Indigenous people Aunty Rowena knows] than I will to these people [Indigenous people she does not know well]. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L248-251)

Furthermore, the reason that Aunty Rowena will reveal more to the people she knows is because of trust.

So that is because I am familiar with those people and these people to me still have got a lot to prove that they are black fullas. I don't class them as white, I don't class them as black. It's not, it's none of my business but I don't trust them. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L251-253)

The trust has been built with the parents Aunty Rowena knows. "Whereas, I have full trust in these [local] fullas because I know them." (AEO2, i3, 2015, L256).

Aunty does not believe that the Western knowledge system has had a major impact on her identity as an Aboriginal woman. However, she does believe that when Indigenous students attend school they become more Westernised. Aunty Rowena believes their behaviours out of school are different compared to when they are at school.

Yes when they are coming to school they are Westernised. No I don't because I think first and foremost I am Indigenous. I am Aboriginal, I am a black woman before I will ever be Westernised. I see the kids see both places and when they are home they are completely different people and when they are school they are completely different people. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L286-288)

Furthermore, Aunty Rowena often questions whether her identity changes when she is at school. But then when she thinks about it, she believes she is the same person. The students are different because they change whom they socialise with.

I sometimes wonder whether I am too. But then I go no hang on no I don't because families come in and I am still me. I am me here and at school and at football, at home.

No matter where. Some of the kids will have a lot to do with non-Indigenous kids at school but won't have a bar of them outside of school. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L288-291)

The school is very open to and accepting of different cultures. The Principal is supportive and is happy to take on board new ideas. Aunty Rowena is allowed to discuss protocols with all students at the school. This enables Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to learn about important protocols and lore in Indigenous communities.

But here everything is about culture and it is multicultural. They do everything for any kids with a different background in this school, which is good. The good thing about having our Principal is he is really happy for me to have yarn time. I put that to the school. They didn't ask me. I wanted the kids to grow up understanding what welcoming and what acknowledgements [of Country] are. All political stuff. Being an Aboriginal is also being political. You have to, you have to vote or we won't get this and that. So I do all of that. Then I do growing up and the difference between law and lore. The kids just absolutely love it. At the end of it all I chuck a scary ghost story into it and they just think oh my god. They say, "Hurry up, what time is it? We are not going yet Aunty Rowena didn't tell us a ghost yarn." (AEO2, i4, 2015, L125-135)

There has been little conflict with Aunty Rowena's identity since she has worked in the school. However, prior to working in schools, when she was nursing, there was a lot of conflict due to cultural protocols such as working with male patients. In her role at the school, Indigenous culture and protocol are being taught. Whereas, when Aunty Rowena was nursing, Indigenous culture and protocols in those days were not a priority.

There was conflict with Aboriginal cultures in nursing. I think. Because I don't know how I didn't get fired, because I refused to touch Aboriginal men. Cause cultural thing you are not allowed to. You weren't allowed to see another Aboriginal man, shower them and that. Sometimes I got ordered to and I would say well I'm going home. Then they would find me something else to do. To them it made them think that I was childish. But I wasn't going to back down because they just didn't understand. The more Aboriginal nurses that did this sort of stuff it moved the Department of Health to realise we have got to do this culturally otherwise we aren't going to have any Aboriginal staff. And that is when they started to do that. I noticed when I did my training to become like a supervisor, nurse supervisor and stuff. I realised it was actually in the curriculum (Indigenous culture and protocols). It was in there they had the cultural stuff. When I first started when I was 17 there was none. Nothing to do with Aboriginal culture. That's when they started saying you have to do this and I would go nope I'm not doing it and you know what you can stick your nursing up your arse. I am leaving. And because we had a really good lady who was our teacher

cause we worked on site and learnt on site at Lansville hospital that made a difference because I don't know how many times I would've walked away off the shift. Then people say, "Oh don't ask her" and I would hear little snickering and I would go, "Why? What you talking about?" I would put nurses on the spot. "You have no idea. You walk a day in my shoes then talk to me." I would even swear at people because I would be so damn angry. But being a strong person I got through it all and I ended up being nurse supervisor. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L102-123)

Indigenous students at Aunty Rowena's school are exposed to a lot of Western perspectives and beliefs. However, since Aunty Rowena has started teaching Indigenous protocols and lore, students are learning protocols and lore that have not been passed on.

People are forgetting their responsibilities now. [There is] way too much Western perspective. I totally agree with that. I noticed when I first started doing cultural stuff with the kids they were like, "oh my God really". I let the kids talk to me as well. I don't just sit there and talk into their faces. It is always open to suggestions and always open for them to question and how they see things as well. The first day and they were right into it. We only had five kids the first day. Now we get the whole of the Aboriginal kids in Year 7 and Year 8. We started in this room [Aboriginal education room]. Now we have to go into the library or get a classroom because this is too small. We put them in a varning circle. I go into, I work with Indonesian too with the white kids, and I go into HSIE history too. My job when I go in HSIE is to talk about my history. Me growing up between zero and now as an Aboriginal woman. I chose to do that. They asked me to come in and talk about what I know about my Aboriginal culture. I said no. I will tell you about, if this is a history class, I will tell you about my history. What I didn't realise was everything I spoke about like the Stolen Generation, flora and fauna, just working, you know everything. And that was that they were learning. And we had one student last year who did HSC [Higher School Certificate] Aboriginal studies [through] distance ed because we didn't have it available [here]. She has got top marks left, right and centre. I would make time and say come in and she would ask me questions. I would say, "Work out which questions you need to get through this HSC. And I will only tell you what I know or what I think." (AEO2, i4, 2015, L155-172)

Aunty Rowena believes a school that works well together must have an excellent leader who has good relationships with all staff members. It took a while for her relationship to form with the Principal at her school, but once the trust between them was there the relationship became very strong. The acknowledgement of Indigenous culture by the Principal is what helped build strong relationships between Aunty Rowena and the Principal. The Principal at

Aunty Rowena's school has a very open mind to Indigenous education and Aunty Rowena puts it down to Stronger Smarter training which he has attended. This has also helped in building positive relationships between Aunty Rowena and him.

I think the key to working together is having a good Principal. We have got a good Principal. And like I said before I avoided him at all costs because I did not know how this was going to go. But when he did Stronger Smarter and he allowed that staff development day, this school has been going forward ever since. He [has] allowed us to take our kids on foot out to cultural sites. He allows us to take our kids to AIME<sup>9</sup> now. I am [the] program mentor in all this stuff and he [the Principal] has never said no to me [when I ask him if we can participate in programs] ever since he did Stronger Smarter. Ever since he did Stronger Smarter and that was the best thing for him and the best thing for me, even though I only just started. But for our relationship I think that is what he needed [Stronger Smarter training] because he had no idea about how it all works, how it all evolves and what makes black fullas tick. I don't think I changed. I think I am the same person. But, I am a more happier person because he has changed. He had to open up and allow me to do more. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L419-430)

Aunty Rowena wanted the Principal to acknowledge her knowledge and then they could work together.

I can finally see, you know, how they say take a walk a week or walk a day in my shoes. Well because of Stronger Smarter he walked a day in somebody's shoes and realised that I don't care what anyone says Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people are different. And they always will be and we CAN work together. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L433-436)

According to Aunty Rowena Indigenous students learn best by having a supportive learning environment. Aunty Rowena believes Indigenous students learn best with one-on-one learning. However, she knows this is not always possible. But small groups are also effective for Indigenous students. Aunty Rowena always checks that the students have an understanding of what they are learning. If they do not understand, Aunty Rowena probes her students so that they have an understanding of what they are learning. She also believes that hands-on learning is best for Indigenous students.

I think a lot of one-on-one when possible. But also if you've got three or four kids doing the same thing and they are Aboriginal kids you bring them into the student room and the Norta Norta workers bring them in here and I think they find it easier if we explain it ... What we do as a team we got a board (see that board). We write down

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup> AIME is an Aboriginal mentoring program for high school students.

what assessments are due, we look at the kids that can do it. We check on those kids in the playground and say, "How are you going with that, that's due do you need any help?" We prompt that with the kids so they understand not to let things bog them down. "Come and see us and we will get to that." Hands-on stuff for sure. Not chalk and talk. No, no on-the-job sort of training stuff because it's meaningful. They see the end product for what they have done not for what they have wrote. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L125-135)

Aunty Rowena wrote a poem reflecting on what it is like to be an Aboriginal woman. It shows the struggles and achievements that she has achieved. Aunty Rowena has seen changes in herself since working in the school, and being able to share Indigenous knowledge and culture with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and staff is something that she is proud to do. However, there are still struggles with identity in the school context. The poem below showcases some of the struggles Aunty Rowena has to deal with as an Aboriginal woman and traditional owner.

# It's Hard Being Me

It's hard being me,
But who am I?
I'm a woman, a mother, a sister, a wife.
I know I have values, pride, culture and a life.

It's hard being me, I'm Custodian, I'm a protector, and I care, I try not to disrespect and try so hard to be fair, But at the end of the day I end up in despair.

It's hard being me, This Land of ours cannot survive, Unless we come together show strength and pride.

It's hard being me,
I try to show them how much there is to protect,
Only to be put down and made to disrespect.

It's hard being me When anger sneaks in, Cause I have passion and the need to win.

It's hard being me.
An Aboriginal woman,
I thought of giving up,
Get on the drink, to drown out my troubles,

You know what that's not ME. YOU DON'T HAVE TO AGREE, YOU DON'T HAVE TO LIKE ME, But at the end of the day, I've got a job to do, So go ahead and disagree, BECAUSE THIS IS ME!

#### 5.3 JASON'S JOURNEY

### **5.3.1** Country

Jason is a 25-year-old Nyangbul man from Bundjalung Country. He has worked as an AEO for approximately one and a half years. Prior to his AEO role, he was employed as a tutor at a local school for one year. Before he began tutoring at the local school, Jason worked part-time at the local supermarket. He currently is working on Country but he did not grow up on Country. He grew up in a town close by. He is related to a large number of the students who attend the school where he is currently employed. Jason has completed a Bachelor of Sports Science. He is studying Education at the tertiary level. Jason believes studying at the tertiary level has helped him to gain a range of skills that assist him in his role as an AEO. "Definitely yeah. Just in time management, goal setting, team work and all that sort of stuff." (AEO3, i1, 2014, L23-24) Jason really likes the school he is working in and finds most of the staff to be supportive.

Growing up Jason was aware that his father was always strong in his Aboriginal identity and he passed this on to his children. Even though Jason's father was part of a group that was ostracised by other Australians as he was born before 1967, he taught his children to be proud of their identity. Jason's father was an activist in the 1970s and fought for Aboriginal rights by attending marches and protests. Jason reflects on his father's influence.

Not so much for me because my Dad is pretty strong [in his identity]. I mean he was flora and fauna when he was born as well. But they, my grandparents, always pushed for them to get educated and all that sort of thing. So he has always been pretty strong. He was one of the people in the '70s. He was marching and all that sort of stuff. He has always been strong in his identity and it has been passed on to me I reckon. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L25-30)

Because Jason's father is proud of who he is and was comfortable with his own identity, he instilled in his children that people who have racist attitudes and create stereotypes are the uneducated ones. This helped Jason cope with the racism that he encountered growing up.

In high school Jason was subjected to racist stereotypes that were directed towards Indigenous students. However, he puts this down to people being uneducated about

Aboriginal people. Jason was not targeted as much as some of the other Aboriginal students, but he would hear things being said that were racist.

I couldn't say I was targeted as much as the other kids when I went to school when I was going there because I am fair see. There we sort of hung in the one group so we were segregated in a way. Pockets of it [racism]. Your mates would crack a joke here and there, which got you a bit cranky. You know an Aboriginal joke or something. But again it's just lack of knowledge. Sometimes you feel the Aboriginal kids are getting targeted. When I was at school anyway. Not so much now but when I was at school it was like we were all painted with the same brush I suppose. (AEO3, i2, 2015, L47-50)

Being stereotyped does frustrate Jason. But he believes it is the person making the stereotypical statements that has the problem.

It is frustrating, you just look at people and you get frustrated. But I know myself they are just, they just don't have enough knowledge. They don't know what they are talking about and you just have to accept that there are people like that and there is not much you can do about it. Inform them if you can. (AEO3, i2, 2015, L28-36)

Jason tries to educate people who hold negative views of Aboriginal people and help them break down the stereotypes. However, he acknowledges that you can try to rectify the ignorance by sharing knowledge but there will always be some people's attitudes that you cannot change.

When Jason attended school he felt that he fitted in. He was able to cope with the workload and did not get into much trouble until his later years in high school. There were two years when he felt unsettled, but after this, he managed to get back on track. On the weekends, Jason would hang out with his family and then he would go back to the routine and structure of school during the week.

I fitted in quite well [at school] I must say. You know I got in trouble in Year 10 and 11 but that was just being stupid with my mates. I grew out of it. Well when I was younger I fitted in really well at school. [I] got in trouble a little bit in the middle years but then came good again at the end. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L72-75)

During his years of schooling he believes that there were not a lot of Indigenous perspectives put into the curriculum.

Well just thinking back to when I was at school, the Indigenous perspectives, I didn't see a lot in the classroom. History – I didn't learn much. I probably spent one term learning about Aboriginal culture in my whole schooling. That didn't give me the drive to take up Aboriginal studies because I just didn't know anything about it. And if

I had known about it and if I did know what I know today I would have been more interested and more likely to take it up. I think a lot of other kids would have too. There was just never the opportunity to learn. Whereas, now they do more [Aboriginal] history. They do try and link in Aboriginal perspectives with whatever unit they are teaching at that time. They were doing special places in Kindergarten and I was invited to come in to talk about Aboriginal special places in the area. So it is getting better. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L156-166)

In his role as AEO he tries to ensure that Indigenous perspectives are incorporated into the curriculum and makes himself available to go into classes to put an Indigenous perspective on what the students are learning. He hopes that this engages both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students and broadens their learning.

## **5.3.2** Understanding the role

The Principal defined the AEO role very clearly to Jason when he started at the school. He made it clear that Jason was employed to liaise with the community and be involved with the welfare of the students. The Principal made Jason feel welcome in the school and gave Jason the flexibility to meet the needs of the students.

When I first started my Principal was pretty clear that I wasn't just an aide. I was here as a bit of a community liaison person and a welfare sort of person for the kids. But when I did come I did have a timetable and I was put on with a literacy group of a morning, and then in a 3/4 class in the afternoon but that was flexible. I wasn't required to be in those places at those times if I had other things to do. They were happy for me to go and do that. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L27-31)

The AEO role has many dimensions and it can be hard to follow a timetable so a lot of flexibility is needed. When Jason applied for his position as AEO he did not realise the many different aspects of the role that he would undertake. Furthermore, he did not really think about the well-being of the students as part of his role but quickly learnt that it was included.

Well when I started I thought I would be very much an aide in the classroom with the Koori kids but also knew that I had roles in the community as well. I figured I was expected just to be in classrooms to assist students in there and also attend Aboriginal education meetings, welfare meetings, AECG meetings, liaise with community and liaise with parents. I didn't really think much about welfare when I came into it but that came naturally I suppose. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L33-35)

Jason quickly learnt that his role was more involved than teaching and liaising with community. He presently focuses on welfare more so than the academic side of things. "My

role in the school, I don't see my role as it is in a way building them academically but my role is also building them as people. It's not so much worrying about the curriculum." (AEO3, i4, 2015, L133-136)

In the beginning, Jason was given a timetable to work from but he was allowed to be flexible with his time. He felt the timetable gave him some direction in the beginning and helped him to understand what he needed to do in his role. "Well just going off my timetable I was sort of looking for direction when I first came because I didn't really have, well I wasn't sure what I was meant to do." (AEO3, i1, 2014, L29-31) As Jason felt unsure of what to do he used his timetable to give him some direction but he also asked for help from the Principal. The timetable became a thing of the past after one term as there were more student well-being issues arising that had to be dealt with immediately.

So I would often be in his [the Principal's] office yarning with him [for help]. Yeah well that timetable that I had when I was first came that only sort of lasted a term to be honest and then for the rest of that year I didn't really have a timetable. Yeah they [timetables] never worked especially in this role things pop up. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L38-40)

Jason used his time on a needs basis and prioritised the most urgent cases first. With the help and guidance from his Principal, he quickly settled into his role. Jason's relationship with the Principal is key to his success in his role as an AEO.

Work relationships between Jason and the teachers depended on individual circumstances and the directions in which the teachers pointed him. Very few teachers gave Jason specific directions with regard to how he could best assist them or students in their classrooms. Teachers' attitudes, prior experience and ability to assist Indigenous students' learning directly impacted on his role within the classroom contexts. One teacher, due to her ability to teach and engage Indigenous students, provided structure and empowerment for Jason. This teacher made Jason feel as though he was achieving in the classroom.

One teacher I had in the morning, she is the acting Principal now, she was just really good so I helped her out around the classroom. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L60-62) I was asked to sit in on little reading groups. I had my own little reading group. I'd play some literacy games with them [students] and I would just sit with them or I'd just go around the room and see who needed help. Like an aide basically. I felt that I was playing a bigger part in their learning. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L162-165)

By contrast, the less experienced teacher did not provide any structure for Jason to follow. He mainly provided behavioural management in that classroom. Jason did not contribute to any student learning and his time in that classroom was demanding in regard to

student behaviour. Jason's experiences with the less experienced teacher evidences that some teachers are unsure how to best use AEOs.

In the other classroom there wasn't much [happening in the way of teaching]. The teacher wasn't that skilled I would say, and I would find myself doing a lot of behaviour management stuff in that class. You know he [the teacher] just went about doing his thing. I wasn't asked to do specifics in the room. There was a lot of kids just running amuck and I'd just be rousing on them really or trying to make them get back into the room or whatever. But that was pretty stressful. I suppose I tried not to be too harsh on them. I'd more or less ask them to come back and join us. But since I've gained more confidence, I'm more ready to rouse on them. But even though I've gotten a bit more harsher in my time they still seem to respect me more. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L62-72)

When Jason was implementing learning activities in the classroom, he felt as though he was contributing more to Indigenous student learning. He also gained more confidence and self-efficacy by having a structured environment.

Jason would often be involved in the behaviour management of Aboriginal students but he did this out of care for the students. He would often have to do home visits or call parents to talk to them about their child's behaviour at school. Jason believes that there should be better communication with parents when there are issues with their child. However, he did become conscious of always being the bearer of bad news and believes he is there to negotiate between the school and the community. There should be more opportunities for AEOs to be the bearer of good news.

When I first did start there was [a] lot of behaviour issues. You know kids on the roof, fights in the playground. I wasn't asked to do it but I did get myself involved in that sort of stuff. You know taking a student home because of a suspension, ringing up the mother. And I have taken letters home as well but that was by choice because we couldn't do it any other way. I prefer for the kid not just to take the letter home and present it to the parent, I prefer to do it myself so they've [the parents] got some sort of explanation. But yeah I just sort of found myself getting into it. Yeah one student who has left us now, he was a big behaviour student and I was just trying my best to get everything right for him by contacting his mum. But you know every time I did ring Mum she sort of knew it was for a negative reason so that sort of you know. But thinking about it recently I don't want to be seen as that to the parents as that negative person. I should be the middleman sort of thing. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L38-52)

Jason works hard to maintain positive relationships with Indigenous parents and students from his school as he sees himself as the connection between the community and the school.

At school, Jason had built up his relationships with the Indigenous students. Although he was related to a lot of the students at the school, because he did not grow up on Country they did not really know him well. Once they realised his background and family connections, it became easier for him.

Well although I am related to a lot of them. A lot of them are my second and third cousins. I didn't grow up in Blaney. I grew up in Winley so they didn't know the links. But when they do start figuring it out. [They're like] "you're my Uncle" and they start warming to you a bit. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L93-95)

Furthermore, when Jason first started in the role and the students were not familiar with him, Jason made every effort to get to know them so he could build strong relationships.

When I first started they didn't really know me but they were sort of sussing me out because I was going around giving them letters and giving them flyers and that sort of thing. Getting them out for a yarn, sitting in the class. They were more interested in getting to know me, you know. And I was interested in getting to know them. I'd just go out and kick a footy you know. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L97-100)

Having good relationships with the Aboriginal students is an important part of the role of an AEO. Aboriginal students need to trust the AEO so they can go to Jason with anything that they need help with.

Aboriginal education programs were not running when Jason first began working in the school. However, the school was supportive of any suggestions that presented and Jason began to implement some very positive and engaging Aboriginal education programs. These programs helped the Indigenous students to gain confidence.

When I first started yeah there wasn't any real programs that were running. I sort of outlined my vision of what I wanted or what sort of things I wanted to do here and the school was pretty on-board with that. Prior to me getting here, there was a fella in my role and he had been here for a while. And he was doing Aboriginal dance with the boys and he stayed on as an aide so I got him to help me and we built up that program for the boys and it was a boys dance group. Yeah we are at the point now where people ring up and the boys dance and we get a bit of money. Then through our Aboriginal education meetings I have come up with different programs here and there. At the moment I do Rock and Water with the boys out in the playground sort of stuff. I do a boys group for my Years 3, 4 and 5's. I do a Bro's Speak for my Year 6 boys. And I don't personally run this program but I organised a girls program called Stronger Sisters, which is a bit

like Bro's Speak. In their learning, I run a program here, we've noticed maths levels were pretty low in Stage 2 [Stage 2 is Year 3 and 4]. So I started an outdoor maths program where they come over and we play games that are mathematics based. We've seen plenty of success there. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L123-133)

By having these programs in the school Jason aims to build confidence and outcomes for Indigenous students. Jason considers that he has done well to get these programs up and running in his school to support Indigenous students. He believes that when Indigenous students have support they learn best.

In his role he ensures that he is in touch with Indigenous students and community so that he knows of any issues or anxieties that he can provide support for. Jason also believes that when Indigenous students are in a respectful, safe and supportive environment they thrive and gain confidence.

And in their learning as well if everything is not right at home they are not going to come and learn. So I like to get out and have a yarn to them in the morning. If I see a student who I think might be having a bit of trouble or I know through other people that something is going on outside of school, I'll focus my attention on them for the day and assist them in class. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L103-109) They [Indigenous students] learn best when they know they're supported and they know everyone has their best interest in mind. They learn best when they have got respect for the people who are trying to learn them I suppose. If they don't have any respect for their teacher they're not going to sit down and learn. Some of them will. Some of them will sit there and plod along but the kids that need help they won't. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L136-141)

To ensure Indigenous students are supported at his school Jason has developed and coordinated programs so Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are catered for. The activities were all developed collaboratively so that students can relate to them. Jason also strives to provide a supportive and respectful environment by ensuring the well-being of all his Aboriginal students is being catered for.

A hands-on approach was also incorporated by Jason to include an Indigenous perspective. He likes to explain to the students why they are doing the activities and what the outcomes will be. Jason believes that explaining this to the students and having a hands-on approach were major factors in supporting the improvement of student outcomes in mathematics.

Originally we'd play games with, you know, we'd have number lines with the dirrawong, you know the goanna. That would be the number line. We use things like pipi shells as counters. I'd draw boomerangs as number lines and all sorts of different

things. But now it's got a bit more game based now that the kids have started to pick up their maths. Because it's a bit hard to keep it cultural you know when they are progressing. Often I'm sitting with a kid and they don't know why they are doing and what they are doing and I've mentioned to the teachers maybe explain where we are going with this. And definitely from my maths groups from the hands-on stuff. The writing with the chalk on the ground, the jumping around and counting sort of stuff. We've had kids just shine from it. So it works. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L114-118)

Using hands-on methods with an Indigenous perspective has helped Indigenous students to achieve better results at Jason's school.

## **5.3.3** Working at the interface

Jason works on Country and is accepted in the community. However, when he first started in his role he was a little anxious as to how he would be accepted, as he did not grow up on Country, he grew up not far from Country. Nevertheless, the community had no problem with accepting Jason and he puts it down to his family being well known in the community. Jason believes because he is known in the community and he is working on Country it is easier for him to approach parents, students and community members. However, although Jason is working on Country, it is not always easy. Sometimes the community can be hard to work in. People in the community want things to be done the way they like it to be done.

I have sort of come back to Country. I live down in Starry. But this is my mob here and I was a bit nervous coming in because I haven't had much to do with people in this area. But they have accepted me pretty well I think. It's easier when they know because they all know my Dad and they all know my Grandfather and Grandmother and Aunties and that sort of thing. It makes it a lot easier. Well although I am related to a lot of them, a lot are my second and third cousins. But when they do start figuring it out, "you're my uncle" and that, they start warming to you a bit more. This community can be difficult to work in with so many different groups. Yeah people like things done their way and that sort of thing. Yeah I would find it a lot harder if I was in Dunbie. I would find it a lot harder just to engage parents. Well we are all Bundjalung but we are different. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L85-92)

As he stated, if Jason was to work off Country he believes that it would be harder. The advantages for him working on Country are that he knows a lot of the families and can have discussions at a community level to ensure the right protocols are being followed.

When it comes to Indigenous students' identity at school Jason believes there is a conflict between their identity and the Western school system. What Indigenous students know and grow up with is different from what happens at school. At home it is all about

family whereas school is based on curriculum. However, Jason does believe that it is getting better for Indigenous students at school as they are getting support. Teachers and support staff are gaining more knowledge on how best to support Indigenous students, but there are still many things that need improvement.

There is definitely [conflict of identity for Indigenous students at school today]. It's just the structures of the school system basically. It doesn't conform to what they do at home. What they have grown up with. It is getting better. There is a lot more support in place for the kids. As educators we are learning more on how better to teach these kids and get them succeeding; so yeah, it's just the home and school difference is massive for some of them. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L78-82)

When Indigenous students come to school they have to learn to code switch. So they have atschool behaviours and at-home behaviours.

### 5.3.4 Two-way strong

Jason admits that when he is at school he acts differently when he is talking to teachers. The way he talks to teachers is different compared to when he is at home. Also, the way he talks to Indigenous parents and students is different from how he is with teachers. However, he does not think that he loses his identity as he switches from one group to another. He talks to Indigenous parents in a more casual way than he does when he is talking with the teachers. He contests that this is because he has a different relationship with parents when compared to his work colleagues. Jason understands that it is his role to negotiate between the school and Indigenous parents.

You speak differently. You act differently. You communicate differently. Just professionalism. (AEO3, i2, 2015, L85-86) Yeah there is things I wouldn't say and the way I say it I would be semi-professional [when talking to Indigenous parents]. I would talk to a parent differently to what I would talk to a teacher, you know what I mean. I will have a bit more of a yarn and a laugh and that sort of stuff. There is a change but I still try and keep that I don't know what you would call it. I just try and keep professional as I can. (AEO3, i2, 2015, L92-96)

At school Jason feels more comfortable talking to Indigenous staff and parents than speaking to non-Indigenous staff. He often feels uncomfortable when talking to non-Indigenous teachers. He likes to show that he has confidence in what he is doing. Furthermore, he thinks more cultural awareness needs to occur so that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can have a safe space to learn about each other's culture.

I am still pretty uncomfortable with them [teachers] I suppose with teachers and stuff like that. I don't really know how to talk to them that well. I try and put on a bit of a façade with them I suppose [positioned in the Western side]. It would be my own confidence. I like to seem like I know what I am doing. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L154-159) I suppose the understanding on this side [Indigenous] of things and the Western side of things [is what we need to get to a safe space between the two knowledge systems]. What do they call it? Cultural awareness and that sort of stuff. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L170-171)

To have better relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members there needs to be greater awareness about each other's culture.

At school Jason envisages that part of his role is to help Indigenous students become familiar with processes of a Western system. He will code switch when he talks to teachers, Indigenous parents and students. He does this to ensure both Indigenous parents and students are feeling comfortable. However, when he is in the school setting he takes on a more Western approach with the Indigenous students.

I just see it as I have a bit more of an insight into how to make it easier for the kids to transition if you know what I mean. I don't know getting the kids to understand that they are in a Western setting and they have got to be able to have that home talk and have that school talk. When the teachers talk to the parents it would mostly be in Western [language]. When I am in the school setting I would probably use a lot more Western language. But if I am at their house or talking to a kid in the playground or something it would be a lot more Indigenous. Even outside of school if I see them outside of school it is more Indigenous. Yeah just making them [Aboriginal students] aware that you know swear around at home, I don't care. But when you are at school you don't swear around because that is how you get yourself in trouble. That is how that gap widens because you get suspended and things like that. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L28-31)

It is important to Jason that Indigenous students are able to feel comfortable and safe in a Western school system. He sees himself as a role model for all Indigenous students in his school and within his community. He shows the students that you can still be a proud Aboriginal person but also be able to work in Western systems.

I think it is important because they are in a Western system in a Western society. It is important to show them what life is going to be like in a Western world. They have got to be ready and you have to use that talk with them. You know you can't talk like you're on the mish [mission]. Like I said before, they're Aboriginal kids in a Western world so you have got to try and find that good middle ground to display. I am a

model for these kids so I sort of try and portray someone that can fit into both sides so they can be aware of how to do it really. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L138-141)

Jason believes it is a strength for Indigenous students if they know when they have to code switch. "Being able to [work between two knowledge systems] I think it's a strength. Well this day and age you need to be able to. You can't just be one or the other." (AEO3, i4, 2015, L87-88)

Closing the gap in education is also part of Jason's role. But he believes that it is a whole community issue and everyone should be having input. This includes teachers and parents. While he acknowledges that some of the strategies used in the Closing the Gap strategy would have had input from Indigenous people in relation to how best to close the gap, he contests that what works in one community does not necessarily work in another. At Jason's school he has input into programs that help to close the gap. Once Indigenous students at his school start to gain some confidence in the classroom they experience greater success with their learning.

I think they [Closing the Gap] would have attempted to speak to Indigenous people or experts if you say I would suppose [about closing the gap]. But they [the writers] are not cut from the same cloth as majority of Aboriginal people in Australia. So they would have attempted it but I would say it is probably a Western idea. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L36-39) Probably I would have the majority of the say in programs that close the gap other than educational programs. I am part of the learning support and they are currently trialling a whole range of programs to help build those kids get back up. We have kids in Year 6 that are reading at a Year 1 level. So we are trying to pick them back up which is closing the gap. Getting the kids involved in assemblies and that. Building their confidence. I have a lot to do in that sort of area. I find with Goori<sup>10</sup> kids their biggest problem at school is confidence. If they find the confidence to be able to speak out in class and ask questions and that sort of thing that's where they start improving. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L50-58)

Jason's knowledge of Indigenous students helps him to organise programs that are suitable for Indigenous students and helps these students to gain knowledge from both Indigenous and Western perspectives.

Attendance at Jason's school is something that he would like to work on. He wants to reward students who have high attendance rates. Jason also believes the attendance policy needs an overhaul as it is upsetting many Aboriginal parents because they are receiving letters

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup> Goori is an Aboriginal person – autonym form, Bundjalung people from northern New South Wales and south-east Queensland.

home when their children are attending school. Students are being classified absent even if they are late. In the future, Jason wants to be involved in the creation of the attendance policy and has already approached the attendance officer about this. The attendance officer is happy for Jason to be involved to give an Aboriginal perspective.

Attendance is one thing I need to work on at this school. I've tried a couple of things like rewarding those kids with high attendance and that sort of stuff. But I think our attendance policy and the way it is structured and sending out letters and that sort of stuff doesn't work for the Aboriginal families. A prime example is one parent getting really cranky the other day and another one who I ran into down the street asking me about what these letters are about. You know next year I have set myself a goal to be more involved in attendance and I have already spoken to the lady who looks after attendance. And yeah she is happy for me to do that and get involved. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L152-158)

However, adding attendance to Jason's role increases his workload, a workload that is already quite substantial. But he sees attendance as an important issue and would like to see in place a policy that is more supportive of Indigenous parents.

The school also has an Aboriginal education team. This team meets regularly to discuss all issues regarding Indigenous education. Jason believes that predominantly Western ways have been used in these meetings in the past but slowly Indigenous knowledges are becoming part of the meetings. The meetings are not held on school grounds any more. Having the meetings off school grounds has resulted in more parents attending.

Yes, in years gone by definitely a Western perspective [is used for the Aboriginal education team] but this year we, well I have personally pushed to have a lot of parents on board. Well actually our meetings are actually held out in West and we have a lot more Aboriginal parents on that team. We get a lot more done. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L64-67). It has [had a positive response taking the meetings West] and those parents yes [are more involved]. In time, hopefully more parents will get involved. They will all be involved in the organisation of our NAIDOC week and they will be in the school so hopefully they will be encouraging others as well to come and help out. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L70-73)

Having more parents involved in Indigenous education meetings has allowed the school to begin to work more closely with Indigenous parents on what is best for their children.

At times, Jason forgets that the teachers do not always understand Indigenous perspectives and culture. He is occasionally shocked by the lack of knowledge that some

teachers have with regard to Indigenous education and culture. In fact, he believes that the ignorance and behaviour of some teachers can be demeaning to Indigenous families.

Sometimes I suppose I am guilty of thinking the teachers know a lot more than they do. Then I am sort of taken aback at times and think how don't you know that and then I have to think well you all come from here [Western] and we come there [Indigenous]. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L176-179) I had one teacher was trying to organise for one child to take a hearing test. I called the parent and she said, "Yeah all good I have her booked in and I will take her on this day." Then this teacher would just pester me every day, "Have you organised this hearing test?", and I would say, "yeah she's on to it she is going to take her". Then she'd say, "I think we need to call her" and I'd say, "She's onto it." [The teacher said], "I think we need to call her every day until it happens". And I said, "Look she has booked the appointment she is going to do it. So just be patient." You can't call parents every day, that is just stupid. You wouldn't do that to a white parent. It's just ridiculous and I was pissed off at first but then I realised this woman [teacher] doesn't get it. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L185-194)

Incidents like the above mentioned is an example of how Jason has to work between the two knowledge systems. In this incident he knew there would have been negative consequences with regard to the Indigenous family if the teacher continually harassed them about their appointment. He also recognised that this teacher's behaviour towards Indigenous parents was different from how she would act with non-Indigenous parents. Jason does not always agree with how some issues are handled by teachers.

Sometimes I don't agree with some of the things that are done and sometimes said. Some people might be pressuring parents to do certain things and I know that is not the way to do it. But sometimes you are not sure whether or not to say something to that teacher or to your supervisor or their supervisor. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L53-57)

Jason believes he has worked between two knowledge systems his whole life. In his role as AEO, he is always crossing between two knowledge systems, but it is something that he has adapted to from a young age. However, at times Jason does question himself if he is "too Westernised" when it comes to the discipline of Indigenous students. He does not always agree with how he disciplines Indigenous students but he feels there is nothing else he can do.

Yeah [work between two knowledge systems]. Why do I think that? Well I have grown up in a Western society too you know. I would go to the school during the week and then on the weekend I would be with all my cousins mucking around and having mud fights and all that. So you learn those family values and then you go to school on the Monday and you would be back into those structures. Yeah it is just two

ways of being. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L198-202) Sometimes you do question yourself [about which knowledge system you are using]. Especially when it comes to discipline and stuff like that. Am I being a bit of a gubba [non-Indigenous person]. Yeah no but what can you do? In the end it is what is best for the kids. I don't like being that fulla that takes kids home for being suspended but it has got to be done. They can't live in a society where they assault people and abuse people and stuff like that. They need to understand but at the same time you are sort of second guessing yourself whether it is right or whether it is wrong. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L206-212)

Home visits about student behavioural issues can result in pressure being exerted on Jason by the Indigenous community. He perceives that this community pressure results from him being seen as the person who is always delivering negative news. He often worries about how the parents are going to react when he arrives. However, most of the parents are supportive when he explains the purpose of the visit in a non-threatening manner.

It's more or less it's the drive [to the parent's house to discuss their child's behaviour that Jason worries], once I get there it is fine and the parents are usually fine but on the way there you are thinking ahh what am I doing, is this right, how is this going to go down, how are they going to react you know. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L219-221)

When Jason needs to have a discussion with a teacher he finds it easiest when he is in a comfortable environment. He tends not to go into the staffroom, as he does not feel comfortable in there.

Well I haven't been there [the staff room] in a long time to be honest. There is certain things said at times and I just ignore it. Never from an actual teacher more from a volunteer. This school is pretty good. It's just, yeah I don't want to hear that. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L122-125)

Therefore, most of his discussions happen in the playground. He also brings up any issues that need to be addressed on staff development days.

I always find that when we are on duty in the playground is a good time to do it because it's more relaxed. I don't like being in the staffroom personally. Cause I just don't find their conversations all that interesting to be honest. Like it doesn't speak to me. If I am out on the playground well I like being outside and I like to have conversations out there. Communication yeah and staff development days are good days to do that sort of thing. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L113-118)

Code switching comes naturally to Jason. He just knows when to do it. He code switches to ensure that everyone is in a comfort zone. He believes that having a more casual approach with Indigenous parents encourages them to come into the school.

It just comes doesn't it [code switching]. You don't really think about it. I think we just know that's how the families feel comfortable. Well that's how we are going to get them to communicate with us and solve the problem really. Or whatever it might be. If you are asking them [parents] to come in and help you are not going to talk to them like you would a teacher. "I need some help this week do you reckon you can give us a hand." (AEO3, i4, 2015, L186-191)

Having good relationships with parents makes Jason's job easier as he is not always dealing with conflict situations. He also provides cultural safety to Indigenous students, parents and staff. Jason provides cultural safety at his school including making sure Indigenous culture is celebrated. Indigenous students feel safe with Jason as they are willing to discuss anything they feel they need to with him.

I think I do [provide cultural safety for Indigenous students and staff] because Aboriginal culture is celebrated here. None of the kids are shy to come and talk to me because they know that I will listen to them in whatever they have got to say. You know I will listen to anything. To me that is them feeling safe. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L205-207)

If students and staff feel comfortable then they will feel safe. If students and staff feel safe at school, they will have better outcomes while they are there. Jason believes outcomes do not necessarily have to be academic outcomes either.

In Jason's community there is a lot of politics surrounding Indigenous knowledge. Some people only see "their" stories as the "correct" stories and are not open to hearing other people's stories. For a variety of reasons, a lot of culture and stories have been lost over the years.

We are limited in this community, lack of knowledge, lack of local knowledge. A lot of lost culture. A lot of road blocks in the community in terms of teaching Aboriginal culture and language in the school so this community is limited in what you can do. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L140-143)

Jason is hoping that the politics eventually settle down and people are more accepting of each other's knowledge.

Yeah there is a lot of politics [surrounding Indigenous knowledge]. A lot of people think that their knowledge is the only knowledge. And they don't take on board anyone else's knowledge. Everyone, just in my opinion, everyone just needs to come to the understanding that's their knowledge and I will accept it and this is my knowledge and they'll accept it and it's all true. And no one is right and no one is wrong because you weren't there. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L145-149)

For many different reasons, some of the parents at the school do not know a lot of their cultural stories. So when Indigenous students come to Jason's school they are not strong in culture either.

They don't know as much [about cultural understanding] because their parents were never taught either. Kids have been removed from their immediate families as well so they don't know anything about their culture so you need to try and share it as much as you can with them. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L210-213)

Furthermore, some of the younger students have not learnt to code switch either.

No a lot of them [students] haven't learnt to do that yet [code switch]. Yeah [they speak Aboriginal English]. Some of them are quite clever and can do it [code switch] but the majority of them are the same here as they are at home. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L216-220)

Discrimination also happens when people code switch. Jason has not had things said directly to him but he does know that it happens. Both Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people hold discriminatory views with regard to this issue.

Well I know it happens [discrimination for code switching]. I know people think "look at him hanging out with all them white fullas". You know. I know it happens but no one has ever said it to me. And like I said I have always grown up with Dad who has always been good at code switching and that is where I get it from. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L223-226).

Being strong in travelling between two worlds enables you to place yourself in both worlds. Jason is able to place himself in both worlds and if people discriminate against him because of it he deals with this discrimination as it occurs.

When teachers at Jason's school redistribute Indigenous knowledge, at times, it is not the same as what was told to them. However, Jason is happy that they are taking Indigenous perspectives on board and all students are learning about their Indigenous culture.

It's never going to be the same as it was [Indigenous knowledge being redistributed by non-Indigenous people]. It's like the old Chinese whispers you know it is never going to be the same. Ohh they might learn a bit of language and how to say hello. Then they are using it with the kids in the classroom and it's not probably said properly. I am not going to come down on them for it. They are trying their best to bring Aboriginal perspectives in the classroom. So I am not going to come down on it. But I am sure some of the parents might not be too pleased. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L93-101)

It is important that teachers do take on Indigenous perspectives in the classroom and to keep it as close to the original version as possible. Furthermore, it is good that two-way learning is happening in the school as it has not always been the case. "In the past yes [it has been one-way learning with Western knowledge] but it's moving more and more [to two-way learning with Indigenous knowledge]." (AEO3, i4, 2015, L153)

Even though it is getting better in the classroom with regard to Aboriginal perspectives being implemented and two-way learning being used, there is still a lot of work to be done to make it work.

#### 5.4 UNCLE PAUL'S JOURNEY

# **5.4.1** Country

As a proud Nyangbul man from the Bundjalung nation Uncle Paul has worked as an AEO at his local primary school for 24 years. He is also the language keeper in the area. Before he became an AEO at the school he was a youth worker at Minda detention centre in Sydney. He worked with troubled children in maximum-security detention, helping to rehabilitate them. Uncle Paul studied the AEO course at the Koori Centre in Sydney. However, due to family commitments he was not able to complete the course. He also studied teaching at Australian Catholic University, but was unable to complete his studies in teaching due to illness. The teaching course he was undertaking involved a substantial amount of travel and living away from home. If you are sick it is extremely difficult to be away from home for long periods. Uncle Paul does credit his time at university for giving him more confidence. It also helped him gain a better understanding of how to relate to the students and the community.

I have been to uni a couple of times. There was the AEO course at the Koori Centre at Sydney University. I done a couple of years of that. Moved on and did a couple of years of that. My brother was doing it at the time and my sister was doing it so I thought I would follow suit and so I thought I would go out there with them. After that probably about 5 years ago I went to the university, the Catholic University. I did about a year and a half there until my knee started playing up. I found it difficult to get mobile around the campus. [University helped with] Just relating to children, relating to the community and staff. Like I said earlier a lot of confidence. I used to have a bit of a stutter and it has just brought me out of my shell. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L23-38)

When growing up Uncle Paul went to school on the mission where he lived until he reached Year 3. The mission school only had classes from Kindergarten to Year 2. Both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students could attend the school; however, it was identified as an Indigenous school due to its location. All of Uncle Paul's brothers and sisters attended the

school as well. They all attended until the end of Year 2 and then they had to transition over to a school located in another town. Uncle Paul's mother chose this school, as she believed it would give her children the best educational opportunities.

An Aboriginal community school yes. It wasn't Aboriginal only, it was either/or, but it was built on a reservation, on a mission, so it was classified as an Aboriginal school. Yeah I felt different. When we went from the transition, because Allam was only an infants K–2 and it is up to sixth class now but when we all went to school, all my sisters and brothers, we had to transition from there to either Delly or Stanley. And Mum always chose Stanley because Delly was a bit funny in those days. Stanley was a bigger school with more opportunity. We was moving to Stanley anyway. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L15-22)

Uncle Paul and his family lived on the mission until they were given permission to leave. His family moved to the town where he was attending school. But things were not easy for Uncle Paul when he moved away from the mission. He often received criticism from his mates from the mission about whom he hung around with in the town. This happened because he was left in town with the non-Indigenous children when his Indigenous friends went back to the mission. It was very hard for him and he had to code switch between the two worlds so that he fitted in.

We finally passed as being civilised and [could] live in a town. Yeah boxes ticked off and signed off the mission, we moved into town and Dad got a permanent job on the council then. He was there 35 years I think Dad was. Knowing you were different there even when we did go to Stanley schools because we were from the mission all my mates that lived on the mission [attended] Strad school at home. What do I do because all my mates have gone home on the bus back to the mission? And I would stand at the bus stop waving to them so then I started getting mixed up with some of the white kids there because they were mates from the Year 2, 3, 4 and 5 class at the convent school. So I had established some friendships there already. So I started hanging around my white mates see but then I copped it from my Goori mates then. "What are you hanging around those white fullas for?" I just said, "What am I meant to do when you go home? I got to have mates of me own." So it was all right after a while. They sort of got used to it. I got used to it. Just that difference. It was like two worlds. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L23-36)

When Uncle Paul's family moved from the mission into the housing commission house they were one of two Indigenous families to live in the area. Uncle Paul had a very large family and they would have to do most tasks in two sittings, as there was not enough room for all the family to participate in a particular task at any one time. I grew up on the mission till I was in about Year 2. Then we moved to Stanley into housing commission houses. There were only two black families in the area. There was 13 kids so with 15 of us in the house dinnertime we had two sittings, homework we had two sittings. If you were home late too bad [you missed out]. I often did not get home until late then eat my dinner at 8 o'clock in the second sitting. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L33-37)

## **5.4.2** Understanding the role

Uncle Paul first started in his role 24 years ago and he still has distinct memories of his first few weeks. To begin with, he was not given any particular roles to undertake in the school. This was not very stimulating for Uncle Paul. He was given sundry jobs that predominantly involved resource preparation. He was also asked to help with the behaviour management of the Indigenous students at the school. Even though he did not really know the students, he was asked to talk to them and convince them back into the classroom.

My first day here I remember the Deputy Principal was a lady teacher, Mrs. Allen. She sat down and read me the riot act first thing. She was a bit of an old school lady. She had really old ways of teaching and things. My first lesson in a classroom was in a Kindy. I was sitting there observing for about an hour and got bored. So I said, "Can I do something?" And she said, "You can sharpen pencils." I got right into sharpening pencils because I knew the kids wanted sharp pencils all the time. I always checked the containers to make sure there was the right number of pencils in it. [Then I was asked to] do their [students] reading booklets. I'd go to the photocopy room and got shown how to do that. How to staple, collate and all that sort of stuff. That was my first job. And talking to the kids when they had problems. Like I was sort of wellbeing the Goori kids. They'd [the teachers would] say, "Well you're the Aboriginal person you go and sort them out." And I'd be like, "Yeah well okay. I don't really know the children, but I will try." After many attempts of doing that sort of stuff I got the knack of it after a while and I am not too bad at negotiating with children to come back to class. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L41-55)

In the beginning, Uncle Paul felt as though he was only at the school to babysit the children who misbehaved. They had him chasing children around the school, trying to comfort and help them to settle back into class. There was a high demand on him to return students to their classrooms. But he found that this task was often very difficult.

Well as an AEO I felt like I was babysitting. It sort of felt like I was just babysitting the children. Putting lids on hot pots or boiling pots. On kids that were getting pressured or stressed out over their work. I would sit with those guys and try and support them, help them calm [down] and hopefully do their work. (AEO4, i1, 2014,

L58-61) Mainly supporting the children who take off out of the classroom. Hiding in trees, hiding under buildings that sort of thing. My job was to find them, relocate them and look for them. And then try and persuade them to go back into class. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L78-80)

As Uncle Paul got to know the students the task to get them back into the classroom became easier.

Uncle Paul worked to a timetable but it did not always work out, as he would often be sorting out issues. He was working in many different areas and was being called to attend to issues all over the school at different times.

When I first started here I got a timetable. I think it lasted two weeks. I ended up tearing it up because it wasn't working. I couldn't be in a class at certain time because certain things were happening. Like just after play time you would be dealing with things for half an hour sometimes an hour. I just can't make it to class. I said [to the Principal], "Mate this isn't working

and I tore it up in front of him. He said, "Well." And I said, "Well it's not going to work this term so maybe next term we can try." But after I got to know the kids, and once they got familiar with me in my role and who I was, over time it just got a lot easier working as the AEO. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L84-92)

The Principal at the time was fine with Uncle Paul not following his timetable as he could see that there was a high need for flexibility in the role as AEO.

Another role Uncle Paul had to take on when he first started as an AEO was being the chairperson of the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committee. The ASSPA committee was made up of parents and teachers. It provided support for Indigenous students while they were in preschool, primary school and high school. The committee's aim was to increase parent involvement in their child's education. ASSPA funding was given to schools and parents. At the school level teachers distributed the funding over a wide variety of activities, programs and equipment with the aim of raising participation and attendance of Indigenous students.

We also had ASSPA at the school those years and we didn't have much parent involvement and being the Aboriginal person at the school at that time working here, I was designated to be the ASSPA chair. I got about three or four parents on board that were regular in the school. They started coming on board then. I had to learn bookkeeping through our Deputy Principal so I could do the books to make sure our money was spent properly. Documented and accountable and kept all the receipts. So I learnt all that and I'm not too bad at bookkeeping now. It was traumatising sometimes

when it came to doing the acquittals. You had to find every cent. And sometimes you couldn't find this or that and you had to keep going over it and over it and I had to nail it right down to the one cent. I got pretty good at doing it in the end. (AEO4, i1, 2014, 65-74)

Being the Chairperson of the ASSPA committee was quite a large job. It had many factors that Uncle Paul had to learn and he was fully accountable for the spending of the associated funds.

When Uncle Paul first started in his role some people questioned why he got the role when he is not from Country. However, the role was filled according to the Department of Education protocols.

I would mingle with community and catch up with people on the weekends. I used to play football with a lot of people from the community and I got to know them and they got to know me well. But when I first started I had people questioning me. Why did he get this job? But it was all legitimate. They had an Indigenous member on the panel and he knew me but he said straight up that he would be professional and not let that influence who got the job. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L5-8)

Uncle Paul fitted in to the community well and did not have any problems, as he was always respectful.

In the beginning Uncle Paul would not go into the staffroom at the school. He felt excluded as there were nametags on the staff table and his name was not on there. Uncle Paul would sit out and yarn with the students. He developed a great rapport with the students, as he would talk to them about their families, how he knew their families, and tell them about his family.

I do [go into the staffroom] but in saying that I never did when I first started. I used to sit out with the kids on my little table and chair. That was about for the first six months. They used to have these little plaques on the table with teacher's name inscribed. So I wasn't going to sit there. Then one day one of the female teachers asked me, "Why do you sit down there?" and I said "No one has asked me to sit at the table." She said, "Really you shouldn't have waited to be asked." About a month later all the little plaques were off the table. I sit at the same spot now. I have for years. I sit where I can see everybody and then when people walk into the staffroom they are greeted by me because I am the first to see them. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L191-199)

Being asked to come and sit in the staff room made Uncle Paul feel included as a staff member.

Uncle Paul was quite shy when he began his role as AEO but this did not stop him from developing good relationships with Indigenous students and their families. Moreover, he did have connections to some of the students and parents through his community involvement and sport. He made sure when developing his relationships with the students and the community that the students knew he was there to support them. He felt that he made the students feel comfortable in the school environment and that they were able to trust him.

When I first started, I was a bit shy at first and I knew some families. I had been playing sport and footy up here for years. I did get to know some families. I started to get to know the children from working here. I was down at Stanley Public first with a boy down there. Then this job came up and I applied for it. I didn't really know the kids. It was a bit daunting at first because I didn't really know them. But as I got here and got used [to] the place, got used to the kids. Started talking to them. I'd just walk up to them. I'd yarn with them and joke around with them in class just to break that ice. Then the kids would say, "Uncle Paul's not bad aye. He's alright you can joke around with him." And I said that's the way I want to be with them. My job isn't to ... I always say to them, "I'm not here to growl on ya. I'm not here to tell you what to do. I am here to support you." I always let them know that because my role is not to growl at them. I do growl at them sometimes when they do something wrong. But to a certain extent that's the teacher's job and I let them do that. But when the teacher doesn't see that or whatever and they're busy then I'll jump in. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L137-151)

Uncle Paul was there to support Indigenous students, families and teachers and fundamental to this role was establishing good relationships with them all.

It is important for students to be engaged in their learning at Uncle Paul's school, otherwise they do not participate. He suggests that hands-on learning with meaning is best for Indigenous students at his school. He also believes the relationship with the teacher is important.

Hands on, definitely hands on. But you really have got to engage them first, you really got to make it exciting for them and worthwhile. Because if you going through a lesson with them and they go, "Arghhh, I'm not doing this." They just throw their arms up and some of the kids are hard to get back on task. But a lot of teachers here are now starting to understand our kids more and they are starting to make our lessons a bit more enjoyable and a bit more fun. I know in our senior classes they are pretty much work orientated. They do have their fun, a bit of fun at times. But the middle classes, the Stage 2 [Years 3 and 4] kids, the teachers in those two classes they have fun all the time. The teachers are always kind of joking around with them. Showing the kids that they are real people. They're not just there to dictate and direct and tell

them what to do and teaching them. They actually showing the kids they are real people and they've got real feelings and they are genuine. And they have a lot of discussion around that too in the classroom. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L184-196)

Uncle Paul believes that teachers at his school are starting to understand how to engage Aboriginal students and what the best strategies are to help them learn. However, there is still a long way to go.

With our [Young Women's Christian Association] YWCA people here working as well, basically we sit down and have groups and the Stronger Smarter program is starting to happen now. So we check in, check out so we know what our kids are feeling and you can check on their faces and see what kind of mood they're in. Which is a good thing I really find that's a great thing, the Stronger Smarter program. And the 8 ways of learning<sup>11</sup>, we have started with that too. So the teachers are starting to really value Ab ed. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L197-203)

# 5.4.3 Two-way strong

As an Aboriginal man, Uncle Paul feels proud of his heritage. However, when he was younger he did not always feel so proud. This was caused by him being labelled and classified by non-Indigenous people. The labelling made Uncle Paul feel as though he was looked at differently. Furthermore, Indigenous people also had labels for Uncle Paul. Some Indigenous people portrayed his family as thinking they were better than other Indigenous people. This was hard on Uncle Paul's family as they were only trying to gain an education and find employment. So not only did non-Indigenous people exclude them but also at times Indigenous people excluded them.

The labelling is the problem. I feel proud of who I am but when I was younger I didn't really feel proud because the same old thing as being classified as this and that. But when I was in Kindergarten I was an animal or classified as an animal in 1963 and 1965. By the time it got to 1967 I was in Year 2, so I was classified as an animal and I felt different and I was isolated in a small school because I never went to school with the white kids you know. I used to think how come the white kids don't come to school. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L6-12) Yeah we were looked upon different. We were looked upon as the cliché uptown niggers<sup>12</sup>. We got that branded at us for a little while. But that was only until people found out who we really were. We weren't trying to be anyone different, we were just trying to move on in our lives. We just get along with people, we just get an education and get a job. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L 53-57)

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup> 8 ways of learning is an Aboriginal pedagogy framework (Yunkaporta, 2009b).

<sup>12 &</sup>quot;Uptown niggers" are people of colour who are perceived as wealthy or rich.

Uncle Paul's identity comes from his family's background. He credits knowing his family's background as forming his identity. A part of Indigenous identity and Uncle Paul's identity is being inclusive. He also believes that the way he was brought up and his life experiences have impacted on his identity formation.

Just knowing my roots where I come from. Knowing the family structure. Knowing that all my blood relatives do come from this area. Although Mum came from Brown's Head. Mum's side. But we grew up here in this area not in Brown's Head. Mum has been up here since her and Dad got married. She always talked about going back to Brown's Head to live but she didn't go back. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L108-112) We are inclusive [of everyone]. We are always including our family in things when we are talking about things and they [white people] are about just their own direct family. White fellas only really include their first cousins as family and don't really worry about the rest. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L61-64) Whereas, we include first, second, third, and fourth cousins as our close family. We take ownership to all of them [cousins]. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L66-67)

Language has been a contributing factor for Uncle Paul becoming more in touch with his Indigenous identity. As a child he was not allowed to speak his native language on the mission. However, Uncle Paul has found that language has helped him to discover more about his identity.

Me being the language teacher here now that is part of my identity because I wouldn't talk language as a child. Mum and Dad would not let us as they were worried we would get into trouble for it. It is only through developments through the school, working in the school got me into that next step. This really helps me with my identity and who I am. This is part of my purpose of being here. I am the next person and starting to carry on the language. To develop it and train some more people up and get it to continue on. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L154-159)

Uncle Paul facilitates the language program at his school. He teaches language to the whole school. This enables Indigenous identity to be acknowledged in the school. When he teaches it he can see Indigenous students linking some of the words back to their own homes and family.

Yeah [the Aboriginal students' identity is acknowledged at school] with the language program I am doing at the moment. I find that a real good thing. A good tool. When I do language the kids are starting to really open up and sit there and feel proud. "Ahh it's the black fulla's word." They are starting to be inclusive too a lot of them. Like "oh I remember" or "I remember that Uncle Paul." Or, "They talk like that at home, I heard Mum or Dad or Grandma say that word." Then they look at the Aboriginal kids

and say, "See, we got our own language. We can talk it up when we start learning a bit more." They are starting to be really proud of it now. I find that part of it very rewarding. It's really good. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L70-77)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at Uncle Paul's school have become really proud about learning their language and it enables them to learn more about their identity.

Indigenous student identity firstly needs to come from home. But Uncle Paul believes that the school should have some input into the students' identity formation. However, the main source of input into Indigenous students' identity formation needs to come from home.

I think it is both [school and home], it [identity] has got to come from home too. We can't say a kid is Aboriginal if we don't really know or their parents don't want them to know. You know some parents don't want them to know. They say we are not Aboriginal. But then you can pick some kids out just the way they go on and that. Some parents say they are and some parents say they are not. It's just the way they are. [It] depends on who they grow up with, who they get around with and influences of parents at home. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L86-91)

When it comes to the school having input into Indigenous identity the school has to make sure the students actually identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander first. This decision lies with the parents.

Even though Uncle Paul is comfortable with his identity, he does believe he acts differently at school compared to when he is at home. At school he always makes sure that he is doing the right thing as he does not want anyone to see him as not doing his job correctly. He also speaks differently at school compared to when he is at home.

Yes. I talk differently. I am different at school to how I am at home. When I am at school I am not the real me. You are always looking over your shoulder to see if someone is watching you. You just can't relax. Whereas when you are at home you can do things how you would and want to do them. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L184-187)

Not being able to relax in your workplace puts extra pressure on Uncle Paul and at times he obviously does not feel comfortable. He is always looking over his shoulder as he does not want to fail.

When it comes to Acknowledgement of Country at Uncle Paul's school he is usually the person who does it. Occasionally Indigenous students do it if Uncle Paul is unavailable. The Indigenous students who generally participate in Acknowledgement of Country are from the school parliament, which is similar to a student representative council.

Mainly it is me [who does Acknowledgement of Country]. But if I am not available one of the Goori kids will do it. And we have a few Goori kids on our [school] parliament. One is the vice-captain. We have had captains as well. Aboriginal kids as captains. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L81-83)

Uncle Paul believes the students feel proud when their Country is formally acknowledged. One student even asked for advice from Uncle Paul on adding language in his election speech for parliament.

Oh yeah [they feel proud when they see Acknowledgement of Country]. Well one guy that went for parliament last year. He wrote a speech with his Pop and they really wanted to get right into [it] so they went to the Deputy Principal to try and get some help and support with the writing of it. Then they come and saw me and put a bit of language in there with the acknowledgement. I said, "ok mate that is fair enough". You could see he was building up to be really proud of his speech. When it come to the day he had his dad there, his mum, grandparents, aunties, uncles. They were all there behind him standing at the back of the hall. You could see he was all shame. We were like, "Be proud brother. Be proud bud. This is you now." You could see him trying to build the courage up. He got going and I thought he spoke really well. And he got the job as vice-captain. And he has got two cultures, he has the Goori and the non-Indigenous. Mum's white and Dad's Goori. Both worlds. Same as my kids. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L85-96)

Some of the students have to move between two knowledge systems as that is how they are living. Being able to be proud and in touch with both identities is something that can be a strength for these students.

## 5.4.4 Working at the interface

To support Indigenous students in learning and social well-being Uncle Paul ensured students were well prepared to learn. Fundamental to this preparation is the notion that they need to be calm and ready to learn. If Uncle Paul sees students getting agitated because they do not know what to do, he quietly asks them if they need help. He also listens to the teacher's instructions and assists students, either in small groups or one-on-one.

Well in the learning in the classrooms usually sitting with them one-on-one or in groups with them. Do some group work or go through their stencils or their booklets or their workbook or their textbooks. Whatever the teacher has got for the day. I will sit back and I'll just watch and see what kids aren't ready. See [which] kids haven't got the things they use in the classroom like pens, pencils whatever. And I will part them and say, "you, two or three come sit with me". I will just calmly walk over there

and say calmly, "What do you want a hand with?" When they're down or something that has happened before school. Or when they're down you can say, "What's the matter mate, tell us first. Calm down if you're angry, calm down first and when you are calm we will have a little chat to you and try and work out what's wrong and try and fix it up." (AEO4, i1, 2014, L156-166)

Ever since Uncle Paul has worked at the school he has been asked to do home visits with Indigenous families. He attends the homes of families and has the family members fill in forms or talk about issues that are going on in the school. Uncle Paul usually used to do these visits alone, and even if he had any of the teaching staff with him he generally had to do all the introductions and talking. Doing the home visits took Uncle Paul out of the classroom a lot of the time, which meant that there was less support for the students who were at school. However, more recently Uncle Paul has been supported in his home visits by the Deputy Principal.

It used to be, "Paul, when are you doing a home visit?" It used to be. Then I'd go down, I'd go down and get the information first and get the address, look at the map where the parents live or whatever. If I weren't sure where they lived and took the map and take the information and go talk to the parents and try and negotiate and whatever the problem was. No teachers. I'd just go by myself. For seven, eight years I done that. Which I didn't mind doing but I was taken out of the classroom a lot and I'd get back in the classroom and they'd be like, "where did this fella come from". I remember last trip I went for home visits. I thought, "Here we go again, they are going to send Paul in to break the ice", but it didn't happen like that. The Deputy walked straight in and said, "Nope, this is my role now Paul. You just sit back now Paul, you're my support." He said, "I'll do the talking and I'll do the introductions" and I thought, "wow". (AEO4, i1, 2014, 216-228)

Having another staff member attending the home visits with him has taken some of the pressure off Uncle Paul; he felt supported in his role as an AEO.

When Uncle Paul was on the home visits other staff members often wondered what he was doing in his role. Although this did not seem to cause any issues with the teachers, at times it did make him feel as though people were questioning what he does. In fact, on these home visits he would often be out of the school for long periods of time.

It didn't really cause issues but you could see people thinking, "Why is he out of school? Why is he coming in and out and he has got no timetable either?" But I found it worked better that I could just be called at a matter of time. Just like that. You know, I might do forty minutes in a morning or an afternoon, you know, I wouldn't just go in and out. I'd sit and have a yarn to them [parents on home visits]. And sit down and fill

forms with them, whatever had to be done. We'd talk and they say I'd be doing this and I'd be doing that. Just write that. Do what you gotta do. I'm here to do one at a time. (AEO4, i1, 2014, 230-237)

By having flexibility in how he allocated his time, Uncle Paul was able to make sure all his visits were thorough and all associated tasks were completed.

Sometimes when an AEO is off Country they can find it difficult to fit into their role as an AEO. Visiting students at home could become problematic. However, Uncle Paul was always accepted in his role as AEO. Playing sport in the local area and doing the home visits helped Uncle Paul form relationships with the families in the community.

I felt comfortable. I'm not a local but I do know plenty of people from playing sports up here for many years. And my family is pretty well known up here. I did feel comfortable. It didn't worry me. I liked doing it because that way I got to know the parents as well. But now you see with the teachers at school they're starting to talk right up to the parents. The parents are starting to come into the school and having a chat and laugh with us. You just see the changes just starting to occur now. (AEO4, i1, 2014, 239-245)

Having good relationships is an important dimension of the role of an AEO as it is in the students' best interests to have an AEO who is able to communicate well with parents and community.

An AEO can provide all types of support to Indigenous families. Some of the families at Uncle Paul's school know him because other family members have attended the school. Having strong relationships with the families also helps address the ongoing problem of student attendance because the families and students know that Uncle Paul is there to support them.

I think it has [helped with student attendance]. Because knowing there was a black fulla here to support our kids. There is only this school and Denning that have AEOs in the primary. Aplin Public hasn't nor has Aplin Cove. They do have people but they have to pay them out of a program. But there is no permanent AEOs in those schools. So I think it does. Knowing that there is an Aboriginal person to support them. And a lot of the kids' uncles and aunties went to this school and they know who I am. They know that I'm approachable. Yeah I find having an Aboriginal person here keeps it positive and keeps our kids here. And all the programs that we have happening in the school. We've got some really good programs here and they are open to a lot of families if they want to be part of it. They can join in the band group and learn to play instruments and our language program. YWCA program they do stuff before school,

after school and on weekends here. Yeah so it's getting a lot better here. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L250-261)

Uncle Paul believes that having someone to support you at school can make a world of difference to whether you like attending or not. Uncle Paul was always available to support the students, to make sure they felt safe and happy in their environment. Uncle Paul also encouraged students to do the extra-curricular activities that were available at the school.

When invitations from teachers started coming to Uncle Paul about putting Indigenous perspectives in the curriculum he jumped at the opportunity. The communication between the teachers and Uncle Paul has always been reasonable, but Uncle Paul was generally told how to do tasks and never asked how he would do them. He would take instructions from the teachers and the relationship was generally one-sided. The teachers wanted him to do it their way. Asking Uncle Paul to give an Indigenous perspective on the curriculum has made him feel valued as a staff member at the school. But not only was it valuable for him, it also was valuable for the students and teachers to have an Indigenous perspective on the curriculum. From Uncle Paul's perspective schools are still only working at surface levels when it comes to Indigenous perspectives.

Yeah they [teachers] would show me how to do things. Well, their way on how to do things. Usually [it] had to be their way. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L286-287) It took a little while [for me to be asked from an Indigenous perspective]. But usually if I was sitting in the class and they would talk about Aboriginal things they would ask me my opinion. And I think "ohh I could be valuable here". Well I am being valuable here because I know I am saying the right thing. So yeah just being invited to discussions I thought it was really good. No it didn't happen for the first year or two. Until they got familiar with me and knew about my role and stuff. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L295-298) Oh yeah [it is important to have an Indigenous perspective]. There is a lot out there to offer that Europeans haven't tapped into yet. And even being Aboriginal you know there is a lot that I still got to learn. I'm only just touching the tip of the iceberg with some of the stuff we are doing at school. How did our people do it for so many thousands of years, you know survive and look after our children. All those spiritual stuff, you know with our families, so yeah. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L302-307)

Indigenous perspectives are not only good for Indigenous students but they are broadening knowledge for non-Indigenous students as well.

Not only should schools be having an Indigenous perspective, they also should be participating in two-way learning. Two-way learning allows students to teach teachers about

their culture. Uncle Paul believes two-way learning should most definitely be included in schools

You have got to include it [two-way learning]. Even in the morning discussion and stuff always include that stuff. It's [Aboriginal culture] theirs; it is personal and it's part of them. It's something they are bringing into the school and sharing. And they want to share it. [Teachers] saying that you can't – it's got nothing to do with school. It does have something to do with school. A child comes from that home and they are part of the school so it belongs. It goes both ways. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L61-66)

Uncle Paul believes that sharing culture in the classroom brings a sense of pride to Indigenous students and having two-way learning enables that to happen.

Even when Uncle Paul is talking to Indigenous parents he is generally using Western knowledges. Uncle Paul talks differently to non-Indigenous staff members as compared to Indigenous staff members.

I speak to parents and teachers from a Western [perspective] because that is where they're at. Our parents don't know a lot of their culture because of different things that have happened. So I speak to them in a Western way. The teachers are generally Western. There is Ben Hill [he is Aboriginal] who works up at the school and we will talk differently with one or two other male teachers, "you doin' the" and "eyahh there". But other than that it's all Western. A lot of our parents don't know their stories, they don't know their culture. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L17-22)

Uncle Paul is able to code switch when he needs to. He is able to use Indigenous knowledges and he is capable of adapting to Western knowledges as required.

In the role as AEO Uncle Paul needs to work at the interface of two knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western). Furthermore, he sees being able to work between two knowledge systems as a strength because it allows you to see things from both points of view.

[In the AEO role you are working at the interface] because you are dealing with both sides. You have got to play the role. You have to play the role of the middle person. You can't be biased on either side. I find I try not to be bias[ed], I listen to the teachers and think, "How would I do it? Why do they do it that way?" (AEO4, i3, 2015, L26-29) Yeah having Indigenous and Western knowledge is a strength because you can see both angles. You can try and work out where they are coming from. You can be a part of Indigenous and Western knowledge. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L48-49)

Even though Uncle Paul is moving between both knowledges at school, he perceives that there is still not enough Indigenous knowledge being taught in schools. For Indigenous

knowledge to become more prevalent in schools, there needs to be greater input from Indigenous staff. The more that staff learn about Indigenous knowledges then the greater the likelihood for it to be passed on to all students.

To get Indigenous knowledge more prevalent in schools we need to have more Aboriginal workers coming in. Having more open days or professional development days from an Indigenous perspective. Aboriginal, not even professional people, but people who are professional from the community to come in and have yarn ups with the kids. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L95-98)

Indigenous knowledge is formed and learnt in many different ways. Indigenous knowledge can be learnt through family, school and experiences. How we learn about Indigenous knowledge is forever evolving.

It's [Indigenous knowledge] acquired in different ways. There is not a specific way to acquire. Obviously you are brought up that or learning it through different speakers or cultural knowledge, people who have lived that life. But then there is people like us that weren't allowed to learn it when we were little but now we are starting to pick it up in our senior years so we can try and hold onto it, so we can continue it on. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L40-45)

Thus, much of what we know about Indigenous knowledges has been lost in the past due to government policies that existed when Uncle Paul was young. But, Uncle Paul feels that this is slowly being addressed. He also stated that having Indigenous knowledge allows Indigenous students to be in touch with their identity and work between the two knowledge systems of Indigenous and Western.

According to Uncle Paul, schools are squashing Indigenous students' identity. Even though the language program at Uncle Paul's school is acknowledging Indigenous identity, in an overall picture students' identity is being squashed. Uncle Paul has worked at his school for 24 years and he has seen little change with regard to accommodating Indigenous students and their identity within the current school environment.

Yeah [schools are squashing Indigenous students' identity]. They are holding them back a bit because if they were brought up in a community in a more traditional way they would get so much more. They would know exactly who they were growing up in a traditional lifestyle, growing up that way. They would be in touch with their identity. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L102-105) [Schools have not changed to accommodate our kids], they still don't understand our kids. The workers in the classroom, the support workers especially some of the schools with big numbers of Goori kids, because they still don't

understand the kids. It's the aides' work to work them out and support them and work them out and let the teachers know. (AEO4, i3, 2015, L109-112)

At school Uncle Paul teaches the older primary students about the history of Indigenous people in Australia. The students are often shocked about what they hear, especially knowing that it happened to Uncle Paul.

Just knowing we were put in that category [of flora and fauna] was a big shock when I found out as a child. When I tell the kids at school they can't believe things like that happened to me. We were like prisoners when we lived on the mission. We had to ask the mission manager if we could leave and had to get signed in and out. Just to go to the shop or doctors. If you were late he wouldn't let you back in and you had nowhere to sleep. We were starting to get self-sufficient. We had corn and vegetables growing and then the mission manager went and bought cattle and they destroyed all the crops. We don't know whether he did this deliberately or just had no idea. (AEO4, i2, 2015, 74-82)

Uncle Paul believes the treatment he received in the past has shaped part of his identity.

From Uncle Paul's perspective, a lot of the problems that arise between teachers and Indigenous students are because of the lack of communication. The teachers never ask the students what is going on and why they are so upset. Uncle Paul does not care if the students are Indigenous or non-Indigenous, he always helps them out and asks them about why they are acting the way they are. Usually it is because of a problem that has happened either at school or home.

The teachers don't ask the kids what the problem is. I never get angry at the kids when they are mucking up badly. I talk to them. I tell them to let me know what is going on. "Tell me what the problem is and then I can try and help you." A lot of the times the non-Indigenous teachers are straight down the line and strict and they don't ask what the problem is. They just deal with them [Indigenous students] without finding out why they are mucking up. All the kids have got a story. But in saying that if a non-Aboriginal kid is mucking up or hurt I don't just walk past them. I can't walk away because they are not my kids. Whether they are black, white, brown I don't care who they are. Kids are kids. You got to look after them and support them all. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L86-97)

Uncle Paul cares for all his students. He tries to talk to them as much as he can. He always endeavours to get to the bottom of their problems, as he believes that this helps these students to have a happier time at school. As he shares, "If the students are happy then the AEO is happy" (AEO4, i4, 2015, L210).

Four major constructs emerged from the data analysis of the case studies. These were: (a) the role of the AEO; (b) cultural interface; (c) two-way strong; and (d) ways of knowing, being and doing. Each of these constructs consisted of themes and sub-themes that differed for each case study. The next section presents examples of the analysis of constructs, themes, sub-themes and excerpts from the interviews.

#### 5.5 DATA MAPS OF THE EMERGING THEMES

This section consists of data maps in the form of tables, which present the constructs and themes emerging from the analysis of the case studies. The first two data maps provide examples of the data analysis that occurred, showing the constructs, themes, selected subthemes and supporting excerpts within each case study (see Table 5.1 and Table 5.2). For a complete analysis of each construct, theme and sub-theme, and supporting excerpts from the yarning sessions, for each co-researcher, refer to Appendices F, G, H, and I.

The next four data maps each correspond to the four constructs: (a) the role of the AEO (Table 5.3); (b) cultural interface (Table 5.4); (c) two-way strong (Table 5.5); and (d) ways of knowing, being and doing (Table 5.6). These four tables display the construct with the corresponding themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data across the case studies. The ticks in the table indicate which participants spoke about the sub-theme in the yarning sessions. For example, the construct examined in Table 5.3 is the role of the AEO. All four participants mentioned the sub-theme *Home visits – can be problematic* in the yarning sessions. By contrast, only one participant (Aunty Michelle) stated that she *Didn't have the courage to challenge the Principal or the teachers re jobs* in the yarning sessions.

Table 5.1

Data Map of the Constructs, Themes, Sub-themes and Supporting Quotes Within Case Studies (Aunty Michelle and Aunty Rowena)

AEO	Construct	Theme	Sub-theme	Quote
Aunty Michelle	Role	Well-being	Social and emotional well-being	So I really worry about the kids' social and emotional well-being first because I believe if you don't take part because we are teaching the whole child and if we don't take care of those needs how can we expect the child to go into the classroom and learn
	Cultural interface	Transporting knowledges	Indigenous knowledge	I think I am closing the racism gap and broadening the cultural. Not that it is a gap but trying to broaden the culture.
	Two-way strong	Travelling between two worlds	Keeps her identity of who she is but she may act differently at school	But you know you are one way at home, and then you're a different way with the kids and then you have got to be a different way with the staff.
	Ways of knowing, being and doing	Relationships and Country	Connection to Country	I feel connected to the land, my mob. I'm not saying I don't feel connected here but it's just different.
Aunty	Role	Well-being	Social and emotional well-being	I do everything to keep their health and their mental health in a good way.
Rowena	Cultural interface	Transporting knowledges	Discussions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous during professional development	Me being from here a traditional owner custodian it was good to have me on staff because then I could explain it and then it started to make sense.
	Two-way strong	Travelling between two worlds	Act differently at school	My kids have got a lot of non-Aboriginal friends and they go, "Your mum is different at home."
	Ways of knowing, being and doing	Relationships and Country	Aboriginal ways	My way, the way that other Aboriginal people understand me

Table 5.2

Data Map of the Constructs, Themes, Sub-themes and Supporting Quotes Within Case Studies (Jason and Uncle Paul)

AEO	Construct	Theme	Sub-theme	Quote
Jason	Role	Well-being	Social and emotional well-being	If I see a student who I think might be having a bit of trouble or I know through other people that something is going on outside of school, I'll focus my attention on them for the day and assist them in class.
	Cultural interface	Transporting knowledges	Indigenous knowledge	They were doing special places in Kindergarten and I was invited to come in to talk about Aboriginal special places in the area. So it is getting better.
	Two-way strong	Travelling between two worlds	Acts differently when he is talking to teachers.	You speak differently. You act differently. You communicate differently.
	Ways of knowing, being and doing	Relationships and Country	Beliefs and values	So you learn those family values and then you go to school on the Monday and you would be back into those [Western] structures.
Uncle Paul	Role	Well-being	Social and emotional well-being	I would sit with those guys and try and support them, help them calm [down] and hopefully do their work.
	Cultural interface	Transporting knowledges	Indigenous knowledges are still being learnt to pass on	But then there is people like us that weren't allowed to learn it when we were little but now we are starting to pick it up in our senior years so we can try and hold onto it so we can continue it on.
	Two-way strong	Travelling between two worlds	Talk differently to non- Indigenous staff	There is Ben Hill [he is Aboriginal] who works up at the school and we will talk differently with one or two other male teachers, "you doin' the" and "eyahh there".
	Ways of knowing, being and doing		Aboriginal students being removed from family	Kids have been removed from their immediate families

Table 5.3
Role of an AEO Data Map of Themes and Sub-Themes Across Cases

Theme	Sub-theme	<b>Aunty Michelle</b>	<b>Aunty Rowena</b>	Jason	<b>Uncle Paul</b>
Role when first	Doing jobs that were not part of the their role	✓			
employed	Didn't have the courage to challenge the Principal or the teachers re jobs	✓			
	Stereotyped by teachers and Principals – undertone of racism	✓			
	School not catering for Indigenous students	✓			
	Lack of interest by some staff members re Indigenous students' education	✓			
	Did not attend Indigenous education meetings, PD or conferences	✓			
	Staff were not interested in any ideas she put forward in how to help Indigenous students	✓			
	Role entailed working with Indigenous students only but asked to work with all students and staff		✓		
	Not to discipline students		✓		
	Discipline students / behavioural management	✓			✓
	Home visits – can be problematic	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Create opportunities for students to informally discuss how they feel and if they are struggling		✓		
	Targeting where students require assistance				✓
	Not given a particular role				✓
	Sundry jobs predominantly involving resource development				✓
	Coercing students back into the classroom				✓
	Chairperson ASSPA committee				✓
Current role	Ensure Indigenous students are understanding concepts	✓			
	Making Aboriginal education everyone's business	✓			
	Helping students complete learning assessment tasks				✓
	Liaising with teachers to address specific learning needs				✓
	Very little direction given by Principals or teachers			✓	
	Home visits		✓	✓	
	Implementing learning activities – hands-on approach and incorporating Indigenous perspectives			✓	✓
	Language teacher				✓
	Do what the teacher wants				✓
Common thread –	Well-being of the students	✓	✓	/	
well-being	Social and emotional well-being	✓			✓
	Preparing students to learn	✓			✓
	Helping Aboriginal students understand their culture and build self-respect		✓		
	Building students academically as well as confident people			✓	✓
	Building strong relationships with students			✓	

Theme	Sub-theme	<b>Aunty Michelle</b>	Aunty Rowena	Jason	Uncle Paul
Role formation	Teachers and Principals to begin with	✓		✓	✓
Current influences on role	Programs informing staff regarding Indigenous knowledges Aboriginal education committee and the programs they suggest to implement Yarns with Indigenous students and members of the community	1		<i>J J</i>	

Table 5.4
Cultural Interface Data Map of Themes and Sub-themes Across Cases

Theme	Sub-theme	<b>Aunty Michelle</b>	Aunty Rowena	Jason	<b>Uncle Paul</b>
Transporting	Indigenous knowledges – broadening the culture	<b>√</b>	1		
knowledges	Advice on Indigenous perspectives in the classroom	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Knowledge holders must be willing to share		✓		
	Indigenous knowledges are acquired in many different ways				✓
	Indigenous knowledges are still being learnt to pass on				✓
	Professional development allowed discussions in regard to Indigenous education		✓		
	Issues at the school are sorted differently to the way Indigenous people would do it / Teachers' behaviour towards Indigenous parents is different	✓		✓	
	Compromisation to Indigenous cultural identity	✓			
	Western curriculum teaching us to be Western	✓		✓	
	Move to between Western and Indigenous in regard to student welfare		✓		
	Carry Western knowledges		✓		
	Dealing with behaviour from a Western perspective / Discipline		✓	✓	
	Help students become familiar with the processes of Western system			✓	
	Teachers do not always understand Indigenous perspectives			✓	
	Attendance policy is from a Western perspective			✓	
	More professional development days with Indigenous perspective		✓		✓
	Western strategies dominate in schools				✓
Creating a safe	Strong relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff creates a safe space	✓	✓		
space	A lot of work required to achieve safe space	✓			
	Safe space is better than what it was 10 years ago	✓			
	Professional development created safe space		✓		
	Being relaxed and open creates a safe space		✓		
	Non-Indigenous teachers need to feel comfortable too		✓		
	Being able to talk truthfully creates a safe space		✓		
	More understanding is needed to create a safe space			✓	
	A safe space has been created for Indigenous staff and students			✓	
	Safe space is not created for students				✓
	Meetings held off site to create safe space for parents			✓	
Consequences of	Respect		<b>√</b>		
having safe space	Easier to work in the school		✓		
	Empowering		./		

Theme	Sub-theme	<b>Aunty Michelle</b>	Aunty Rowena	Jason	<b>Uncle Paul</b>
	Recognition of being wrong about Indigenous culture by non-Indigenous teachers		1		

Table 5.5
Two-Way Strong Data Map of Themes and Sub-Themes Across Cases

Travelling		Aunty Michelle	Aunty Rowena	Jason	<b>Uncle Paul</b>
1	Keeps her identity of who she is but she may act differently at school	✓	✓	✓	1
between two	Code switching is a necessity when working in Western structured systems	✓	✓		✓
worlds	Travel between two worlds regularly	✓		✓	
	Professional role in an institution	✓		✓	
	Compromise part of who you are to fit in the Western world	✓			
	Good at switching between two worlds	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Travelling between worlds – ensures our kids are being looked after	✓			
	Employed because good at switching roles	✓			
	Use Western strategies at school (speak at conferences, facilitate professional learning)	✓	✓		
	Discrimination for switching between two worlds	✓	✓	✓	
	Strength to be able to switch between two worlds	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Comfortable in both worlds and know culture		✓		
	Indigenous knowledges when talking to parents		✓	✓	
	Switches to Western at school		✓	✓	
	Too much Western perspective		✓		✓
	Can see from another perspective/different angle		✓		✓
	Learnt to travel from own parents			✓	
	Travel to make people feel comfortable			✓	
	Show students how to move between two worlds			✓	
	Happens naturally			✓	
	Usually talk to parents in Western way				✓
	Learning about indigenous knowledges strengthens Indigenous students' identity				✓
	Schools don't accommodate Indigenous students				✓
	Talk differently to Indigenous staff compared to non-Indigenous	✓	✓	✓	✓
Identity at	Beliefs are the same as they were before walking in the gate	✓	✓	✓	
school	Identity is strong even though travel between two worlds	✓		1	
	Aboriginal identity comes first		✓		
	Identity does not conflict at the school but has at other jobs		✓		
	Students feel proud in language classes				✓
Indigenous	Some Indigenous perspectives are better than none from non-Indigenous teachers	✓			
knowledges	Indigenous knowledges shared by Aunty	-	✓		
at school	When it is redistributed it is slightly different		•	1	

Theme	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Aunty Michelle</b>	Aunty Rowena	Jason	Uncle Paul
	Slowly becoming more prevalent in schools			✓	_
	More work needs to be done on Indigenous strategies				✓

Table 5.6
Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing Data Map Across Cases

Theme	<b>Sub-theme</b>	<b>Aunty Michelle</b>	Aunty Rowena	Jason	Uncle Paul
Ways of knowing, being	Connection to Country				
and doing	Belief systems	✓		✓	✓
	Connection to colours and flags	✓			
	Paving Indigenous ways in school	✓	✓		
	Sharing ways of knowing, being and doing		✓		
	Aboriginal ways		✓		
	Influenced by experiences	✓	✓	✓	
	Differences in ways		✓		
	Not conscious of changing behaviour at schools		✓		
	Protocols for Country				
	Ways we (Aboriginal people) do things		✓		
	Family	✓	✓	✓	✓
	Students and being removed from Indigenous knowledge			✓	✓
Sticking together	Look after each other (Aboriginal students and staff)	✓			
	Relationships	✓			
Western views do not	Non-Indigenous people do not understand (Aboriginal people)	✓			✓
understand Indigenous ways	Non-Indigenous people makes us complicated		✓		
Not learning ways of	Aboriginal people not learning culture		<b>√</b>		
knowing, being and doing	Teaching students culture as Aboriginal students are missing out		✓		

# 5.6 CHAPTER REVIEW

This chapter presented data from yarning sessions with four AEOs on how they understand their role as educators. The case studies presented in this chapter form the data journey of AEOs' stories from the beginning of their role as AEOs to the present. Chapter 6 discusses these analyses in light of the research literature and context in the area of AEOs understanding their role as educators and the challenges they encounter in this role.

# **Chapter 6: Discussion**

This chapter presents a discussion and synthesis of the findings presented in Chapter 5 with reference to the literature. The purpose of this study was to explore how AEOs understand their role as educators. Data were collected through yarning sessions and artwork with each AEO in their location of choice. The focus of the data collection was to gather insights into the way they understood their role as an AEO and the challenges they encountered in this role. Chapter 5 also explored each AEO's identity as an educator and the influence this had on their role. The conceptual framework that emerged from a synthesis of the literature (see Figure 3.4) presented four major themes from an Indigenous perspective pertaining to how AEOs saw themselves as Indigenous educators. These were: Country; Twoway strong; Cultural interface; and Ways of knowing, being and doing. It was from these themes the research question and sub-questions emerged:

- What do AEOs understand to be their role as educators?
  - O What challenges do AEOs encounter in their role as educators?
  - Where does identity as an educator configure into AEOs' understanding of their role?

These themes were also used to provide further insights into the findings of the case studies presented in Chapter 5. In this chapter, findings that emerged are examined and reviewed in the light of the literature and the conceptual framework. The chapter is presented in three sections. The first section discusses AEOs' understanding of their role in the school context and the challenges they face. The second section, AEOs' identity as educators, is organised under the four themes: Country, Two-way strong, Cultural interface, and Ways of knowing, being and doing, and discusses how AEOs perceive these influence them as Indigenous educators. The chapter concludes with revisiting the Australian Aboriginal educator's identity framework (see Figure 3.4), and reconceptualising it in light of the discussion of these findings (see Figure 6.4). Figure 6.1 presents an overview of Chapter 6.

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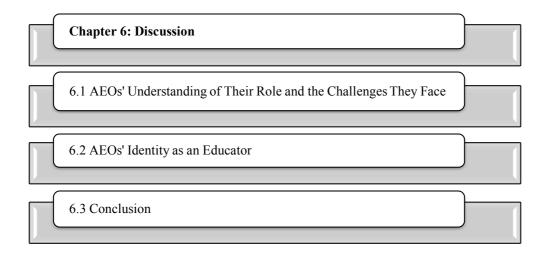


Figure 6.1. Overview of Chapter 6.

# 6.1 AEOS' UNDERSTANDING OF THEIR ROLE AND THE CHALLENGES THEY FACE

Policies in schools are put in place to help guide the actions of all involved in the school. Policies relate to the day-to-day administration of schools. These policies include day-to-day running procedures, how to comply with legislation, and codes of conduct requirements (NSW Industrial Relations, 2013). Policies highlight broad guidelines that when implemented are purported to put in place actions that achieve their purpose.

In past years, there have been many policies that did not support Indigenous people in Australia (e.g., the Aborigines Protection Act [NSW Government, 1909] and White Australia policy (1951). The White Australia policy expected all Aboriginal people assimilate and live in the same ways as non-Indigenous Australians. This White Australia policy was not just for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to follow it was for all migrants from other cultures. However, policies have now been developed to support Indigenous people in education contexts as well as in wider society. The first Aboriginal education policy introduced in NSW was the Aboriginal Education Policy (AEP) in 1982 (NSW Department of School Education, 1982). This policy was developed as a result of activism for Indigenous rights in the 1960s and 1970s. Since this first AEP in NSW was established, it has undergone several amendments and name changes (see section 2.3). These policies have helped to shape the way Aboriginal education is looked at in NSW schools.

This section consists of six subsections:

- 6.1.1 Influence of policies and curriculum documents;
- 6.1.2 Formulation of the role;
- 6.1.3 Building relationships in the school community;

- 6.1.4 Inclusion of student well-being;
- 6.1.5 Supporting student learning; and
- 6.1.6 Concluding comments

# 6.1.1 Influence of policies and curriculum documents

Findings from past research have reported that the role of AEOs is diverse (Warren et al., 2010; Winkler, 2006), and often not focused in the classroom. However, this new study deepens our understanding of this diversity. In this present study, school executive teams appeared to determine the tasks AEOs undertake. The formulation of these tasks is based on addressing the diverse needs of the school community (see Appendix F, 1–8; Appendix G, 1–4; Appendix H, 2–7), and is grounded in national, state, and employing authority policies. In this study, these tasks included:

- providing an Indigenous perspective in the classroom (sections 5.1.4, 5.3.4 and 5.4.4);
- working with students in the classroom (section 5.3.2);
- working in small groups outside of the classroom (sections 5.2.4 and 5.3.2);
- co-teaching Indigenous studies or languages (sections 5.2.3 and 5.4.3);
- facilitating programs (e.g., Bro's Speak, Rock and Water; section 5.3.2);
- setting up breakfast clubs (section 5.1.4); and
- giving advice to executive teams with regard to cultural protocols (section 5.1.4).

Contrary to Winkler's (2006) findings, the current role that these AEOs are fulfilling appears to be much more classroom focused as opposed to undertaking sundry tasks outside of the classroom (e.g., photocopying). This present study demonstrates that the AEOs' role is heavily influenced by policies (national, state and employing authority) schools adopt and the extent to which school administration teams execute the policies, as discussed in this section.

This is at odds with findings from past research (e.g., Nakata, 1995; Warren & Quine, 2013) where it has been evidenced that the policies have had little influence on the role that AEOs undertake within the education context. An underlying goal of many past policies was to include more Indigenous people in schools (e.g., the NATSIEP; DET, 1989) with an aim of integrating cultural knowledge into school processes. While more Indigenous people were employed at schools, rarely were AEOs' roles in line with the job description (see Figure 2.2). Schools often chose to be selective about which parts of the policy they implemented, or ignored, particularly with regard to integrating cultural knowledge into the curriculum (Funnell, 2012; NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004). In the past, this has led to AEOs being

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confused about their role (D. Rigney et al., 1998), and the aims of these policies were not being achieved.

In the schools in this new study, the implementation of the AEP (NSW DET, 2008) and its objectives are influencing school administration and their approach to the role of the AEO. Briefly, this policy states that all NSW schools will "incorporate the cultural contexts, values and practices of local Aboriginal communities into the mainstream delivery of education and training" (NSW DET, 2008, objective 1.5.5). In the schools in this new study, the implementation of the AEP (NSW DET, 2008) has resulted in AEOs having to educate non-Indigenous staff on Indigenous cultural values and practices (see Appendix F, 17). As indicated by the findings of this research, schools that are closely following this policy objective have their AEOs implementing cultural values and practices through professional development for all staff members. This allows these staff to transfer this learnt knowledge to their students (see Appendix G, 31). The policy also states that Aboriginal education and training is core business for all staff. It seems that these schools have certainly paid serious attention to this policy's aims. This is evidenced in this study as schools are using AEOs in diverse ways to assist staff to (a) facilitate and implement programs with an Indigenous perspective, (b) work in partnerships with teachers to embed Indigenous perspectives into lessons, and (c) provide culturally relevant resources for teachers.

School executive teams have changed their philosophical stance in the way they look at Indigenous education. All the schools in this study have participated in programs such as the Stronger Smarter or What Works program (see Appendix F, 15; Appendix G, 17) to change their whole school philosophical stance. The Stronger Smarter program encourages schools to take on the philosophical stance that holding high expectations, building relationships and being two-way strong helps to improve working conditions and learning conditions for Indigenous staff and students (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2014). This approach has enabled teachers and students to understand and respect the perspectives of other people and recognise that they are learning about other cultures and knowledge systems (Harris, 1994; Ober, 2009; C. Sarra, 2005). In turn, it has enabled the schools to begin to build relationships that are based on having high expectations between both the staff and the students and as a result Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' confidence improves (C. Sarra, 2011).

As a consequence of the amended AEP (NSW DET, 2008) and schools' participation in the aforementioned programs (e.g., Stronger Smarter, 2014; What Works, 2012), the role of AEOs in this study entails undertaking educational tasks and ensuring the well-being of Indigenous students. The findings of this study provide evidence that there has been a shift

from AEOs completing sundry tasks (Winkler, 2006) in schools to that of having more responsibility in line with their role description. This is clearly demonstrated by comparing the roles performed by Aunty Michelle and Uncle Paul when they were first employed as AEOs with the roles they currently undertake. It is conjectured that these sundry tasks could have been initially given to them because executive members of staff and teachers in schools had low expectations of the role of the AEO (MacGill, 2008; Warren et al., 2010; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). As Aunty Michelle's and Uncle Paul's roles changed, they were given responsibilities that aligned with their own knowledge and professional status (see Appendix F, 9; Appendix I, 9). Examples of the changes in tasks to those they initially undertook include working as language teachers (Appendix I, 7), assisting students to read and write (Appendix I, 8), managing student behaviour (Appendix F, 14), and collaborating with the executive team at their school (Appendix F, 10). However, this change evolved slowly and appears to be due to transformations in the schools' philosophical stance with respect to Indigenous culture (see Appendix F, 16; Appendix G, 17). It should also be noted that AEOs from this study who were employed within the last four years (Jason and Aunty Rowena) were not asked to complete sundry tasks when they started in their role (see Appendix G, 1– 18; Appendix H, 1–13). Thus, this change in roles almost seems to be systemic in the context in which this research was conducted.

The changes in the philosophical stance, to some extent in these schools, were driven by the AEOs themselves. Aunty Michelle had to fight to have Indigenous knowledges acknowledged in schools (see Appendix F, 17), and fight to have staff undergo cultural training (see Appendix F, 17). Once the school took on board cultural training, the staff gained a better understanding of Indigenous knowledges and education (see Appendix G, 35) (White et al., 2009). AEOs facilitated professional development days to help teachers to understand that Indigenous education needs to come from a whole school approach (C. Sarra, 2011). This in turn made staff acknowledge how important the AEO's role was, and how useful it was to the education of Indigenous students (see Appendix F, 10, G-10). Thus, simply paying lip service to these policies is not enough. For their implementation to occur it is conjectured that some form of advocacy has to happen. This can be instigated at the grass roots by the AEOs themselves or by them working alongside the Principal.

AEOs also committed themselves to building Aboriginal education teams in their schools with the assistance of other staff members. When building these teams, AEOs slowly moved away from the influence of Western knowledge as a basis for conducting Aboriginal team meetings to using the influence of Indigenous knowledge (see Appendix F, 10;

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Appendix H, 29). For example, a move away from the influence of Western knowledge resulted in a change from using formal meeting structures to instigating the use of yarning circles as a way of conducting meetings (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Davis & Grose, 2008). A yarning circle is an informal conversation that is discussed in a relaxed seated circle (Bessarab & Ng'andu, 2010; Walker, Fredericks, & Anderson, 2012). It is important for AEOs and teachers to communicate well so they can work together as a team to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. Good communication can also give teachers a better understanding of the diversity of Aboriginal cultures (S. Matthews et al., 2003).

Additionally, some AEOs in this study organised Aboriginal education team meetings outside of the school grounds. This helped to guarantee Indigenous parents felt comfortable attending these meetings. Indigenous parents often feel intimidated when entering school grounds because of how they were treated when they were at school (S. Matthews et al., 2003). These feelings are often the result of past institutional racism, and schools they attended having no appreciation for Indigenous culture (de Plevitz, 2007). Since these Aboriginal education team meetings have been held outside of the school grounds more Indigenous parents have become involved in Indigenous education at the school (see Appendix H-12). In addition, these parents are now organising and participating in NAIDOC day at the school. It is conjectured that once these parents are involved in school activities they will talk to other parents, and these parents will also become involved in school activities.

As the Principals in this study led and followed through on policies being implemented in the school, they made AEOs a part of the executive team. This reflects a stance that from the highest level in the school Indigenous education is important (Ainsworth & McCrae, 2006). AEOs who are part of the executive team attended meetings with Principals, Deputy Principals, and Head Teachers, and had input into educational decisions made in the school (see Appendix F, 10). These AEOs also had input into overall school action plans. This is a lot different as compared to when AEOs started in their roles in schools in the mid 1970s. In the past, some schools did not even have an Aboriginal education team, even though they had high Indigenous student cohorts. In addition, if schools did have AEOs employed they were commonly given menial tasks (Winkler, 2006). Being on the executive team allows AEOs to represent and voice Indigenous education issues (Fitzgerald, 2003).

Finally, curriculum that includes a focus on embedding Indigenous perspectives in the classroom is also influencing the role of AEOs in schools (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Williamson & Dalal, 2007). The results of this present study suggest that AEOs are currently

being used in their schools to provide input into how to best embed Indigenous perspectives into school curriculum (see Appendix F, 34 & Appendix H, 7). This is a relatively new focus for AEOs in response to the Australian National Curriculum requirement to embed Indigenous perspectives into all key learning areas (e.g., English, mathematics, history, science; ACARA, 2015; Lowe & Yunkaporta, 2013). Prior to this initiative, these AEOs did not have a voice in the school with respect to embedding Indigenous perspectives in the classroom (see Appendix F, 4). Since the time when Indigenous perspectives began to be embedded in the curriculum, AEOs have negotiated the tasks they complete, with regard to these perspectives, with the Principal and teachers (see Appendix F, 10; Appendix G, 18 & I - 35). Thus, they have made a greater contribution into a whole school approach with regard to Indigenous education.

Hence, in contrast to the past, current policies articulated by the government are now influencing the role of AEOs in schools. The reason for this occurring seems to lie in the present accountability procedures put in place by school employing authorities (Herbert, 2012). There are now policies on how to put aims and objectives into practice (NSW DET, 2009), and if these practices are not followed there are consequences for staff members (NSW Department of Education, 2015). For example, all teachers must adhere to professional responsibilities and if they are not followed appropriate action will be taken by the NSW Department of Education, which could include dismissal. Thus, all staff have guidelines and professional responsibilities they have to keep track of. The professional responsibilities that teachers have to account for are the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], n.d.). There are mandatory standards that teachers now have to meet when they are at the graduate and proficient stages of their careers (AITSL, n.d.). A standard that includes Indigenous perspectives is Standard 2.4 Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (AITSL, n.d.).

In summary, the diversity of the AEO role seems to be related to structures and policies that each school has adopted. The NSW Department of Education has developed an AEP that NSW state schools follow (NSW DET, 2008). A further document, the *Aboriginal Education and Training Policy: Turning Policy into Action* (NSW Department of Education and Communities, n.d.) was written with the purpose of supporting the implementation of the AEP across NSW Department of Education schools. The policy has three elements that all staff are required to focus on in its implementation. These three elements are relationships, engagement and ongoing learning (NSW DET, 2008). It is evident that the schools in this

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study have been implementing the three elements from this policy and focusing particularly on relationships with AEOs.

## **6.1.2** Formulation of the role

Policies have also influenced the formulation of the role that AEOs undertake. Recent studies have established that in the past there were no standard procedures as to who took on the responsibility for the formulation of an AEO's role, and Principals, Deputy Principals and teachers all played a part in its formulation (Gower et al., 2011). However, more often than not, the construction of AEOs' roles was predominantly decided by Principals (NSW Department of Education, 2015). AEOs were frequently confused about what their role was (P. Buckskin et al., 1994) as Principals and teachers often had competing expectations with respect to what was required.

In this present study some AEOs were often confused about their role when they first started in the position, and had to consult with the Principal to define what they were meant to be doing and how they were meant to do it (see Appendix H, 2; Appendix I, 1). This confusion seemed to emerge from lack of direction. When the AEOs started in their roles, in alignment with past findings, Principals and teachers directed and instructed these AEOs in what tasks they should complete (e.g., Warren et al., 2004). However, as some of the AEOs became more experienced in their role, they were able to have input into what they did and how to do it (see Appendix F, 12; Appendix G, 1; Appendix I, 16). In addition, as Principals and teachers became more familiar with policies and Indigenous knowledges, AEOs started to have greater flexibility in establishing how their role was fulfilled. As evidenced in this new study, AEOs were able to suggest their ideas as to what they should be doing in their role and discuss this with their Principal (see Appendix F, 18; Appendix G, 18; Appendix H, 1). Presently, these Principals are usually on board with what these AEOs suggest, as they know that these AEOs are working closely with the teachers and community to establish what is needed for their Indigenous students.

#### 6.1.3 Building relationships in the school community

The AEOs in the current study also expressed that building strong working relationships with all members of the school and Indigenous communities was the foundation for their success. Complementary to Gower et al.'s (2011) study where teachers believed that AEOs and teachers need to have strong working relationships, the AEOs in this study also agreed that working relationships with teachers need to be strong. Teachers and AEOs having strong working relationships contributes directly to addressing the needs of the students. AEOs in

this study also indicated that, in order for them to be successful in their role and to achieve their outcomes, AEOs needed to build strong relationships with the community. Strong ties to the community allow AEOs to liaise between the school and the community (P. Buckskin, 2015; MacGill, 2008; C. Sarra, 2006). AEOs also act as a link for the teacher to access the community and interpret what students are saying. AEOs linking teachers to community members ensures that all communication aligns with Indigenous protocols so that teachers are talking and consulting with the right people.

In building these relationships with communities, one of the problems AEOs have faced in the past has been in relation to their role in student behaviour management (MacGill, 2008; Winkler, 2006). This role creates tensions between families and AEOs, and the student behaviour management role takes time away from the classroom (see Appendix, I, 3) (MacGill, 2008). This aligns with the results in this study, which demonstrate that at times AEOs have been heavily involved in behaviour management of Indigenous students, and this has included home visits to see parents about student behaviour (see Appendix F, 8; Appendix G, 3; Appendix H, 6; Appendix I, 6). This has unfairly positioned these AEOs and has contributed to the strained relationships between community and school (MacGill, 2008). While policies state that AEOs are to liaise between school and community, it needs to be acknowledged that this particular task of informing parents of behavioural problems at school can have negative implications for the relationship between the parent (or family members) and the AEO (see Appendix F, 8; Appendix H, 6). As a result, this impacts on the AEOs' capability to form effective school–community partnerships (P. Buckskin, 2015; C. Sarra, 2011), and can in turn negatively impact on the whole school community.

The working relationship between AEOs and teachers is an important aspect of an AEO's role. In the past, relationships between AEOs and teachers have been problematic (Warren et al., 2004), and teachers have often treated them unjustly (C. Sarra, 2011; Warren et al., 2004). When AEOs in this study started at their schools their relationship experiences aligned with the findings of this literature. AEOs were made to feel excluded and could sense tensions between themselves and teachers (see Appendix I, 17). Teachers would choose when they would and would not talk to AEOs. This made AEOs feel uncomfortable in their workplace. AEOs were often not asked their opinion about supporting Indigenous students, and if they suggested any strategies to their teachers these teachers would come up with excuses as to why they were not adopting these strategies (see Appendix I, 14). However, over time the AEO–teacher relationships have shifted. While AEOs now felt that they were being treated more justly, at times they still felt uncomfortable. Presently these AEOs are

involved in decision-making at a whole school level and classroom level. They are invited into classrooms to give an Indigenous perspective and liaise with teachers about students' well-being and achievement. By having AEOs and teachers working together it is conjectured that working relationships/partnerships have been strengthened.

There appear to be many factors that have assisted to change the relationships between these AEOs and their teachers. First, present policies require teachers to focus on Indigenous perspectives in their teaching so teachers have worked with AEOs on how to implement these perspectives into their classrooms (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Riley & Genner, 2011). This has resulted in AEOs and teachers developing stronger working relationships, as they had to work closely to implement Indigenous perspectives in the classroom (see Appendix F, 17; G, 36 & 37). Second, Principals and staff participated in training that helped change the philosophical stance of the school (e.g., Stronger Smarter). This resulted in an integration of an Indigenous perspective into a whole school approach. Third, Indigenous staff facilitated professional development for teachers. This opened up discussions around Indigenous education. These discussions enabled Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff to build a mutual respect for each other (see Appendix G, 36), and allowed them to get to know each other better. This helped non-Indigenous and Indigenous staff members to form more positive relationships with each other.

In summary, the AEOs credited the success they have had in their schools to the strong working relationships they have developed with staff members in the school and Indigenous communities. However, a strain can occur in community relationships if AEOs are continually reporting negative student behaviour to families as this can cause tension between AEOs and families (MacGill, 2008; Winkler, 2006). Over time the AEO–teacher relationships shifted to stronger working relationships. As relationships became stronger AEOs felt they were being treated better in the school context. However, at times the AEOs did still feel uncomfortable with some of their relationships with teachers. There have been many factors that contributed to the strengthening of working relationships between AEOs and non-Indigenous teachers, including policies, training, and professional development.

### 6.1.4 Inclusion of student well-being

Attending to, and making a priority of, Indigenous students' well-being was central to this study, and adds to past research, which has rarely acknowledged this dimension as part of the AEO's role. Well-being in broad terms can be described as how you feel about yourself and your life (Andrews & Withey, 2012). Potential reasons for this gap in the literature are:

(a) the majority of research pertaining to this area has been undertaken by non-Indigenous

researchers (e.g., Campbell & Gregor, 2004; Cooper, Baturo, & Warren, 2005; Funnell, 2012; MacGill, 2008); and (b) the participants from whom the data were collected in past studies have predominantly been non-Indigenous teachers (Warren et al., 2004). The AEOs in the present study believe that attending to Indigenous students' well-being is important as they are teaching the "whole child at school" (see Appendix F, 12; Appendix G, 11; Appendix H, 8; Appendix I, 11 & 12). Thus, for AEOs this has become a pivotal component of their role. They endeavour to ensure that Indigenous students feel happy and confident with themselves and their experiences while they are at school (see Appendix G, 11).

The notion of well-being to these AEOs is that students are well prepared to learn cognitively, emotionally, socially and physically in the school context. For these AEOs, cognitive well-being pertains to the strategies and processes that they have put in place to ensure students reach their academic goals (e.g., liaising with teachers to help students address particular problems they are experiencing with their learning and/or their assessment tasks, helping individual students with specific identified learning needs; see Appendix G, 6). These AEOs indicated emotional well-being entailed talking to Indigenous students when they are distressed, trying to make school life enjoyable, and building up their confidence and selfrespect (see Appendix H, 8; Appendix I, 11). Social well-being was signified as having good relationships with peers and school staff, respect for oneself and making Indigenous students proud of who they are (see Appendix G, 12; Appendix I, 27). Physical well-being was regarded as giving Indigenous students food when they have forgotten to bring it and making sure they have the right classroom equipment (see Appendix I, 12). These dimensions align with four dimensions of the UNICEF Report Card 7 – dimensions of child well-being (UNICEF, 2007), namely, Health and safety, Educational well-being, Family and peer relationships, and Material well-being. Each AEO's focus on well-being differed from school to school, but there was acknowledgement that these dimensions were related constructs.

In addition to these dimensions, AEOs stressed the importance of cultural identity to students' well-being, and the relationship between well-being and student learning. The AEOs' view of Indigenous student well-being aligns with P. Buckskin's (2012) belief that when Indigenous students are taught as "whole" it gives them a sense of self and personal value. If Indigenous students feel like they are cared for, and AEOs have interest in their cognitive, social, emotional and physical well-being, then this promotes students' self-esteem and self-confidence. If this is the case, Aboriginal students are more likely to become effective learners (P. Buckskin, 2015).

AEOs from this study reflected the notion that supporting strong cultural identity and pride amongst students is fundamental to achieving high expectations (see Appendix G, 12). Both strong cultural identity and high cognitive expectations help to shape the values and attitudes of Indigenous students (Ball, 2004). These findings align with the views of Indigenous education advocate Chris Sarra (2011). He acknowledges the importance of Indigenous students' well-being through his Stronger Smarter program. Sarra (2011) believes that building a strong sense of cultural identity and pride in Indigenous students contributes to their well-being. When you feel strong in yourself you feel good about yourself (Greenberger & Padesky, 2015). Furthermore, Sarra's (2011) philosophy incorporates high expectations for Indigenous students because students' achievements contribute positively to their well-being in regard to their confidence and self-esteem. In line with Sarra's (2011) Stronger Smarter philosophy, these AEOs are setting up their students to be successful and thrive throughout their schooling by building their sense of identity. It is believed that focusing on students' well-being sets students up for future success and having pride in what they achieve (Malin & Maidment, 2003; Purdie et al., 2010; Sarra, 2011).

Well-being of Indigenous students in the school context emerged strongly in the data. There is a paucity of literature with regard to AEOs looking after Indigenous students' well-being in the Australian school context even though it is part of the Closing the Gap initiative (COAG, 2008; MacGill & Blanch, 2013). AEOs support Indigenous students to succeed both socially and academically through making them feel as though they belong in the school community. MacGill and Blanch (2013) argued that AEOs in schools provide a caring paradigm for Indigenous students at school; however, the lack of acknowledgement for their efforts leads to disempowerment and lack of agency for AEOs to care for Indigenous student well-being. In contrast, in this study it is conjectured that these AEOs felt empowered when they were having so much input into the well-being and care of Indigenous students.

# **6.1.5** Supporting student learning

An AEO's role encompasses supporting Indigenous student learning. AEOs in this study provided further insights into how this occurs in their schools. Past studies have shown that Indigenous students learn best when they have good relationships with their teachers (Fanshawe, 1976; Harslett et al., 1999; Malin, 1994; St. Denis, 2010). In this study, AEOs concurred with these past findings but added that the relationship they themselves have with the students is also important. From these AEOs' perspective, if AEOs and Indigenous student relationships are strong then they can help build relationships between the teacher and

Indigenous students too. AEOs can also inform the teacher of any issues students may be having if they have strong relationships with students.

The AEOs also suggested that it is imperative for students to have meaningful, practical and hands-on learning tasks (P. Buckskin, 2012; St. Denis, 2010; Yunkaporta, 2009a). The AEOs shared that, before Indigenous students start their learning task, students need to be given an explanation as to what they are doing and why they are doing it (St. Denis, 2010). These learning tasks also need to be broken down so that Indigenous students can relate and make links to prior learning and the context in which they live (C. Matthews et al., 2005). As Aunty Rowena described Indigenous students engage in lessons if the lessons are meaningful and worthwhile (St. Denis, 2010). As a result of these processes, brought to light by the AEOs, teachers at their schools are now starting to understand how Indigenous students learn, and are trying to cater for their needs. Despite these positive changes, however, there is still a long way to go (see Appendix F, 40; Appendix I, 35).

In contrast to past research where AEOs have been given little recognition for the role they play in Indigenous student learning (MaGill, 2008), the AEOs in this study are seen as agents in the learning process. The AEOs played a significant role in Indigenous students' learning by using a three-way approach in supporting student learning. The three-way approach involves AEOs: (a) talking to the community about student learning and identifying any issues students are facing (see Appendix F, 13 & G, 8); (b) liaising with the teachers to help them address the perceived difficulties students are having; and (c) assisting teachers to overcome student difficulties (see Appendix G, 10). Thus, student learning has become a whole school and community approach. AEOs are liaising between both teachers and communities on how teachers can best support student learning (see Appendix H, 12). This approach allows AEOs to be effective and powerful agents of knowledge transformation involving Indigenous education, contradicting what past research has suggested in regard to AEOs (MacGill, 2008; Warren et al., 2004; Winkler, 2006). Furthermore, the AEOs are no longer trying to solve problems in isolation but are now working with teachers, parents/caregivers, and students as a team to best support Indigenous students at school.

Aboriginal students informed the AEOs about how they could best be supported. There were many discussions with regard to how AEOs could best help Aboriginal students learn at school (see Appendix G, 5–7). How else better to provide support than by asking the students themselves where they need help (Groves & Welsh, 2010). AEOs in this study communicated with students in their breaks and asked them what areas they needed help with. They also discussed with them any personal issues that arose (see Appendix G, 5). The AEOs tended to

give up their breaks to find out what was happening with their students at school. This discussion occurred in an informal setting to make Indigenous students feel comfortable and not under pressure to disclose any problems they may have been having (see Appendix G, 4).

#### **6.1.6 Concluding comments**

Relationships between these AEOs and their teachers have strengthened and become more equal with regard to Indigenous education. In the past, relationships between AEOs and teachers have been problematic (Warren et al., 2004). However, this study suggests that these relationships are improving, with AEOs having more of a voice that is now being heard, with respect to Indigenous education. It is conjectured that the introduction and implementation of policies support this occurring. These current policies (e.g., the NSW AEP, NSW DET, 2008) are discussed from an Indigenous and a non-Indigenous perspective, and are implemented as a whole school approach. Processes have been put in place at both the Education Department level and whole school level to ensure that these policies are being implemented. Professional development in relation to Indigenous education occurs, and relationships are being built between teachers and AEOs. Principals, teachers and AEOs are now working as a team. These relationships require culturally appropriate professional development, as after this professional development occurred at these schools non-Indigenous staff seemed to have begun to understand some of the cultural background of Indigenous people and the racial issues that many Indigenous people face (see Appendix F, 36). With this new knowledge, non-Indigenous staff members have openly started talking to AEOs to find out more information with regard to how to support the teaching and learning in their classrooms. While the situation has improved dramatically compared to what it was in the past, it is still not where it should be. As evidenced by the findings of this research, these changes take time to occur. Based on the findings in this study, a theoretical model for change was developed. Figure 6.2 presents a theoretical model of the elements (e.g., Policy, Intervention and School Aims) and the relationships between these elements that support effective change in Indigenous education in schools.

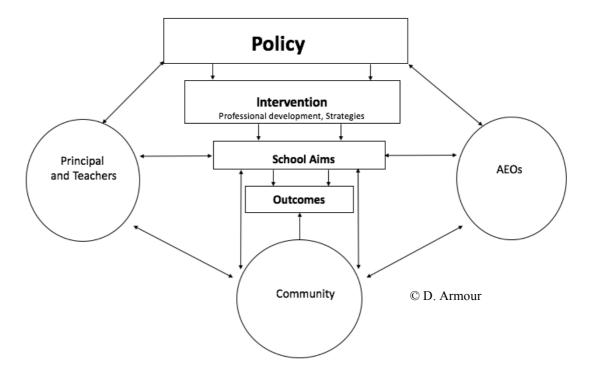


Figure 6.2. Theoretical model for supporting effective change in Indigenous education in schools.

Supporting and implementing effective change in Indigenous education in schools requires the following elements.

#### Policies:

- policies developed at the state and federal departmental level that inform schools on Aboriginal education;
- policies implemented at department level and distributed through to schools;
- school executive teams distributing and implementing policies at school level; and
- school executive teams being held accountable if policies are not put into practice.

#### Strategies:

- executive teams organising intervention to implement strategies and professional development focusing on Indigenous education;
- an outside source such as Stronger Smarter (http://strongersmarter.com.au) or What Works (http://www.whatworks.edu.au) providing school staff with strategies and ideas to help them prioritise areas from the policies;
- professional development days conducted to help school personnel to develop aims for Indigenous education;
- teachers, AEOs and the community collaboratively working together as Indigenous education becomes more of a priority in schools; and

 principals, teachers, AEOs and the community being consulted to ensure the aims are appropriate for Indigenous students, meet policy guidelines and are linked to the curriculum.

#### Outcomes:

- through consultation with the community and AEOs, Indigenous perspectives are implemented in the classroom by teachers;
- principals and teachers work in partnerships with AEOs and the community to help achieve the school aims;
- students are central to the school aims; and
- teachers implement aims and guidelines in the classroom.

#### 6.2 AEOS' IDENTITY AS EDUCATORS

Cardinal's (2014) theoretical framework based on the shaping of one's identity has four threads. These threads were purported to underpin the development of the participants' identity in her study. The four threads are in Cardinal's study are: multiplicity of early landscapes, world travelling, living in liminality and embodied knowledge, (see Figure 3.3). The threads are interrelated and link to each other. This study reconceptualised Cardinal's theoretical framework from an Australian Aboriginal perspective (the Australian Aboriginal educator's identity conceptual framework – see Figure 3.4). This framework was used to discuss the findings of how AEOs perceive their identity as an educator in the school context. The four threads of the Australian Aboriginal educator's identity conceptual framework are: Country, Two way strong, Cultural interface, and Ways of knowing, being and doing. Hence, this section is presented under the following five subsections:

- 6.2.1 Identity and Country;
- 6.2.2 Identity and Two-way strong;
- 6.2.3 Identity and Cultural interface;
- 6.2.4 Identity and Ways of knowing, being and doing; and
- 6.2.5 Concluding comments.

#### **6.2.1 Identity and Country**

In traditional times, prior to invasion, Aboriginal people remained strictly within their tribal boundaries, seeking permission if they wished to traverse, hunt, trade or socialise in other groups' traditional areas. In addition, Aboriginal people were required to observe strict

protocols whilst present in someone else's Country, with heavy penalties for transgressions. Today, Aboriginal people are much more mobile and often live and work away from their community of origin. This is expressed as being off Country. Those living and working on land that belongs to their traditional ancestors are said to be on Country.

This study is one of the first to consider the experiences of AEOs working on and off Country in the Australian school context. The concept of on and off Country is one known and understood by most Aboriginal people, but is underrepresented in the literature. Little has been written about this issue and how it impacts on individuals, particularly Aboriginal people who are working on/off Country with other Aboriginal people, or giving an Indigenous perspective to educational agendas while working on/off Country (Jackson-Barrett, Price, Stomski, & Walker, 2015; Louis, 2007). The AEOs in this study were living and working both on Country (Aunty Rowena and Jason), and off Country (Aunty Michelle and Uncle Paul). Importantly, this study sheds light on what it means to be an Indigenous person working as an "outsider" in a school context and the protocols that they need to follow.

For most Aboriginal people, the relationship between their identity and the land remains strong and is embedded within their psyche. All AEOs in this study articulated that Country was an important part of their identity, their families and their spirituality even if they were not living on Country (Bird Rose, 1996; Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015). For the AEOs, Country has special meaning evoking deep emotions. Comments about making them feel at ease and relaxed on Country were made, and Aunty Michelle spoke of the times when she left Country and returned making her "spirit leap". It has long been believed by Aboriginal people that separation from land can be detrimental to their physical and spiritual health and well-being (Bird Rose, 1996). Thus, it is essential for AEOs who are off Country to regularly return to their Country in order to be culturally revitalised. This helps their connection to Country remain strong (Dudgeon et al., 2010). It does not mean that when you are off Country you forget your spirituality, family and identity (Bird Rose, 1996; Dudgeon et al., 2010). Great pride is taken in respect to Country and where Indigenous people are from.

# Working on and off Country

There is very little research about what working on and off Country entails. AEOs working off Country are seen as outsiders in a similar way to non-Aboriginal workers. This is because they do not have cultural links to the Country they are working on. While Aboriginal people living and working on someone else's Country have some shared cultural understandings and historical experiences with the traditional owner group on whose land they now are located, it cannot be assumed that they automatically know the cultural protocols

of that community and are accepted. Outsiders must find out and follow the cultural protocols for that particular community and develop appropriate relationships to enable them to work effectively (Foley, 2003; Martin, 2003; L. Smith, 1999).

Cultural protocols are put in place to protect the community from being exploited. These ensure that cultural business is not being shared without permission, which has commonly occurred in the past (Foley, 2003; Martin, 2003; L. Smith, 1999; Yunkaporta, 2009a). A number of organisations and government departments have developed useful resources for cultural protocols for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (e.g., *Working with Aboriginal Communities, A Guide to Community Consultation and Protocols*, Board of Studies NSW, 2008). However, these resources usually focus on non-Indigenous people working in Indigenous communities, and there is a paucity of research that shares what it means to be an outsider Indigenous person working in these communities.

Furthermore, the issue of on and off Country raises the related issue that at both the system and school level, non-Indigenous people often do not comprehend the diversity of Aboriginal communities. Education systems, Principals and teachers often make assumptions that because the AEO is Aboriginal, they should be able to work with the school community regardless of where their origins lie. In the recruitment process, the information about the connection to Country is often overlooked. This research has found that this is an important consideration in the employment of AEOs, and should also be a factor in transitioning and supporting them into the role. A number of writers have hinted at this process of following correct protocols of Indigenous people working off Country and becoming connected with the adopted community, but there are many important processes that need negotiating (Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015; Martin, 2003; L. Smith, 1999; Yunkaporta, 2009a).

# Local Indigenous knowledge in the school context

The results of this research suggest that working on Country is advantageous and working off Country is disadvantageous for AEOs as they implement and share local Indigenous knowledge in the school context. This aspect of their role has become more prevalent with the implementation of the Australian National Curriculum (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Jackson-Barrett, 2011; Riley & Genner, 2011; Yunkaporta, 2009a). The NSW Quality Teaching Model (NSW DET, 2003) identifies that teachers need to have evident in their teaching programs Aboriginal background knowledge, cultural knowledge, and connectedness. However, most non-Indigenous teachers do not know how to access cultural knowledge holders or traditional owners to provide such knowledge (Riley & Genner, 2011).

AEOs on Country are able to empower Indigenous students and teachers in schools about local Indigenous cultural values (Partington, 2002; Santoro et al., 2011). AEOs working on Country can provide this knowledge as they belong to the local area and are familiar with the stories, language and cultural practices. These AEOs have greater authority to implement cultural knowledge and values within the school context as compared to AEOs working off Country. This happens as AEOs working on Country have a thorough knowledge of the local culture (Bird Rose 1996; Dudgeon et al., 2010). These cultural values link to Martin's (2006) ways of being and include places, which are spiritual to local Aboriginal people, and why things are done in certain ways. In this study, AEOs working on Country ensured correct cultural values and knowledge were being shared within the school (see Appendix G, 12). Furthermore, teachers were able to go to these AEOs and get an immediate answer about local Indigenous values and knowledge. These AEOs also had close connections to Elders, who can bring authenticity and wisdom to the school environment. In fact, Aunty Rowena was not only working on Country but also was a traditional owner. This was to her advantage as she already had an established footing in the community.

However, AEOs working on Country can still have initial concerns when starting in the school community. Even though they are classified as insiders, sometimes there are high expectations placed on them in their role as AEOs by the Aboriginal community (Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015; Martin, 2008; Yunkaporta, 2009a). The assumption that working on Country is easier than working off Country is not always true (Martin, 2003; Warren et al., 2010). This is evidenced by Jason who did not grow up on Country but in a town close by. He was nervous about coming back to work with his people as he was worried he may not be accepted back into the community (see Appendix H, 44). The expectation that relationships would be strong and AEOs can easily slot into place can be daunting. Indigenous people want to be accepted by their community so that they can have strong relationships and complete their role at a high standard. Not having contact with community for a long time can be hard for AEOs coming back to work on Country. However, in the case of Jason the local community did accept him as he came back onto Country, but this acceptance cannot be assumed to be always automatic.

With respect to outsider AEOs, in their role they can share and incorporate basic local cultural knowledge into the classroom (Horstman & Wightman, 2001). However, if outsider AEOs are to share local knowledge (e.g., dances and stories), they do need to first gain permission from the community, especially Elders (Martin, 2006; Yunkaporta, 2009a). This does not mean that AEOs who are working off Country are not strong in their own cultural

values and knowledges. Rather, they do not have the same authority as AEOs working on Country to implement local cultural values and knowledges in their schools. AEOs working off Country can only share local cultural values and knowledges with teachers and students in schools once they have been given permission.

# Working with the community

Relationships with the community are an important part of an AEO's role. AEOs working on Country generally have strong prior relationships with the community before they start in their role. This is true of those who have been born and raised in the community, and their families are known (MacGill, 2008; C. Sarra, 2011). In fact, an AEO working on Country is often given respect because of their family status within the community. They also have an insight into community dynamics. However, this can also be problematic, as too much can be known about the AEO, community families and their challenges. AEOs can often be caught up in community issues, and this can impact on their role within the classroom and outside the classroom as they liaise with the community. While this does not necessarily affect their relationships with Indigenous students, relationships with parents can become strained if correct protocols are not followed (MacGill, 2008; Martin, 2008; Yunkaporta, 2009a).

Furthermore, some communities can challenge AEOs on Country to do things in certain ways. As evidenced by Aunty Rowena, being a traditional owner and working on Country can be extremely demanding and conflicting. This is because traditional owners need the approval of their Elders in relation to what they can do on their Country (Martin, 2008). Additionally, AEOs working on Country generally hold authority in the community and are involved in many different committees outside of school, such as native title, housing, welfare and community development (C. Matthews et al., 2005; C. Sarra, 2003). Tensions arising within these committees can impact on what happens in the classroom and the AEOs' engagement with parents.

While AEOs working off Country can find working within the community initially challenging, in the long term working off Country can be advantageous for them as they do not tend to become heavily involved in (or knowledgeable about) local community issues. However, it takes time for AEOs off Country to develop strong working relationships with Indigenous community members if they have not previously lived and worked in the area. With time and effort, the AEO can develop strong community relationships (see Appendix F, 38). This study found that after a period of time, as trust was built between AEOs working off Country and the community, there was less questioning and more respect given to them,

especially if all protocols had been followed. AEOs in this study working off Country demonstrated a willingness to go out of their way to ensure they built strong relationships and tried to have an amicable view on challenges in the community (see Appendix I, 18). The results of this study also evidenced that when AEOs working off Country begin their role in schools there needs to be an understanding from school personnel that it takes longer than an AEO working on Country to form strong working relationships within the community.

# Protocols for working on and off Country for Aboriginal people

Protocols are an important part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture. Protocols for working in Indigenous communities are intended to provide effective and respectful manners of communication (Martin, 2006). Each circumstance or situation is different and there are generally no set rules. However, there are some protocols that present ideal ways to proceed when researching, interviewing, or conducting works dealing with matters of concern to Indigenous peoples (Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015; Martin, 2006). Protocols vary between communities and people in communities.

AEOs who work off Country have strict protocols they have to follow. These protocols align with protocols that are set out for non-Indigenous people (Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015). However, these protocols are generally spoken of and not written in a formal document. Most Indigenous people working off Country know these protocols as they have been orally passed down through generations, and they are continually reminded if they do not adhere to them (Martin, 2008). If Indigenous people are working off Country, they need to ask permission from traditional owners to share any local Indigenous knowledge. When permission is granted to share the knowledge, AEOs need to acknowledge who shared the knowledge with them and where they heard it. Another protocol AEOs need to be mindful of is when schools are visiting significant sites in the community a traditional owner needs to be present. These protocols are developed from an Aboriginal worldview. This means all things in the world are connected, including spirituality, land, law, knowledge, culture, oral traditions, language, people and environment (Martin, 2006).

Figure 6.3 presents a theoretical model of lenses for "knowing" Indigenous local knowledge and the authority that non-Indigenous people and Indigenous people working off Country have with regard to access to this knowledge.

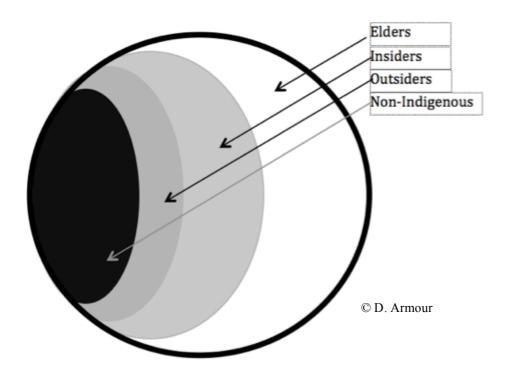


Figure 6.3. Aboriginal knowledge lens.

As displayed in Figure 6.3, each group has varying parts of the picture from non-Indigenous to Elders, who have the full understanding of Indigenous worldviews. Each lens holds different levels of authority of knowing and sharing, and entry from one lens to another relies on protocols, trust and a "need to know". The eye is used to depict how the world is viewed with regard to Indigenous knowledge being shared. The eye as a physical organ is complex. It acts as a camera lens. It is said to be "the window to the soul". This research is about reframing/shifting the colonial gaze which has shaped views of Indigenous knowledges and cultures, education and working with Indigenous people. It proposes a collaborative approach to learning so that the lens is not biased. Seeing it through our eyes from an Indigenous viewpoint, non-Indigenous people are generally limited in Indigenous knowledge (Nakata, 2007a). They only see the surface level of knowledge and often do not understand our worldview. When working in Indigenous communities' non-Indigenous people are exposed to limited Indigenous knowledge until trust is built (Jackson-Barrett et al., 2015; Martin, 2006).

AEOs working off Country or outsiders are also only subjected to limited Indigenous knowledge when they start in their role. The more trusted AEOs working off Country become, the more local Indigenous knowledge they have shared with them. However, there are protocols for transporting this local knowledge. Indigenous people working off Country (outsiders) gain more knowledge and understanding of the knowledge than non-Indigenous people, but they never have as much knowledge as Elders and traditional owners.

Traditional owners or insiders have extensive insights into the local Indigenous knowledge in their area. However, they do not know everything there is to know about the local knowledge. Elders in the community have the most thorough knowledge of local Indigenous knowledges. Elders share this knowledge with younger traditional owners as they see fit to share. This local knowledge is usually shared by Elders so lessons can be learnt (Martin, 2006). As you can see in Figure 6.3, the Elders in the community hold all the local knowledge.

# Concluding comments

It seems that working as an insider or outsider is complex and can have benefits and challenges when it comes to community and school partnerships. There are advantages for AEOs working off Country as an outsider when it comes to community challenges (Martin, 2008; Yunkaporta, 2009a). AEOs working off Country are able to stay out of these challenges facing the community. By not being involved, AEOs are able to keep relationships open with community members and not compromise their cultural identity or professional role. They also are able to give all families a level playing field without being biased due to community alignments. This is beneficial to both the school and the community.

It is conjectured that when AEOs are employed in schools' consideration should be given as to whether they are working on Country or working off Country. Furthermore, processes should be put in place or time allocated to help them transition into their role. Staff in schools have an expectation that AEOs, whether they are on or off Country, can implement and share local cultural knowledge within the school. But it must be known that Aboriginality in itself does not give Indigenous people a ticket to engage with and share Indigenous knowledges (Martin, 2006; Yunkaporta, 2009a). Any person, regardless of who they are, must have a deep and sophisticated understanding of their own Country. They also have to engage in local protocols in order to pass on Indigenous knowledge of the Country they are working on with integrity. Greater understanding of the cultural diversity of Aboriginal peoples is a consideration for teacher training and development as it is more complex than school staff, curriculum developers and policy writers seem to understand.

# 6.2.2 Identity and Two-way strong – Travelling between two worlds

Being two-way strong is deemed as an important dimension for maintaining Indigenous identity while working within a Western system (Pearson, 2009; C. Sarra, 2006). However, there is a paucity of research findings pertaining to what travelling between Indigenous knowledges and Western knowledges looks like for AEOs working in a school context. There is also limited research delineating how this impacts on them as educators. The AEOs in this

study were all working between Indigenous knowledge systems and Western knowledge systems in a school and community context. The findings of this study begin to give insights into how AEOs do this and the effects this has on their identity as educators. However, all AEOs in this study claimed that being able to work between the two knowledge systems in the school setting (Indigenous and Western) was a strength for both themselves and their students (C. Sarra, 2006).

# How AEOs travel between two worlds and why this is important

While it is acknowledged that travelling between two worlds and having to use different behaviours in these worlds is something AEOs do regularly, little is known as to how they do this (Cardinal, 2014; Yunkaporta, 2009a). Indigenous people know how they fit within each world (Cardinal, 2014), as evidenced by the behavioural changes demonstrated by these AEOs (see Appendix F, 22; Appendix G, 20; Appendix H, 16; Appendix I, 28). When these AEOs are working in Western systems they display different behaviours at school to those exhibited at home or in the community. While it can be argued that teachers also display different behaviours between school and home, it is conjectured that this change is more pronounced for AEOs. AEOs talk differently and act differently when they are positioned in the school context as compared to when they are at home and in the community. All the AEOs in this study claimed that they adopted Western ways of communication (e.g., speaking English) and Western ways of being (e.g., changing their behaviours at school) when in the school context. The AEOs also demonstrated Western behaviours when they were presenting at conferences and school assemblies (see Appendix F, 27). In contrast, they travelled to Indigenous worlds when they were talking to Indigenous parents and students.

There are a variety of reasons why AEOs travel between two knowledge systems in the school context. The reasons go beyond simply fitting in, though Aunty Rowena and Uncle Paul see this as an important aspect. It seems to be more about "acting professionally" (see Appendix F, 30; Appendix H, 25), and allowing them to gain greater authority and be seen as "stronger" in these contexts (see Appendix F, 30). However, the AEOs do not believe that these changes compromise their identity as an Indigenous person (F, 32). Although they believe that they are the ones who have to make compromises when working in Western knowledge structures (see Appendix F, 23; Appendix H, 37), they believe that these compromises are a necessity in Western school systems.

#### Necessity of switching

AEOs working in these schools believe it is a necessity to demonstrate to students that they are able to switch between both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems when in the

school context. This does not mean that they always feel comfortable doing this. However, what they do know is being able to operate in both worlds is a powerful tool and allows AEOs to be more effective in Western contexts (Ober & Bat, 2007; Pearson, 2009; C. Sarra, 2003, 2011). While Aunty Michelle described attending work in a Western system as having to put on the clown suit, she knows that she has to do this to lead a productive and effective life within the school context. Operating in both worlds also lets them gain insights into how Western systems operate, which in turn allows them to make it easier for their Indigenous students as they engage in these systems (see Appendix H, 33). AEOs and their students can view school issues from both points of view (see Appendix I, 28). This goes beyond the notion of being strong in "school talk" and "home talk" (Cairney, 2002; Rahman, 2013), and incorporates a notion of negotiation and movement. These AEOs see themselves as negotiating a new knowledge system, and helping Indigenous students to experience success in this system (Cross, 1971; Cross & Vandiver, 2001). These AEOs claim that they themselves are demonstrating how to move through a Western knowledge system while in the school context. Even though at times it is not easy for AEOs to travel between two knowledge systems, these AEOs have learnt to do it automatically (Ritchey, 2014). They purport that it is necessary for AEOs to know what is going on in both knowledge systems so they can be a voice for their Indigenous students and their parents within this Western context of schooling (Cross & Vandiver, 2001; Ritchey, 2014; see Appendix F, 37; Appendix H, 29).

#### Role-playing at school

While the AEOs believe it is important for them to travel between two knowledge systems as part of their role (Marika-Mununggiritj, 1998; C. Matthews et al., 2005; Ober & Bat, 2007; C. Sarra, 2003, 2011), they adopt different strategies that help them maintain their Indigeneity. These AEOs believe that their capability to travel between both systems was a fundamental reason for them gaining their present position in these schools (see Appendix F, 26). However, there is little literature that supports this belief (Rahman, 2013). But the AEOs in this study recognise that they are two-way strong (C. Sarra, 2003). There are many tasks in an AEO's role that require them to support Western knowledges, and in these instances their Western hat is put on (see Appendix G, 34). It seems that wearing the Western hat in this role-play helps these AEOs protect their Indigenous identity (Ober & Bat, 2007; Rahman, 2013). This could be because the Western knowledge system is so dominant that when AEOs are in the school system they role-play to help them cope within these Western structures (Harrison, 2008; Martin, 2006). Or it could be that their metaphorical role-play simply helps them envisage which role they are presently acting out or helps them "play the game" well (Harrison, 2008). However, AEOs do not forget about their Indigenous knowledge systems as

they still talk and act differently around their Indigenous colleagues and students in the school context (see Appendix F, 19; Appendix I, 20). AEOs are able to move between their two knowledge systems quite fluidly (Miramontez et al., 2008).

When working in the school context the AEOs in this study predominantly work in the Western knowledge system, and travel between the two knowledge systems multiple times a day. This happens for three main reasons (Benet-Martinez, Leu, Lee, & Morris, 2002). First, as past literature indicates, Indigenous knowledges are not often understood and are frequently interpreted/misinterpreted through a Western lens (Martin, 2003; Pearson, 2009; S. Wilson, 2008). Second, Indigenous knowledges are not always supported in a Western system (Warren & Quine, 2013), and Indigenous people can feel devalued in schools (Herbert, 2000). Furthermore, this approach is used by AEOs because they often can feel intimidated, judged and under confident if the language they use is not Standard Australian English (see Appendix F, 20; Nicholls, 2005). AEOs perceive that there are often judgments made about people by the way people talk, and these judgments are linked to their capability of completing their role (Fadden & LaFrance, 2010; Ngarritjan-Kessaris, 1994). Finally, AEOs need to move to the Western knowledge system when communicating with teachers because it is an expectation in the school context. It is conjectured teachers rarely travel between the two knowledge systems and AEOs are expected to do this. However, Indigenous knowledges are slowly becoming more prevalent within the context of schools, but they still require a great deal of input from the AEOs, with AEOs giving the Indigenous perspective instead of teachers (Appendix H, 7; Herbert, 2000).

#### Switching at home and in the community

AEOs in this study often received negative feedback from both the local community and the school community for being able to travel between two worlds. The AEOs in this study suggested that because they can travel between two knowledge systems in the school context community challenges can occur. Being able to travel between two knowledge systems can cause conflict in Indigenous communities. Some people get labelled as a "coconut" because they are able to function well in both Indigenous and Western knowledge systems in the school context (see Appendix F, 28). This name-calling implies that they are not Aboriginal enough and have given up their Indigeneity (Gibson, 2010). It suggests that these people are black on the outside but white on the inside, and this can negatively impact on the influence they have with regard to discussing Indigenous issues with the community. In these instances, the community can tend to see AEOs as aligning with Western knowledge systems (C. Sarra, 2003).

Conflict and challenges also come from non-Indigenous people towards Indigenous people when they demonstrate they can effectively travel between two knowledge systems. AEOs often hear remarks from non-Indigenous people about why they are different to other Indigenous people. This is not only insulting to these AEOs but also to their people, suggesting that not all Indigenous people are capable of travelling between two worlds. It also suggests that some Indigenous people are not capable of engaging in a Western world. Nevertheless, AEOs are willing to take the good with the bad. This negative feedback is something these AEOs are prepared to take on, as they understand the importance of being able to work with teachers to achieve the best for Indigenous students (see Appendix G, 38).

## Strength in identity

The results of this study suggest that even though AEOs can switch between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, their cultural identity remains strong (Marika-Mununggiriti, 1998; C. Matthews et al., 2005; Ober & Bat, 2007; C. Sarra, 2003, 2011). AEOs in this study align themselves with Sarra's (2003) model of being two-way strong by showing Indigenous students that they are comfortable in their identity as well as being strong working in Western systems. This shows Indigenous students that they do not have to feel shame about being able to travel between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems (see Appendix F, 22, 28; Appendix H, 29, 37). Ober and Bat (2007) suggested that AEOs are weaving a stronger identity across both worlds (Indigenous and Western) in the school context. AEOs also show their students how this can occur while they still remain proud of their cultural identity (Ober & Bat, 2007; see Appendix H, 34). Furthermore, AEOs suggest their cultural knowledge always travels with them and it comes before any Western knowledges (Ober & Bat, 2007). However, there have been times when they have questioned their identity, for example, when they discipline their students. At these times, they reflect on their actions at home, and reaffirm within themselves that their cultural identity has not been "left at the gate" (see Appendix F, 31).

#### 6.2.3 Identity and Cultural interface

Where the two knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western) converge is referred to as the cultural interface (Nakata, 2002). Thus the cultural interface is a contested space that is full of contradictions and the struggle for equal relationships (Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2012). Nakata (2002) has described the application of the cultural interface in the school context as beginning to change Indigenous students' life-worlds as they learn new knowledge that extends and overlaps with their local realities. These new life-worlds and knowledges maintain continuity with past life-worlds and knowledges whilst learning skills relevant to

now and the future (Yunkaporta, n.d.). Nakata (2007) indicates that the interface supports Indigenous learners to explore their experiential knowledge beyond the classroom. Thus, AEOs are required to support teachers to assist Indigenous students in transferring this new knowledge beyond the classroom and integrating it into their local realities, their prior experiences (Yunkaporta, 2009a). Furthermore, AEOs have the potential to bridge the gap between Indigenous and Western knowledges in the school context (S. Matthews et al., 2003). For the purpose of this study, this space was called the "safe space" (see Appendix F, 38; Appendix G, 36–37) where both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers and students can learn about both knowledge systems.

Most of the literature in regard to the cultural interface addresses what the cultural interface is, and why staff in a school context need to work at the cultural interface (Yunkaporta, n.d.). However, there is limited literature that addresses how AEOs utilise the cultural interface in a school context (Williamson & Dalal, 2007; Yunkaporta, n.d.). AEOs in this study interpreted how they believe engaging non-Indigenous teachers and staff at the cultural interface in the school context occurred.

AEOs in this study suggested that they position themselves so they are able to create a safe space at the cultural interface of both Indigenous and Western knowledges. They do this by going beyond simply informing staff about Indigenous knowledge; for example, AEOs make staff feel safe to discuss issues with regard to Aboriginal education (see Appendix G, 35). Thus, when they are conducting professional development and cultural awareness programs, they see working at the interface of both knowledge systems as opening dialogical exchange between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school staff (Nakata, 2007b). As a result, these professional development days and cultural awareness days open up a contested space for Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members to harness the two knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western). As Yunkaporta and McGinty (2009) claimed, this space also assists in creating new knowledge in regard to Indigenous education. This contested space provides opportunities for the reconciliation of Indigenous education issues (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). However, even though these professional development days are facilitated and organised by AEOs and Indigenous staff members, they are still running on a Western agenda because AEOs need to follow an agenda set by the Principal (Phillips et al., 2007). Nevertheless, the flexibility within this agenda allows AEOs to imbue the agenda with an Indigenous perspective. This is a shift from other professional development days reported in the literature (e.g., Malezer & Sim, 2002) that have barely included an Indigenous perspective. Discussions in these professional development and cultural awareness days are held in an open and equal forum so that non-Indigenous and Indigenous staff can work together to resolve any issues.

Creating a safe space also strengthens the working relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff. As a consequence of AEOs creating this safe space, these AEOs claimed that respect has been given to AEOs and other Indigenous staff in the school context. Past literature indicated teachers did not have respect for AEOs in their role in the school (Cooper et al., 2005; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). However, as AEOs became more educated in Western knowledges, the working relationships became stronger (Cooper et al., 2005). In contrast to the findings of Cooper et al. (2005) and Yunkaporta and McGinty (2009), this study shows that gaining respect is a two-way process. First, by teaching Indigenous knowledges to non-Indigenous teachers AEOs found it easier to work with non-Indigenous teachers. As part of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy 2015 (Education Council, 2015) teachers are required to be culturally competent in local Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. This study evidences processes at the school levels that support this occurring. Second, it is perceived by these AEOs that the creation of a safe space helped teachers realise that their past attitudes towards Indigenous knowledges were narrow. While it has been suggested that the safe space assists AEOs to gain a better understanding of Western knowledge structures (Nakata, 2007a), there is little evidence in this research of this actually occurring. However, it is conjectured that because of the creation of this safe space, AEOs and teachers' relationships strengthened, and its creation has the potential to help both groups form a deeper understanding and acceptance of both knowledge systems.

The effectiveness of the contested space relies on AEOs transporting Indigenous knowledges to non-Indigenous staff members, and these non-Indigenous staff members transferring this knowledge into the classroom. Indigenous knowledges are learnt in a variety of ways, and AEOs need to work out the best way to accomplish this transfer with each staff cohort. Past research findings have indicated that teachers see AEOs as unreliable transporters of Indigenous knowledges to non-Indigenous staff members at school (Warren et al., 2004; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). The findings of this past research also evidenced that this has occurred because of inconsistencies with regard to AEOs' attendance at school and AEOs' lack of confidence in sharing Indigenous knowledge. However, it is argued that AEOs in this study are reliable transporters of Indigenous knowledges to non-Indigenous teachers. It appears that as AEOs were given formal opportunities to share Indigenous knowledge with staff, their confidence grew, and teachers' interest in this knowledge heightened. This resulted in AEOs

continually transporting Indigenous knowledges to teachers in both formal and informal meetings. The formal meetings were planned professional development days with AEOs facilitating the workshops. Informal meetings involved having conversations and creating resources that consolidated what had been shared in these meetings (see Appendix F, 10). Thus, as Yunkaporta (2009a) claimed, meetings where knowledge is transported involve finding common grounds for teachers to practise Indigenous knowledges, and as a consequence teachers begin to include an authentic Indigenous perspective in their classrooms.

Yet, at times, the overwhelming Western systems of the schools impact negatively on the creation of this safe space. Schools have systemic structures in place that prevent or inhibit AEOs from transferring Indigenous knowledges. For example, schools are governed by Western curriculum, and Indigenous cultures are still inadequately recognised and valued in curriculum practice (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). Although it is recognised in this study that this situation is improving, it is still a long way from being where it should be (see Appendix F, 40; Appendix I, 30). Additionally, in these schools, issues involving Indigenous parents are often dealt with from a Western perspective within which AEOs are required to work. For example, when there were issues where students and parents were called to attend a meeting, the school failed to disclose all the information surrounding the incident to the parents and the variety of ways it could have been be handled (see Appendix F, 35). This put the AEOs in a situation where their cultural identity could become compromised. From the parents' perspective, AEOs are supposed to be in the school to support Indigenous families and help them when they are dealing with issues in the school. By the school not disclosing all the information to parents and AEOs, AEOs were vulnerable. If families find out that AEOs have not told them all they need to know regarding possible resolutions to the problem, AEOs' links with community can be put at risk. It is expected that they disclose all information in regard to Indigenous students in the school context to the community, as they are the bridge between the school and the community (C. Sarra, 2003). Even though AEOs have to predominantly work in Western knowledge systems, there needs to be an understanding within the educational context that when working with Indigenous families the use of Indigenous knowledge systems is essential (Nakata, 2007a; C. Sarra, 2011; Yunkaporta, 2009a).

There is little evidence from the findings of this research to show that the safe space AEOs are creating is allowing for knowledges (Indigenous and Western) to be contested. AEOs see creating a safe space as important to transport Indigenous knowledges to teachers so they can transfer an Indigenous perspective into the classroom. However, there is little discussion between AEOs and non-Indigenous teachers on how Indigenous knowledges and Western

knowledges intersect and intertwine. In the safe space, the AEOs are generally providing professional development. Thus this space could be seen as somewhat limiting and not reflecting the cultural interface proposed by Nakata. Furthermore, having a dominant knowledge system is problematic when AEOs are working at the cultural interface in school systems (Grieves, 2009; Kearney et al., 2014). While Nakata (2007) implies that this space should provide equal opportunities for sharing both knowledges, in this study this is not evident.

In this study, as AEOs reflected on their journey from their initial employment until the present, they shared that working at the cultural interface consisted of a variety of stages. In the initial stages of their employment, there was no safe space to contest knowledge systems (Nakata, 2007a). In fact, in some cases there was an undercurrent of racism (see Appendix F, 3). Thus the intersection between the knowledges was void. At this stage in their journey AEOs were not positioning themselves to engage in and inform non-Indigenous teachers about Indigenous knowledges. There was no exchange of knowledges, and the only knowledges within the school were Western knowledges. It addition, AEOs believed there was an expectation within the school that they would learn about Western knowledges without any support, such as professional development or guidance.

The second stage in this journey involved these AEOs beginning to create a safe space by sharing Indigenous knowledges with teachers (Nakata, 2007a). However, even though a safe space was being created it was still at odds with Nakata's (2002, 2007) cultural interface. While AEOs were sharing Indigenous knowledges with non-Indigenous staff, this sharing was one sided. AEOs were the only ones contributing to the sharing of knowledge in the safe space. Thus, the knowledge being shared was not being contested, it was being strategically deployed by AEOs (see Appendix G, 26).

Finally, it is conjectured that the stronger the relationships between AEOs and non-Indigenous teachers become, the more closely the safe space aligns with Nakata's (2002, 2007) notion of the cultural interface contesting how both knowledges intersect and intertwine. But it is conjectured that this movement initially relies heavily on strong relationships rather than shared knowledge, as it involves a struggle for equality within these relationships (Yunkaporta & Kirby, 2012). Thus, the findings of this study show that these AEOs are not strictly working at what Nakata describes as the cultural interface, but are in the process of moving towards it. There is some dialoguing about different knowledge systems (Yunkaporta, 2009a), but presently, the dominant knowledge system within this space is Indigenous. Figure 6.4 presents a theoretical model of how the notion of cultural interface can develop in the school context.

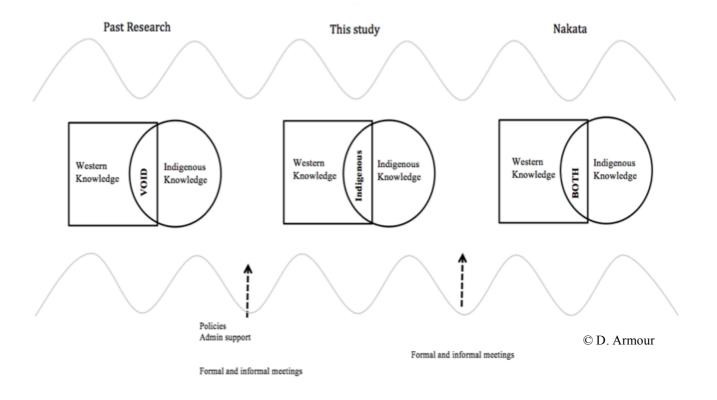


Figure 6.4. Evolving model of the cultural interface.

Figure 6.4 illustrates the journey from void (first image), to a space for sharing Indigenous knowledge (second image), to Nakata's notion of the cultural interface (third image). In addition, it begins to delineate the dimensions that assist this journey occurring. The second image is an important stage of this journey. Even though Nakata (2007) identified problems with non-Indigenous teachers trying to represent Indigenous knowledge, AEOs want some form of Indigenous knowledge shared throughout their schools and passed on in the classroom. However, they understand that interpretations, appropriation and tokenistic approaches can in fact undermine Indigenous values and knowledges (Syron & McLaughlin, 2010; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). Nevertheless, AEOs believe that the more that is learnt about Indigenous knowledges the more acceptance of our culture occurs, and the stronger the relationship between the ways of knowing, being and doing become (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005).

In addition to relationships, policies, administrative support, and formal and informal meetings moved the cultural interface from being a void (see first image) to a space for sharing (see second image). Indigenous knowledges began to become more prevalent because they were being pushed through policies and supportive administrative teams. Formal and informal meetings allow discussions to start about Indigenous knowledges. However, these

discussions need to continue and include both Indigenous and Western knowledges to move to the cultural interface of dialoguing between two knowledge systems (Yunkaporta, 2009a).

# 6.2.4 Identity and Ways of knowing, being and doing

While every Indigenous person is unique, we all share understandings that are connected to our past stories and Country. Our ways of knowing, being and doing have helped us to survive for thousands of years (see Appendix I, 39). Because of this, our ontology constructs our ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin, 2003). Each of these constructs interacts with each other in a dynamic and flexible way and is learnt from, and passed on, through the process of listening, sensing, viewing, observing, waiting, sharing, conceptualising, modelling, engaging and applying (Martin, 2003). These experiences influence our ways of knowing, being and doing (Barnhardt & Kawagley, 2005; Battiste & Henderson, 2000) and make up our Indigenous knowledges. This kind of knowing is more than beliefs held and decisions made; it links to relatedness. It is about the way we experience our world (Cardinal, 2014). Indigenous knowledge is a way of living that is learnt through our stories and values and makes us who we are as Indigenous people (Cardinal, 2014; Martin, 2003).

Ways of knowing, being and doing are linked to our experiences. In line with Martin's (2003) study, these AEOs agreed that their ways of knowing, being and doing are linked to their own Country and stories. Even though AEOs working off Country felt connected to the community, it was not quite the same as the connection they had when they were on their own Country. Thus, these AEOs' approach to helping Indigenous students gain insights into ways of knowing, being and doing involved them sharing their own personal experiences and stories about what shaped them as Indigenous people (see Appendix H, 42; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009). They shared their experiences with students in lessons and informal talks so that these students could gain an understanding of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing according to what had happened in their life (Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Martin, 2003). AEOs shared their lived experiences with students so these students could build on their knowledge of ways of knowing, being and doing.

In alignment with Martin's study (2003), these AEOs acknowledged that the ways of knowing, being and doing are dependent on the experiences that one has lived (Martin, 2003). However, they also added that this can be problematic for some Indigenous students. It is dependent on whom these Indigenous students grew up with and the influences these people had in their lives (see Appendix H, 43; Appendix I, 41). J. Buckskin (2012) suggested that the cultural identity of Indigenous students is made from the social setting in which they have been raised. Some of the Indigenous students at these AEOs' schools have been removed from their

families. In addition, there are parents that have limited knowledge about their own ways of knowing, being and doing due to intergenerational problems and gaps (e.g., Stolen Generation and assimilation policies). While these AEOs attempted to address this issue by sharing their own stories and experiences (Martin, 2003), due to the pressures of schooling, what could occur within the school context was somewhat limited. They suggested that purposeful teaching of knowledges is ingrained in the community and Aboriginal students need to be a part of this community to hear and see the knowledge that needs to be shared (Battiste & Henderson, 2000; Brayboy & Maughan, 2009; Martin, 2003). Western systems do not understand or rarely acknowledge Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. AEOs claimed that non-Indigenous staff at schools do not understand Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. Despite this, non-Indigenous people need to extend their own knowledge systems so that Indigenous and Western knowledges can complement each other instead of contradicting.

There is debate over who should teach Indigenous students their ways of knowing, being and doing. Pearson (2009) proposed that Indigenous knowledges be taught by the community and not by the school. Martin (2003) also suggested that only Indigenous people can represent their worlds as they have an understanding of their own processes and experiences. "Any other model is an imposed view as it excludes Indigenous ontology and interrelationships between the Ways of knowing, being and doing" (Martin, 2003, p. 206). In this study, Aunty Rowena seriously attended to her role as AEO to teach local Indigenous students about their culture, because she felt it was not being taught enough in the community (see Appendix G, 12 & 53). Aunty Rowena also felt it was important to keep students in touch with their ways of knowing, being and doing, so she implemented cultural talks in the school so that students were not missing out. Hence, it is argued that ways of knowing, being and doing should be shared at school by the appropriate people who have the cultural knowledge to do so.

Finally, Indigenous people have different ways of knowing, being and doing than non-Indigenous people (Martin, 2003; S. Wilson, 2008). But the AEOs suggested that non-Indigenous people make Indigenous people out to be more complicated than they are (see Appendix G, 50). AEOs in this study agreed they see things differently to non-Indigenous people (see Appendix G, 46). This is because non-Indigenous people do not understand Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Martin, 2003). The AEOs also suggested that other Aboriginal people are able to understand them (Appendix G, 21) and their ways of knowing, being and doing because they understand how and why we as Aboriginal people think and do the things we do. For example, when Aboriginal colours are seen, (red, black and

yellow) straight away there is a connection to them and other Aboriginal people (Appendix F, 44 & 45).

# 6.2.5 Concluding comments

Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are linked to our Country, stories and experiences. It is important for AEOs to connect with their own Country regularly to reconnect with their own stories, family and ways of knowing, being and doing, especially if they are working off Country (Bird Rose, 1996). The cultural identity of Indigenous people is shaped by the cultural setting in which they are immersed and raised (J. Buckskin, 2012) and from this their ways of knowing, being and doing are formed (Martin, 2003; S. Wilson, 2008). It is important for Indigenous students who are not living with their family to learn their ways of knowing, being and doing. However, there may be some challenges for them learning about Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, as they do not have knowledge to build on. AEOs in this study provided experiential activities so that Indigenous students could connect with their ways of knowing, being and doing.

#### 6.3 CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented discussions with regard to (a) how policies have informed the role AEOs play in the school context, and (b) the protocols AEOs have to follow when working on and off Country. How this research has illuminated AEOs' identities as educators was also discussed. Although Aboriginal identity and education has come a long way and is improving in the school context, there is still a long way to go. This is evident in the data presented in this study. The next chapter consists of conclusions, limitations, and recommendations from this study to enhance and understand AEOs' role in the school context.

# **Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations**

This concluding chapter reviews the main findings in relation to the overarching research question and sub-questions, and presents implications and recommendations from this research. In alignment with Indigenous research perspectives the research must leave something for the community. The recommendations and findings are for AEOs so that school staff can have an understanding of the challenges they encounter in their role. Figure 7.1 presents an overview of Chapter 7.

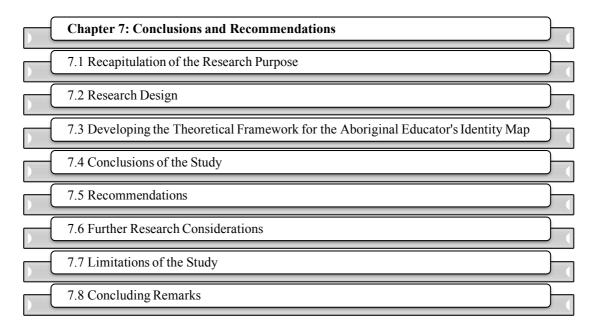


Figure 7.1. Overview of Chapter 7.

#### 7.1 RECAPITULATION OF THE RESEARCH PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to explore how AEOs understand their role and the challenges they encounter working at the cultural interface. This study also explored AEOs' identity as educators. It is important to note that this research was located in four schools in regional northern NSW. It did not set out to establish general principles or universal facts about AEOs in all school contexts. This research is giving voice to AEOs in this study about how they understand their role and their story from when they started in their role to the present.

The examination of the literature in relation to the roles AEOs play in the school context reports that AEOs have diverse roles. The research data not only confirmed this diversity but also informed the research community of the challenges AEOs experience in their roles,

particularly when they are working on and off Country. The data also highlighted the implications of working at the cultural interface and switching between two knowledge systems. This research suggests that there are multiple dimensions within an AEO's role and the way they understand it.

The overall aim of this study was to explore what AEOs understand as their role and the challenges they encounter as educators. The specific aims were to:

- 1. document stories of a small number of AEOs and their journey when working at the interface where the two cultures (Indigenous and Western) meet;
- 2. re-story the AEOs' stories with them as co-researchers;
- 3. analyse common themes from the AEOs' stories and investigate the influence these have on their role;
- 4. construct theories and build new knowledge about how working in these contexts impacts on AEOs themselves as Indigenous people; and
- 5. draw implications for effective participation of Indigenous people working at this cultural interface.

#### 7.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

This research contributes to the limited body of research with regard to AEOs' role in the school context and the challenges of working between two knowledge systems. An interpretive research design was used to explore how AEOs understand their role in the school context. Additionally, this study contributes to understanding the implications for AEOs working on or off Country. The research design was directed by the following research question and sub-questions:

- What do AEOs understand to be their role as educators?
  - What challenges do AEOs encounter in their role as educators?
  - Where does identity as an educator configure into AEOs' understanding of their role?

An Aboriginal researcher in partnership with Aboriginal educators conducted this research utilising Indigenous methodologies. The adoption of Indigenous methodologies recognised the culturally rich ways in which the Aboriginal co-researchers developed their views of education as they shared their journeys about their role as an AEO.

Narrative case study methodology with an option for an arts-based inquiry was used to explore how AEOs understand their roles in the school context. Narrative case study allowed for an in-depth analysis of the data arising from the yarning sessions. This enabled AEOs to tell their story and construct themes that linked to: their identity; challenges of working at the cultural interface; working on and off Country; and switching between two knowledge systems.

Participants were purposively selected based upon the boundaries of the case. The study was bounded to AEOs that had at least one year of experience working in the school setting. The location was in regional northern NSW and the participants were two males and two females, with two working on Country and two working off Country. This purposive selection of co-researchers offered rich and thick descriptions of the journeys being studied (Merriam, 1998).

To explore how AEOs understand their role as educators, yarning sessions and the collection of artwork and poetry data gathering strategies were employed. The yarning sessions were conducted four times across one year. These yarning sessions were conducted at a location suitable to the AEOs. These data gathering strategies are inclusive of cultural and ethical factors relating to Aboriginal research.

# 7.3 DEVELOPING THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE ABORIGINAL EDUCATOR'S IDENTITY MAP

The Aboriginal educator's identity map comprised four themes. These themes emerged from past literature pertaining to Indigenous education within the Australian context and the findings from this thesis. The themes that emerged were: Country, Two-way strong, Cultural interface, and Ways of knowing, being and doing. These themes drove the data analysis and discussion of the findings, and gave an understanding of Aboriginal identity in the school context. As I moved through the discussion, it became evident that there were overlaps and movement between the themes, and some themes seemed more important than others for the AEOs. In addition, Country was not a stand-alone construct but was embedded in all the themes. Thus, I have moved from the conceptual framework developed in the literature review (see section 3.3.6), which was based on a synthesis of the literature, to a theoretical framework based on a re-synthesis of this framework in the light of the findings from this study.

The constructed theoretical framework Aboriginal educator's identity map consists of three interrelated threads, and one thread in which all three threads are firmly rooted. The three interrelated threads are Two-way strong, Cultural interface and Ways of knowing, being and doing. The thread that underpins them all is Country. A consequence of the development of one's identity is voice/empowerment. It is apparent in this study these threads and consequences were all involved in the identity of AEOs in the school context.

AEOs in the school context indicated that the most important part of their identity was their Country. Country is fundamental to Aboriginal people's identity as it is reflected in our stories and relates to who we are and our ways of knowing, being and doing. Country also informs us on being two-way strong. Two-way strong is fundamentally about pride. It is who we are and how we act. However, Country informs this pride as it guides us. Country acts as a map and guides us through the cultural interface keeping us strong in our own knowledge but not afraid of learning new knowledge. It maps its way around the threads and supports us as we move between each component. The map moves when the context changes and stops at the thread needed. Figure 7.2 is a depiction of what shapes an Aboriginal educator's identity.

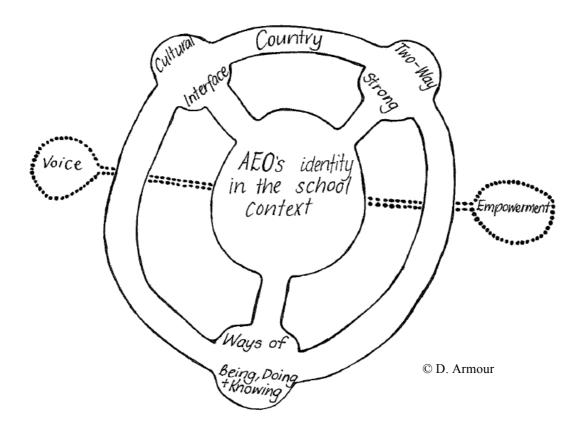


Figure 7.2. Aboriginal educator's identity map.

The three threads overlap and it is hard to distinguish which dominates. However, they are consistently moved between and stopping at each thread occurs as needed. Country is the constant that flows through all three threads. The threads have an organic relationship, intertwining with and influencing each other. Most importantly, comfortably moving through all three threads with the constancy of Country allowed AEOs to have a voice and be

empowered. Working on Country gives AEOs authority to pass on local knowledge without having permission from the local community. AEOs working off Country do not have the same authority but can gain permission from the community on what Indigenous knowledge they would like to be shared within the school community. It is conjectured that AEOs' voice and empowerment did not come until AEOs were comfortable in their identity as an educator within the environment of school.

From this Aboriginal educator's identity map a further theoretical framework was developed with the findings from this study. This theoretical framework was developed from data collected and the literature presented in the literature review. This is a knowledge structure for interpretation of Aboriginal educators in their role.

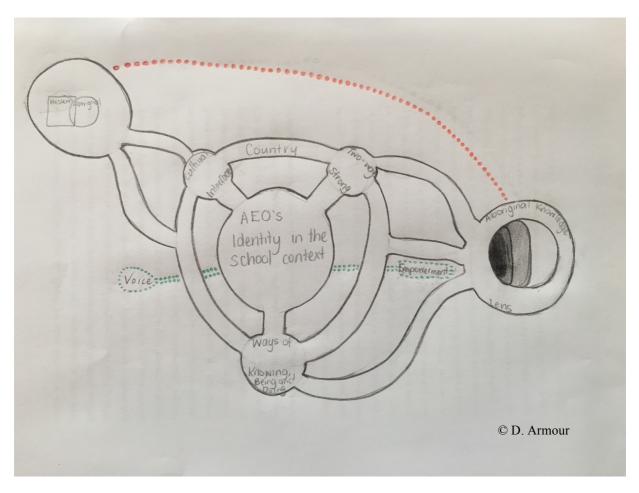


Figure 7.3. Theoretical map of Aboriginal educators working at the cultural interface.

Figure 7.3 is an extension of the Aboriginal identity map in Figure 7.2. This framework consists of six threads. These threads emerged from past literature from an Australian Indigenous education context and the findings from this thesis. The six threads are Aboriginal knowledge lens, Country, Two-way strong, Cultural interface, Ways of knowing, being and doing, and the cultural interface stages. The Aboriginal knowledge lens depicts each lens holding different authority: non-Indigenous people having the least local knowledge, Aboriginal

people working off Country with some local knowledge, Aboriginal people working on Country having more local knowledge, and local Elders having all the local knowledge.

In the Aboriginal knowledge lens model each lens holds different levels of authority of knowing and sharing, and entry from one lens to another relies on protocols, trust and a "need to know". Working on Country and off Country involves different lenses being used. The eye has been used so that it can be seen how Aboriginal knowledge is viewed with regard to sharing.

The red dotted line links the cultural interface model and the Aboriginal knowledge lens. It links because Indigenous and Western knowledges are shared in the cultural interface model. There needs to be an understanding of both Indigenous and Western knowledges for AEOs to be able to share Indigenous knowledge at the cultural interface. The model will change slowly over time from having a void of knowledge being infiltrated in schools to having open discussions and sharing of Indigenous knowledge by all school staff.

The three interrelated threads of Two-way strong, Cultural interface and Ways of knowing, being and doing overlap and are of equal importance. The thread that underpins them all is Country. As AEOs become more confident in these three threads they become stronger in their identity as educators. As a consequence of being stronger in identity, AEOs' voice/empowerment becomes stronger. It is apparent in this study these threads and consequences were all involved in the identity of AEOs in the school context. The interrelated threads of Country, Two-way strong, Cultural interface and Ways of knowing, being and doing link with the Aboriginal knowledge lens as the AEOs have their own Aboriginal worldview. The degree of local Aboriginal knowledge AEOs have in their school is based on whether they work on or off Country. This also intertwines with the cultural interface model as AEOs working off Country need to have permission with regard to the local Aboriginal knowledge they share with schools.

# 7.3.1 Overarching research question

What do AEOs understand to be their role as educators?

The role these AEOs played in the school context was central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student learning and engagement in these schools. They supported Aboriginal students in their academic work and well-being in the schools. This support was provided through conversations between AEOs and both teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students about how they could best care for and engage the students. These AEOs provided time for students struggling with their schoolwork or for those who just needed help in completing a set task. They also offered programs for Aboriginal students to help them

achieve academic success. These programs generally had an Aboriginal perspective and the level of work was suitable for the group the AEOs were working with. The programs were generally based on curriculum outcomes. They found students who experienced success in these programs became engaged in their schoolwork.

These AEOs held the authority with regard to Indigenous knowledge and embedding it in the curriculum. They actively transported the Indigenous knowledges that they and the community wanted teachers to embed in the curriculum. However, whether the AEOs were on Country or off Country determined the Indigenous knowledge they were able to transport to their teachers. AEOs shared and transported these Indigenous knowledges through a variety of ways, including formal and informal meetings with staff, and through resources that AEOs developed. The teachers then transferred the knowledge they had learnt into the classroom. Additionally, the Indigenous knowledges AEOs shared were both local and general knowledges, and authentic from Indigenous perspectives.

The safe space in which Indigenous and Western knowledges intersected was fundamentally created by AEOs in the schools. This safe space was developed in informal or formal settings, with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members participating in the space. AEOs created safe spaces for non-Indigenous staff to learn about Indigenous cultural values and practices, and Indigenous perspectives. This safe space allowed AEOs to educate non-Indigenous staff on Indigenous cultural values and practices, and provided an unthreatening learning environment. However, when AEOs created a safe space both knowledges were not being contested (see Figure 6.4). Generally, one knowledge dominated the discussions that occurred, namely, Indigenous knowledge. It is conjectured the stronger the relationship between staff and AEOs becomes in school contexts the closer the safe space will look to Nakata's cultural interface model, a model where contesting both Indigenous and Western knowledges occurs.

In their role as educators, these AEOs established and maintained links between the school and community. They worked between the community and the school, and relayed messages between the two. AEOs discussed with the community what the teachers and leadership teams were trying to implement with Aboriginal students in the school. Community then gave messages back to the AEO on how the school's ideas could work or not work. Some community meetings hosted by the school were not held onsite so community could feel comfortable about giving input in a safe environment.

The relationships that were built and maintained in the community had different phases, depending on whether the AEO was on or off Country. AEOs working on Country generally

already had built relationships with the local community. Thus, these relationships had to be maintained for the community to have input into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education. By contrast, AEOs working off Country had to build relationships with local community, and this took time. Once relationships were built they then had to be maintained. It is important for AEOs to have good relationships with the community so that community continues to give insights into what is happening in the school with regard to Aboriginal education. The community can then decide the input they would like to contribute to Aboriginal education within the school context.

AEOs ensured they took on the responsibility of the well-being of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. They understood that in order to promote and support positive outcomes for Aboriginal students, a holistic approach needed to occur. This included prioritising Aboriginal students' well-being so the "whole" student was attended to at school. In order to ensure this occurred, AEOs undertook a variety of roles, for example: (a) organising lunches for students who did not bring lunches to school; (b) liaising with teachers, parents and outside services about specialist appointments students needed to attend; (c) assisting with notes being signed for students; and (d) ensuring students had the correct equipment for school. In addition, AEOs talked to and comforted Aboriginal students when they were feeling angry, sad, or just needed a yarn. They provided support and encouragement to Aboriginal students while they were at school. It is conjectured that attending to the whole child results in improved student engagement, which in turn leads to positive outcomes for Aboriginal students. AEOs saw the beneficial effect that attending to the whole child had on their Aboriginal students, and thus, they understood that students' well-being was a priority in their role.

AEOs took a leadership role in modelling what it means to be two-way strong in the school context. They believed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students not only needed to be strong in Indigenous knowledge but also in Western knowledge in order to survive in the Western world. At school AEOs modelled to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students that they were two-way strong in both Indigenous and Western knowledge. It was considered as a strength by all AEOs to be two-way strong. The AEOs modelled being two-way strong so that Aboriginal students did not feel shame when travelling between the two knowledge systems. Additionally, AEOs instilled pride in their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students about their identity and cultural background.

In summary, these findings represent an extension of the literature with regard to AEOs and how they understand their role (Winkler, 2006). These AEOs saw their role as entailing

many dimensions. While it has been established that AEOs are often confused in their role when they first start relationships with their leadership teams (e.g., Principal and Deputy Principal), it is important to ensure that their role is properly defined. This definition needs to include the dimensions of being central to student learning, establishing the bridge that breaches the gap between Indigenous and Western knowledges, building and maintaining relationships with the community, and attending to Indigenous students' personal needs, including their well-being and becoming two-way strong. Findings from this current research demonstrate that AEOs understand their role as complex. They also understand in their role that Aboriginal student well-being and teaching Aboriginal students as a whole is a priority. It is conjectured that Aboriginal student outcomes improve with this holistic approach. The role of the AEO is far beyond that of completing sundry tasks in the school.

# Research sub-question one

What challenges do AEOs encounter in their role as educators?

The findings in this study evidence that AEOs deal with many challenges in their role that is predominantly situated in a Western system. These challenges include working on and off Country, working at the cultural interface, switching between two knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western), and the complexities entailed in the formulation of the AEO role. While it has been established AEOs have strategies to deal with the challenges they encounter in their role, it is conjectured that they are the only staff members in the school context that have such challenges to contend with. Furthermore, this adds to current literature in relation to AEOs not having authority in their role in the school context and not having a range of complex tasks to complete within their role.

Working on and off Country brings different challenges to AEOs in their role as educators. Often school personnel do not recognise the protocols around Country. Country may not make any difference with regard to AEOs' capability to perform their role but it does direct some of the tasks they are asked to complete. The AEOs working on Country ensured correct cultural values and knowledge were being shared within the school. However, AEOs working off Country required permission to share the cultural values and knowledge. AEOs working off Country consulted with community and Elders about the cultural values and knowledge that they shared. Additionally, if AEOs working off Country follow protocol and have good relationships with the community they can gain respect from the community together with permission to share some of the local stories. The challenge for these AEOs working off Country was to establish these relationships. By contrast, AEOs working on Country already have the authority to share the stories of their identity without gaining this permission.

The second challenge for these AEOs was working in a very dominant Western paradigm in schools. They were required to travel between the two knowledge systems and to fit into the Western system. Within this challenge, the cultural interface and code switching appeared to be related constructs. To work at the cultural interface, AEOs need to be able to switch between two knowledge systems. While AEOs are grounded in their own identity, AEOs switch to predominantly Western knowledge systems when they are communicating with non-Indigenous staff members. AEOs also tend to use Western knowledges when they are disciplining students in the school context. However, when AEOs are working with Aboriginal community members and students they need to be able to use Indigenous knowledges. While it is conjectured that working between two knowledge systems allows AEOs to understand gaps in the cultural interface in Western systems like schools, it needs to be acknowledged that this comes with its own challenges.

The role of the AEO is challenging especially when switching between two knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western). There are many reasons why this switching is a necessity for AEOs, including being able to talk to the local community, being able to liaise with teaching staff, and making Aboriginal students feel comfortable and safe in the school environment. AEOs choose when they are going to travel between the two knowledge systems, and what the benefits are of switching. In order to help them in this process, these AEOs role-played when they were in the school context. They put on their Western hat when talking to teachers and changed to their Indigenous hat when liaising with community and parents.

Travelling between two worlds for AEOs has the potential to make them feel like they belong nowhere. AEOs are often labelled by non-Indigenous staff as being different from "other" Aboriginal people. They are also often labelled within their own community as a "coconut". But overall, these AEOs considered being able to travel between two knowledges as a strength, and they were undeterred by this labelling. They maintained that they needed to be able to travel between the knowledges so that they could see both points (Indigenous and Western) of view in school systems.

As AEOs in this study switched between Indigenous knowledge and Western knowledge systems at school, their Indigeneity came first. At times AEOs questioned who they were and if they were giving up their Indigeneity. However, because the AEOs were strong in their Indigenous knowledges and identity, they would always identify their Indigeneity as their dominant knowledge and identity. They did not jeopardise their Indigenous knowledges and values when switching to Western knowledge system. AEOs evidenced strategies in their stories on how they switched between the knowledge systems

and why they switched between them. They argued that while AEOs are required to participate in contemporary 21st century living, they still need to have strong links to their Indigenous knowledges. In fact, they have a right to share and acknowledge Indigenous knowledges in the school context.

Third, relationships between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people appear to remain strained due to past histories, and this can be challenging. These past histories appear to impact on the continued misunderstanding of Aboriginal people by non-Indigenous people. It is conjectured that once non-Indigenous people have a better understanding of the history and current lifestyles of Aboriginal people, there will be a reduction in the over-generalised stereotypes that presently occur. Non-Indigenous people are ignorant and uneducated about Aboriginal issues, including Aboriginal education. This ignorance about education has potentially evolved from non-Indigenous people's own experiences and education. This ignorance impacts on the types of roles that are formulated for AEOs in the school context. This formulation is often the sole responsibility of the teacher and/or Principal, and often can reflect these stereotypes. The challenge for these AEOs was to "fight" for what they saw as fundamental to their role. To do this these AEOs moved quietly and slowly to educate non-Indigenous people about the past and its stereotypes, and the ways they saw that they as Indigenous people could best support Indigenous student learning.

# Research sub-question two

Where does identity as an educator configure into AEOs' understanding of their role?

The most significant outcome of this research is the formulation of the Aboriginal educator's identity map that helped AEOs share the heart and pulse of their stories. The four threads, (a) Country, (b) Cultural interface, (c) Two-way strong, and (d) Ways of knowing, being and doing (see Figure 7.2), not only helped these AEOs share their stories but also gave depth to these stories. First, the map helped the researcher document the ways in which each AEO distinctly switched between the knowledge systems, and the impact this had on their identity in the school context. Second, it showed definitively that AEOs have threads that contribute to their identity while they are working in the school context. These threads have an influence on how they go about doing their role.

These threads are intertwined and organic. One thread will not exist without the other. However, Country is the underpinning of all the threads. Country makes AEOs who they are. Their connection to Country links them to their identity. Country flows through the other threads of Two-way strong and Cultural interface, as Country contributes to our Indigenous perspective. When AEOs became strong in switching between knowledge systems and

working at the interface, voice and empowerment emerged. This happened because AEOs were comfortable with their identity and comfortable to move between knowledge systems. Furthermore, for these AEOs identity travelled with them into the school and was not left at the front gate.

Country also underpins AEOs' identity as educators. Country is fundamental to AEOs' identity as it reflects their stories and their Ways of knowing, being and doing. Country drives who AEOs are and is an important aspect to AEOs' identity. AEOs off Country suggest they have to regularly return to their own Country to reconnect with their identity. Country also informs AEOs on being two-way strong as it provides AEOs with their Indigenous knowledges. It also provides stories for them to share with Indigenous students who have limited experiences about their own Country.

Working between two knowledge systems is a role AEOs understand they need to undertake as educators. Being two-way strong is an important element for maintaining Aboriginal identity while working within a Western system. These AEOs suggested that being able to switch between two knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western) is a powerful tool. It allowed them to gain insights into how Western systems operate, which in turn allowed them to make it easier for their Aboriginal students as they engaged in these systems. AEOs also understood that switching between two knowledge systems allowed them to see school issues from both worldviews. It is suggested that AEOs need to use these four themes when working as an educator at school so they do not lose their Indigeneity as they work in a Western system. It is conjectured that AEOs use of role-play as they work and live being an AEO allows them to maintain their Aboriginal identity.

#### 7.4 CONCLUSIONS OF THE STUDY

### 7.4.1 Conclusion 1

The role of the AEO has evolved over the last 10 years as evidenced by the findings of this research. These AEOs have more authority in the school context. The role these AEOs currently have places greater emphasis on the teaching and learning of Indigenous students. This is a change from the past research that has clearly evidenced that AEOs in the past were generally assigned to sundry tasks in the educational contexts. These AEOs are now sharing Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in professional development days, whereas 10 years ago this was not happening. An AEO's role is still diverse and complex, and over the years this complexity has become more prevalent as AEOs have had more input into what they do

in their role. One outcome is that they are starting to be included as a part of the school leadership team.

#### 7.4.2 Conclusion 2

This study concludes that an AEO's role is complex for many reasons. Part of this complexity results from the need to switch between two knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western). AEOs do this because they acknowledge that for the benefit of their Aboriginal students, they have to talk the talk and walk the walk in school systems. AEOs have to share Indigenous knowledges with non-Indigenous staff. Furthermore, AEOs also have to represent their communities in these contexts. They need to be able to liaise and talk to Indigenous students and parents, and ensure they feel comfortable in the school context. Thus being adept at switching is fundamental to their role. This can be complex at times as there is not always a safe space to do this.

Working between the Aboriginal community, the school and Aboriginal students also adds a degree of a complexity to the AEO's role. The systemic structures in the school can cause issues for AEOs when working with the community, particularly if the school does not disclose all details of the issues to students' families.

# 7.4.3 Conclusion 3

The formulation of an AEO's role is complex and driven by policy and recent changes in the Australian National Curriculum. Departmental and school policy guide what AEOs do in their role. Furthermore, AEOs have some input into the tasks they complete in their role. AEOs' roles are based on the needs within the school and community they work in. With that being said AEOs prioritise Indigenous student well-being. Ensuring Indigenous students at their school are feeling safe and happy in the school environment and providing support to them is highly important to AEOs. Since embedding Indigenous perspectives became a component of the Australian National Curriculum, AEOs have transported Indigenous knowledges and perspectives to teachers through formal and informal meetings.

#### 7.4.4 Conclusion 4

AEOs are creating safe spaces in the school context to transport Indigenous knowledges. Through informal and formal meetings AEOs are creating a safe space to transport Indigenous knowledges to non-Indigenous teachers and staff in their schools. However, in the safe spaces there is limited dialogical exchange between the two knowledge systems (Indigenous and Western). Western knowledges are being shared all the time in school settings with time set

aside to share Indigenous knowledges. When Indigenous knowledges are being shared in both informal and formal settings the sharing is by AEOs only.

# 7.4.5 Conclusion 5

Working on and off Country has different implications for AEOs and schools do not take this into consideration. There are advantages and disadvantages for AEOs working on and off Country. Working on Country has advantages in respect to local culture being shared within the school context, whereas working off Country traditional owners must give you permission to have access to and share local knowledge. AEOs working off Country have advantages in that they are not involved in community challenges. This means they can have an impartial view on issues that are happening in the community and not be involved. AEOs working on Country may be involved in these issues whether they like it or not.

#### 7.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations have emerged from this study exploring how AEOs understand their role. These are directed towards state and federal government education departments, teachers, and education researchers. There are two recommendation categories: (a) policy, and (b) school. In line with Indigenous methodologies the recommendations are made for the best interests of AEOs. Indigenous methodologies require a contribution be left for the community. These recommendations are the researcher's contribution to the community.

# 7.5.1 Policy recommendations

#### Recommendation 1

It is recommended that a framework/policy be developed with protocols for AEOs working on and off Country.

This study shows AEOs have to follow strict community protocols when working on and off Country. AEOs know these protocols as they are passed on orally through the Aboriginal community. However, these protocols are generally unknown to non-Indigenous people. By having a framework for working on and off Country non-Indigenous staff will gain an insight into the cultural protocols AEOs have to follow. It will also enable non-Indigenous staff to see the challenges AEOs working off Country have when it comes to working in other people's Country. School leadership can then allow adequate time for AEOs to develop relationships in the community while the AEO follows protocols.

#### Recommendation 2

It is recommended that a national set of standards for AEOs is developed and implemented giving clear objectives about AEOs' role in improving Aboriginal students' outcomes and experiences at school.

The AEO has a critical role in the success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students; however, there are no clear objectives about what AEOs have to do to gain this success. National standards would help give AEOs and school leadership teams clear objectives.

#### Recommendation 3

It is recommended that there is consideration for teachers to work with AEOs in the AITSL standards.

This study evidenced that AEOs are capable of suggesting strategies for teaching Aboriginal students. Standard 1.4 of the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, n.d.), *Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students*, makes no reference to consulting with AEOs. Standard 7, *Engage professionally with colleagues*, *parents/carers and the community*, also has no reference to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and communities. AEOs can work in collaboration with teachers on how to best work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and parents.

#### Recommendation 4

It is recommended that AEOs have no involvement in behaviour management of Aboriginal students and an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander engagement officer is employed to deal with behaviour as a separate issue.

It is evident in this study that AEOs consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student well-being as their main priority in the AEO role. Even though AEO role descriptions do not document behaviour management as being part of their role, AEOs are heavily involved in all aspects of behaviour management practices in the school context. An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander engagement officer would be able to take away the behaviour management aspect of AEOs' role, allowing AEOs to concentrate on building relationships.

#### 7.5.2 School recommendations

#### Recommendation 5

It is recommended that schools include AEOs in professional development needs so they can make links between content areas and Indigenous knowledges.

This study suggests AEOs are facilitating professional development with regard to Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in the school context. However, if AEOs attend content area professional development sessions they can link Indigenous knowledges to the content area so teachers can transfer this knowledge and bring authentic Indigenous perspectives into the classroom.

#### Recommendation 6

It is recommended that processes are put in place at the school level allowing AEOs to transition into their role. Schools need to have their own processes to follow with the guidance of a framework as suggested in Recommendation 1.

This study found that AEOs working on and off Country have to transition into the community and follow correct protocols. It is suggested that schools have processes in place to give AEOs time to do this transition.

# Recommendation 7

It is recommended that outside intervention and support programs for Aboriginal education occur at all schools with Indigenous student cohorts.

AEOs in this study suggested programs such as Stronger Smarter helped to make schools a safe place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

# 7.5.3 Further research considerations

There are seven issues worth pursuing for further research.

First, this study is clearly case bound, and a larger scale study of AEOs working both on and off Country would be necessary to determine if the findings are applicable in other locations in Australia.

Second, while the findings suggest that people working off Country need to follow protocols, further research is needed to see if these protocols are similar in all Aboriginal contexts, or whether each community has different protocols for working on and off Country.

Third, AEOs in this study suggested Aboriginal student well-being and identity was one of the most important aspects of their role. Further research is needed to determine whether

Aboriginal student educational outcomes improve as a result of creating stronger Aboriginal identity, and what is the relationship between these two constructs.

Fourth, there appears to be a gap in sharing Indigenous knowledges and Nakata's (2002) cultural interface theory of what the cultural interface looks like in the schools in this study. Further research is needed to consider how AEOs and school leadership teams transition to the stage where both knowledges (Indigenous and Western) are balanced.

Fifth, the findings of this study suggest that AEOs often start their role completing sundry tasks. Further research is required to determine if there are shifts in the types of tasks given to AEOs in contemporary settings or if they are still given sundry tasks. Or, whether all AEOs start with sundry tasks before they move on to more complex tasks with authority.

Sixth, this study suggests AEOs understand their role and what is important for Indigenous education from their perspective. Further research is required to determine what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students believe the role of the AEO is in their school and how they perceive their relationship with AEOs.

Finally, further research is required with other AEOs in other school contexts (e.g., remote contexts, all-Indigenous contexts, Indigenous language contexts) to ascertain AEOs' understanding of their roles and the challenges they face, and the commonalities and differences that occur across contexts.

# 7.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study focused on four AEOs who worked in public schools in regional northern NSW. This study did not set out to establish universal facts and generalisations about AEOs' roles in the school context. The stories told by the AEOs demonstrate the variations in their journeys, and there are many contributing factors to why their stories vary. The aim of this narrative case study was to explore how AEOs understand their role and the challenges they face in their role. This study was based on the four co-researchers' stories, therefore it is not generalisable to all AEOs working in the school context.

This study acknowledges there are a number of limitations when case study is used as a research methodology. Additionally, the choice to use schools located in regional northern NSW with an average 13% cohort of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students means that the generalisation of the data is limited. As the researcher, I recognise that there would be a variance if the study was conducted in a remote or metropolitan setting or in schools with a higher or lower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student cohort.

As the researcher undertaking this study, I am Aboriginal and understand protocols in local communities. As I was not researching on my Country, I followed all protocols to ensure best practice for the well-being of the co-researchers. But, as with Aboriginal people working on and off Country within school contexts, working off Country as a researcher has its strengths and limitations, and these are acknowledged. The strength of this study is that it provides the basis for further investigation of AEOs and the challenges they encounter in their role as educators.

#### 7.7 CONCLUDING REMARKS

Conclusions drawn from this study provide stories of AEOs' experiences and understandings of their role in the school context. New insights have been gained into the importance of AEOs' roles and student well-being. Additionally, this study has described the challenges AEOs face in their role and AEOs' identity as educators. Findings presented in this study offer a unique contribution to what AEOs do in their role to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the challenges AEOs face in the school context. Furthermore, this study has provided new knowledge with regard to the influence that an Aboriginal educator's identity has on their role as an AEO.

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# Appendix A ACU Human Research Ethics Approval



## Human Research Ethics Committee Committee Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Elizabeth Warren

Co-Investigators:

Student Researcher: Ms. Danielle Armour

### Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:

The Experiences of Indigenous Teacher Assistants in Provincial and Rural School Contexts for the period: 09/05/2014

Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number: 2014 54Q

### Special Condition/s of Approval

Prior to commencement of your research, the following permissions are required to be submitted to the ACU HREC:

New South Wales Dept. of Education and Communities (SERAP)

The following <u>standard</u> conditions as stipulated in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (2007) apply:

- that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as:
  - · security of records
  - · compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation
  - · compliance with special conditions, and
- that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as:
  - · proposed changes to the protocol
  - · unforeseen circumstances or events
  - · adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a Final Report Form and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an Annual Progress Report Form and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

## Appendix B SERAP Ethics Approval



Ms Danielle Armour PO Box 456 VIRGINIA OLD 4014

CORP14/10143 DOC14/377960 SERAP 2014029

Dear Ms Armour

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in NSW government schools entitled The Experiences of Indigenous Teacher Assistants in Provincial and Rural School Contexts. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved. You may contact principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation. You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to schools.

This approval will remain valid until 22 December 2014.

As this research does not involve face-to-face contact with children, no researchers or research assistants have been screened to interact with or observe children.

I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in NSW government schools:

- School principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The
  approval of the principal for the specific method of gathering information must also be
  sought.
- · The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school's convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the research approvals officer before publication proceeds.

When your study is completed please email your report to: <a href="mailto:serap@det.nsw.edu.au">serap@det.nsw.edu.au</a>.

You may also be asked to present on the findings of your research.

I wish you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely

Dr Susan Harriman

Leader, Quality Assurance Systems

26August 2014

Policy, Planning and Reporting Directorate
NSW Department of Education and Communities
Level 1, 1 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst NSW 2010 – Locked Bag 53, Darlinghurst NSW 1300
Telephone: 02 9244 5060 – Email: <a href="mailto:serap@det.now.edu.au">serap@det.now.edu.au</a>

## Appendix C AECG Letter of Support

# TWEED WOLLUMBIN A.E.C.G



C/- The Secretary 63 Tringa Street West Tweed Heads 2485 Ph/Fax: (07) 55369629

## TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN

Re: Masters Research Project - Student Danielle Armour

I wish to confirm that the Tweed Wollumbin Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG) resolved at our meeting on Monday April 7, 2014 to provide this letter of support for Danielle's study of Indigenous Teacher Assistants' perceptions of working in a school context.

We understand that Danielle will be approaching local public schools to seek the participation of Teaching Assistants in her study.

We wish her well in this worthwhile project, and look forward to being informed of the outcome in due course.

Yours sincerely,

Jackie McDonald Secretary 14 April, 2014

# Appendix D Letter of Information to Principals



## PRINCIPAL INFORMATION LETTER

PROJECT TITLE: The Experiences of Indigenous Teacher Assistants in Provincial and Rural Contexts.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Elizabeth Warren

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Danielle Armour

STUDENT'S DEGREE: Bachelor Education Primary (ATSI)

Dear Principal,

I am conducting research on Indigenous teacher assistants' experiences working in a school context. I am inviting Indigenous Teacher Assistants from your school to participate in the study. I understand that there are different employment classifications under which Aboriginal staff in schools may be employed and that this will have their particular roles. I am a descendant of the Kamilaroi people. This is my Grandmother's country. However, I grew up in Bundialung country and have family and community connections in this area. This study will meet the requirements of the Research Ethics Committee from Australian Catholic University and NSW Department of Education and Communities.

## What is the project about?

The research project investigates Indigenous Teacher Assistants' perceptions of working in a school context. The study is significant as it addresses the lack of knowledge currently presented in the literature about how Indigenous Teacher Assistants (ITAs) perceive their role in a school context. This research is important so Indigenous teacher assistants can voice their experiences of working in a school context. At the end of this research project the research will aim to result in better understanding of the views of participants about how best to support the Indigenous students in their school. Please see attached overview of the research interview to have an insight into the questions being asked during the interviews.

## Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Danielle Armour and will form the basis for the degree of Masters of Education (Research) at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Elizabeth Warren.

## Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no foreseeable risks involved with this research project.

## What will participants be asked to do?

Participants will need to:

- Meet with Danielle in a mutually convenient location.
- Attend 2 digitally recorded focus group sessions for approximately 1.5 hours. These will occur at the start of the study and then at the end of the study.
- Meet with Danielle to complete eight, 20 minute (approximately) digitally recorded semistructured interviews over the period of 12 months.
- Complete three artworks of the ITAs' choice (painting, drawing, poetry, carving etc.) to show ITAs stories of working in schools in the past, present and future. These artworks will need to be completed in the period in between interviews.

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## What are the benefits of the research project?

It is envisaged that this study will give ITAs a voice of their perceptions of working in a school context that is based on Western values. As there is currently little research in this area, by doing so, this research has the potential to give participating schools strategies on how to best use ITAs in the classroom and best support and engage indigenous students in learning.

### Can participants withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Indigenous teacher aides are not under any obligation to participate. If they agree to participate, they can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences.

## Will anyone else know the results of the project?

The results from this study will be published in the researcher's thesis and journal articles.

The data collected will be identifiable to the researcher but confidentiality will be maintained. Participants and participating schools will be non-identifiable in all publications, as pseudonyms will be given to participants. Data will be stored in a locked file at ACU.

## Will participants be able to find out the results of the project?

Results of the project will be provided. Additionally, all participants will be given a copy of the researcher's thesis at the end of the study if requested.

## Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to researchers, Danielle Armour (telephone 07 3623 7565) and Professor Elizabeth Warren (telephone 07 3621 7128) in the School of Education, McAuley Campus, Banyo.

## What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number 2014 54Q). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)

Research of Ethics Manager
Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
North Sydney Campus
PO Box 968
North Sydney NSW, 2059

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

## How do I sign up?

Please sign both copies of the consent form if you choose to participate in the study. The researcher will collect the consent forms from participants' in person prior to the first focus group.

Yours sincerely,

Professor Elizabeth Warren

Danielle Armour

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## Appendix E Letter of Information to Participants



## PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

PROJECT TITLE: The Experiences of Indigenous Teacher Assistants in Provincial and Rural Contexts.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Professor Elizabeth Warren

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Danielle Armour

STUDENT'S DEGREE: Bachelor Education Primary (ATSI)

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in the research project described below.

I am conducting research on Indigenous teacher assistants' experiences working in a school context. I am inviting Indigenous Teacher Assistants from schools to participate in the study. I am a descendant of the Kamilaroi people. This is my Grandmother's country. However, I grew up in Bundjalung country and have family and community connections in this area. This study will meet the requirements of the Research Ethics Committee from Australian Catholic University and NSW Department of Education and Communities.

## What is the project about?

The research project investigates Indigenous Teacher Assistants' perceptions of working in a school context. The study is significant as it addresses the lack of knowledge currently presented in the literature about how indigenous Teacher Assistants (ITAs) perceive their role in a school context, based on Western values. This research is important so Indigenous teacher assistants can voice their experiences of working in a school context. At the end of this research project indigenous teacher assistants will have more input into the experiences of indigenous students in school.

## Who is undertaking the project?

This project is being conducted by Danielle Armour and will form the basis for the degree of Masters of Education (Research) at Australian Catholic University under the supervision of Professor Elizabeth Warren.

## Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

Participants might feel that their responses could impact upon their employment or relationship with their school community. Participants can make an appointment with the school counsellor if they feel that they need support. Lifeline is also available for 24hr counselling on 131114.

## What will I be asked to do? |

Participants will need to:

- Meet with Danielle in a mutually convenient location.
- Attend 2 digitally recorded focus group sessions for approximately 1.5 hours. This will occur at the start of the study and then we meet again at the end of the study.
- Meet with Danielle to complete eight, 20 minute (approximately) digitally recorded semi-structured interviews twice a school term over the period of 12 months.
- Complete three artworks of the ITAs' choice (painting, drawing, poetry, carving etc.) to show ITAs stories
  of working in schools in the past, present and future. Artwork will be returned to participants in the final
  facus group session.

## What are the benefits of the research project?

It is envisaged that this study will give ITAs a voice of their perceptions of working in a school context that is based on Western values. As there is currently little research in this area, by doing so, this research has the potential to inform education systems how to best support and engage indigenous students in learning.



### Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Indigenous teacher aides are not under any obligation to participate. If they agree to participate, they can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences.

### Will anyone else know the results of the project?

The results from this study will be published in the researcher's thesis and journal articles.

The data collected will be identifiable to the researcher but confidentiality will be maintained. Participants will be given pseudonyms in all publications. However, given the small amount of Indigenous Teaching Assistants in Northern NSW participants may be identified even though pseudonyms have been used although this will be unlikely. The location given in the study will only be named as Northern NSW and no specific location will be named. Data will be stored in a locked file at ACU.

## Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

Results of the project will be provided on request. Additionally, all participants will be given a copy of the researcher's thesis at the end of the study if requested.

## Who do I contact if I have questions or feedback about the project?

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to researchers, Danielle Armour (telephone 07 3623 7566) and Professor Elizabeth Warren (telephone 07 3621 7128) in the School of Education, McAuley Campus, Banyo. During the unstructured interviews the researcher will give feedback to participants about the research.

### What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number 2014 540). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Research of Ethics Manager
Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)
Australian Catholic University
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PO Box 968
North Sydney NSW, 2059

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

## I want to participate! How do I sign up?

Please sign both copies of the consent form if you choose to participate in the study. The researcher will collect the consent forms from participants' in person prior to the first focus group.

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Professor Elizabeth Warren Danielle Armour

# Appendix F Aunty Michelle Data Maps

Theme: Role	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
What was your role when first employed?	1	Doing jobs that weren't part of her role	You know he asked me to do lunch duty but he was mindful that it was illegal to put me on the playground duty role. (AEO1, i1, 2014, L65)
	2	Didn't have the courage to challenge the Principal or teachers re these jobs	So he said can you go out with the kids at lunchtime and have your lunch afterwards. But then the kids would muck up after lunch. Then he would come and get me and I would have to go back out. So a lot of the time with this Principal I would only get a 10-minute break the whole day. (AEO1, i1, 2014, 68)
	3	Stereotyped by teachers and the Principal  – undertone of racism	Mind you that was only a minority but there was just a core group of people that I felt that were really racist. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L224-228)
			Also with the stereotypes you know these are teachers that come from white middle class backgrounds so they have their own ideas and perceptions of what we are as (Indigenous) people. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L29-34).
	4	School not catering for Indigenous students' needs	So when I arrived at the school my expectations of Aboriginal education were quickly shattered as the school only had two Aboriginal workers and there was no Aboriginal education team. (AEO1, i1, 2014, 410)
	5	Lack of interest by some staff members re Indigenous students' education	When I first started up there you can tell by people's attitudes, body language and vibes. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L39)
	6	Did not attend Indigenous education meetings, PD or Indigenous conferences	Aboriginal education I felt wasn't a priority. So there was no Ab Ed team, there was no encouragement to go to AECG meetings. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L41)
	7	Staff were not interested in any ideas she put forward in how to help Indigenous students	You know you're just guilty as charged because of who you are. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L47)
	8	Home visits	Just be with them all the time. He [the Principal] used to get me to deliver suspension letters home to their parents, which was very confronting for me. (AEO1, i1, 2014, L77)
What is it now?	9	Ensuring Indigenous students are understanding concepts	I break it down to [be] part of their identity. I break it down to their interest. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L358-372)
	10	Making Aboriginal education everyone's business	But now when we run our meetings it's run in a yarning circle and everyone takes turns in putting our point across and I don't feel like they are looking to me for all the answers anymore. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L128-129)

Theme: Role	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Common thread	11	Well-being of students	You know I had one kid she used to get in trouble all the time and it felt that no one was listening to her story. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L39-47)
	12	Social and emotional well-being	So I really worry about the kids' social and emotional well-being first because I believe if you don't take part because we are teaching the whole child and if we don't take care of those needs how can we expect the child to go into the classroom and learn. (AEO1, i1, 2014, 147-151)
	13	Preparing students to learn	I guess to support the kids in their learning and education. But not just with Aboriginal kids. I see myself as supporting all of the kids in the school and parents in the community. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L150-152)
Who made decisions about its formulation?	14	Teachers and Principals when she first commenced the role.	I would walk past a classroom and I would have the teacher running out at me saying you need to take such and such down to your room because they're doing this and they're doing that. (AEO1, i1, 2014, L62-63)
	15	As teachers and Principals became more aware of Indigenous knowledges, she was given more opportunities to define her own role.	I guess with the Stronger Smarter it helped them [the teaching staff] have a look at themselves and change the way they look at things. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L135-136)
What currently influences its formulation?	16	Programs informing staff regarding Indigenous knowledges	But before Stronger Smarter well you saw that other painting and you saw that I felt like I was in a little box. And it just feels more open now. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L55-56)
How has it changed?	17	Participation of all staff in culture awareness training	I know when the tables got turned and we went down the Aboriginal path I would hear comments you know like how much Aboriginal culture do we need? Or how much of this stuff do we have to take. And you know I would say to my workers we need to take advantage of this time because it might not always be there. So we are paving a way now. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L232-234)
What helps the AEO achieve their role?	18	Strong relationships with staff and community.	To me I think it all builds down to relationships. You think about relationships well good relationships they are built on trust and respect and integrity and out of that relationship comes respect and acceptance. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L307-309)

Theme: Two-way strong	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Travelling between two worlds	19	Keeps her identity of who she is but she may act differently at school	But you know you are one way at home, and then you're a different way with the kids and then you have got to be a different way with the staff. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L258)
	20	Code switching is something most Indigenous people need to do when working in Western structured systems	Yes we have got to have some cultural part of it and we live in a Western world and our kids to get ahead are going to have to learn how to survive in a Western world. And unfortunately that means learning different ways of doing things such as speaking.(AEO1, i3, 2015, L340-341)
	21	Travel between two worlds regularly	You are code switching all the time. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L270)
	22	Professional role in institution	But when you are institutionalised you still have a real me but it's a professional real me. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L2701-272)
	23	Compromise part of who you are to fit into Western world	You have got to compromise part of your identity. Well not your identity but who you are. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L329)
	24	Good at switching between two worlds	But for us as Aboriginal people those that can switch back and forth and are really good at switching into the Western world including part of that is the language. (AEO1, 2015, i3, L334-335)
	25	Travelling between two worlds is for the best for our people, to ensure someone is looking after our children and knowing what is going on in both knowledge systems	Well who's going to do it? Do you want to live in a society where the low expectation is there or do you want to be caught up in that mentality of welfare and live under that because that is what government and society says about us? (AEO1, 2015, i3, L354-355)
	26	Employed in your role because you are good at code switching it can actually be confronting	Somebody actually said that to me once. [Do you think because you can switch from Indigenous to Western that is why you got your role?] I was at a collegial meeting and it was sort of a smack in the face. (AEO1, 2015 i3, L346-348)
			So people like us that get these roles we are really good at switching back and forth in what we do and we do it well. (AEO1, 2015 i3, L348)
	27	Do Western things at school such as speak at conferences, facilitate professional learning etc.	I spoke at a leap conference last year to over a 100 people and it's very much there [Western]. This co-facilitating this Stronger Smarter to Principals, executives and teaching staff is there [Western] but in saying that I don't leave this behind either [Indigenous]. (AEO1, 2015 i3, L285-288)
	28	Discrimination occurs for switching between knowledge systems	You know when we do that and we talk the talk then we get our own mob pulling us down oh look at the coconut, they are trying to be white. Well no actually I am just trying to survive. (AEO1, 2015 i3, L350-352)
	29	Strength to work between Indigenous and Western	I think it is a strength. Because knowledge is power and when you, and like I have said before people in our positions, we learn to code switch. (AEO1, 2015 i4, L346-347)

Theme: Two-way strong	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
	30	Act professional	We might act professional but it doesn't change your identity. (AEO1, 2015 i4, L235-236)
Aboriginal identity in the school	31	Beliefs are the same as they were before she walks in the school gate	My cultural identity travels with me I don't leave it at the gate it travels with me. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L288-298)
	32	Identity is strong even though travel between worlds	I am very strong in my own identity. I know who I am as a person as a human being. I think the way we do things is a little bit different but that is not going to change me as a person and my beliefs and what I stand up for and what I think. We might act professional but it doesn't change your identity. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L231-233)
Indigenous knowledges taught in schools	33	Some Indigenous perspectives is better than none from non-Indigenous teachers	So I think with the Aboriginal perspectives being taught in the classroom yes there is some truth to that you can't teach an Aboriginal perspective if you are a white person. But what if you have got support from Indigenous community. And what if you're in a school where there aren't many Aboriginal kids and not much community but you have those generalised programs you can teach from. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L215-220)

Theme: Cultural interface	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Transporting knowledges	34	Indigenous knowledges	I think I am closing the racism gap and broadening the cultural. Not that it is a gap but trying to broaden the culture. (AEO1, i3, 166-167)
			I do give advice about the Aboriginal perspectives in the classroom. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L173-174)
Western knowledges 3	35	At times issues at the school are sorted differently to the way Indigenous people would do it	I knew I'm sitting in that interview with that parent and I knew that she wasn't being fully told the information. I knew within myself I'm being convicted. You're not being fully told which I felt a bit of compromising there. (AEO1, i4, 2015, 293-297)
	36	Compromisation of Indigenous cultural identity at school	I do think it does compromise our cultural identity to some extent. Western [education strategies are used] absolutely and I think every school just about does. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L460-463)
	37	Western curriculum teaching us to be Western	So going through schools, it's a Western curriculum they are teaching us how to live in a Western society. You know that is what I say to the kids. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L456-458)
Create a safe space 38	38	Strong relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff	I think if we go back to that relationship thing you have a good relationship you have an understanding and acceptance of each other but especially because we live in a Western society. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L454-456)
			So I think for the two to gel together especially us Aboriginal people we invest so much time in our relationships so I think with that relationship comes understanding. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L305-307)
	39	There is still a lot of work required to get this safe space and Aunty Michelle does not think that she will see it happen in her school while she is working there	I don't think I will ever see it in my lifetime. People like me and you we are on a journey and sometimes we are going to come across hot burning coals but we are driven to get a better education for our next generation coming through and our babies. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L311-314)
	40	Better than what it was 10 years ago	Definitely better than what it was 10 years ago in my experience. I think in another 10 years I envisage that it is better than it is now. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L317-318)
Consequences of having a safe space	41		

Theme: Ways of knowing, being and doing	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quote
Ways of knowing, being and doing	42	Connection to Country	I feel connected to the land, my mob. I'm not saying I don't feel connected here but it's just different. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L176-177)
	43	Belief systems	I guess it's the belief system I have been brought up with as a child. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L198)
	44	Connection to colours and flags	You know the flags and just what it means. (AEO1, i3, 2015, L180)
	45		When you see colours like that (red, black and yellow) you identify with that straight away, you're connected there with it.(AEO1, i2, 2015, L181-183)
	46	Paving Indigenous ways in school	So we are paving a way now. (AEO, i2, 2015, L 234)
Aboriginal staff and students stick together	47	Look after each other	We would come together you know me and the kids and my workers we were like a little family, like a little circle unit. (AEO1, i2, 2015, L31-33)
	48	Relationships	Aboriginal people we invest so much time in our relationships.
Western views don't understand our (Indigenous) ways	49	Non-Indigenous people don't understand	Your family because that is your safety net and that's your connection and they did not get that so they would deliberately separate it. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L309-311)
	50		You know they didn't get our kinship system. (AEO1, i4, 2015, L307)
Not learning Ways of knowing, being and doing	51		

# Appendix G Aunty Rowena Data Maps

Theme: Role	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Role when first employed  2  3	1	The role entailed working with Indigenous students only but was asked to work with Indigenous students, non-Indigenous students and staff	So I volunteered in HSIE classes when they had Australian Aboriginal studies or Australian studies. And we had one student last year who did HSC Aboriginal studies [through] distance ed because we didn't have it available [here]. She has got top marks left, right and centre. I would make time and say come in and she would ask me questions. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L356)
	2	Not to discipline the students	I was not to discipline any kids. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L55-56)
	3	Home visits (encouraging students to come to school and reporting to parents problems their children are having with school – behavioural and learning)	Home visits (not meant to do them). I still do home visits. But sometimes because I am related to most of the kids I take off the AEO hat and put on the Aunty hat. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L 59-60)
	Creating opportunities for Indigenous students to informally discuss how they are feeling and if they are struggling	And cause I've got a lot of seniors [students] in here, it gives them a chance to tell me what they are struggling with or need help with. Then I take notes and listen to the gossip that is going around. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L445-448)	
	5	Targeting areas where students required assistance	Because it's better than asking a kid about a kid when that kid is there telling you themselves. This is what is happening to me. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L 455-456)
			And they know me and if I can help in any way to make things better for them I do it. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L106-107)
Role now	6	Helping individual students with specific identified learning needs	We've got a few kids, well not a lot, some kids in the special needs class with behavioural issues like ADHD and mental health problems. If they're not coping in classes I actually separate them and bring them in to the student room and help them with their assessments at their pace. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L140-142)
			If in any way there is something I don't know about we will find a teacher and we will find out what to do and I will take notes and we will get it right. I can also check attendance. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L143-145)
	7	Helping students complete their learning assessment tasks	We write down what assessments are due, we look at the kids that can do it. We check on those kids in the playground and say how are you going with that, that's due do you need any help. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L151-152)

Theme: Role	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
	8	Liaising with parents to understand the problems students are experiencing at school	Because I know the families and the families know me I can actually say to Mum, where was that kid. (AEO1, i1, 2014, L160-161)
	9	Informing parents of school strategies put in place to support students' welfare and learning	
	10	Liaising with teachers to address specific learning and assessment identified by Indigenous students	So how about we go and find out and talk to that teacher about the assignment and then let's work on it. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L460-461)
Common thread	11	Well-being of students	I do everything to keep their health and their mental health in a good way. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L131-132)
	12	Helping Aboriginal children to understand their culture and build their self-respect (spiritual well-being)	I took this job because I wanted to work with Aboriginal kids. I took this job because our Aboriginal kids are losing their culture and losing their respect. And Saintly is in my Bundjalung area. So that's what I thought it was just working with the kids and that is exactly what I am doing. (AEO1, i1, 2014, L66-69)
Who made decisions about its formulation?	13		
What currently influences its formulation?	14	The specific needs that she identifies that Indigenous students have	
	15	Programs enhancing teachers' cultural awareness about Indigenous issues, spirituality and Indigeneity in the local area and	
How has it changed?	16		
What helps the AEO achieve their role	17	Strong and trusting relationships with parents and Indigenous community	But when he did Stronger Smarter and he allowed that staff development day, this school has been going forward ever since. He [has] allowed us to take our kids on foot out to cultural sites. He allows us to take our kids to AIME now. I am [the] program mentor in all this stuff and he [the Principal] has never said no to me [when I ask him if we can participate in programs] ever since he did Stronger Smarter. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L421-424)

Theme: Role	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
	18	Strong and trusting relationships with the teaching staff	I think the key to working together is having a good Principal. We have got a good Principal. And like I said before I avoided him at all costs because I did not know how this was going to go. (AEO2, i3, 2015, 419-421)

Theme: Two-way strong	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Travelling between two worlds	19	To be comfortable in both worlds, and know about their culture	How are we supposed to make things better if we don't ask questions? That's what I say to the kids. No question is a stupid question. I tell them about that [when we were young] we weren't ever allowed to ask questions. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L 291-292)
	20	Act differently at school	They are work colleagues and I am a different person when I leave here because I am relaxed.  My kids have got a lot of non-Aboriginal friends and they go "your Mum is different at home.
<u>-</u>	21	Indigenous knowledges when talking to Indigenous parents	I can talk real black fulla way here. My way, the way that other Aboriginal people understand me, you know like broken English. But with these fullas just discovering [their Aboriginality], they [are] more Westernised people. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L245-247)
	22	Discrimination for travelling between two worlds	There is a difference when you got people who, I have relatives that live on a mission and they see me differently because I drive a 2008 Mazda 3. That I worked hard for. People say "oh look at her" but when they want something it's all "sis". It's different, I do see that. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L529-533)
	Part of AEO role to travel between two worlds	If I would not have been able to do that [travel between two worlds] I should not be in this job. It is part of my being in the community and being in the school.	
			I have got to learn to work with everyone to help those students that need it. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L286-288)
	24	Strength to be able to switch between Western and Indigenous	I think that is a strength [switching between two knowledge systems]. And being in the school. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L286-288)
	25	Switches to Western	I put my Western hat on. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L248)
	26	Too much Western perspective	[There is] way too much Western perspective. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L148) We put them in a yarning circle. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L160)
	27	Can see from another perspective	I can finally see, you know, how they say take a walk a week or walk a day in my shoes. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L433)
Aboriginal identity in schools	28	Aboriginal identity comes first	I am Aboriginal, I am a black woman before I will ever be Westernised. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L282-283)
	29	Identity does not conflict at the school but did in other jobs	With nursing it did [conflict]. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L102)

Indigenous knowledges taught in schools	30	Shared by Aunty	My job when I go in HSIE is to talk about my history. Me growing up between zero and now as an Aboriginal woman. I chose to do that. They asked me to come in and talk about what I know about my Aboriginal culture. I said no. I will tell you about, if this is a history class, I will tell you about my history. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L162-165)

Theme: Cultural interface	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Transporting knowledges	31	Indigenous knowledges	I still take my culture into their [Western knowledge system] because of my Friday cultural and because of explaining too like I said on our staff development days that goes from there [Indigenous knowledge] to there [safe learning area] to there, Western knowledge, they [are] all joined. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L223-225)
			Welfare. I don't I have to be more Western when it comes to the welfare. But I think welfare and culture, they border line, because I have to talk also about the cultural side. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L231-232)
	32	The knowledge holder must be willing to share their knowledge with other people. Also Indigenous people need to not be intimidated by non-Indigenous people and vice versa	It's got to be someone who feels like sharing their knowledge with you. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L415)
	33	During the professional development both Indigenous and non-Indigenous educators	Me being from here a traditional owner custodian it was good to have me on staff because then I could explain it and then it started to make sense. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L185-186)
		had discussions in regard to Indigenous education.	We all had to go around and people ask questions. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L349)
	34	Western knowledges	But in saying that, I carry that forward into the Western stuff. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L222)
			But when it came to the Western side that is where the behaviour's coming in and I am trying to explain to them with behaviours I have to act more Western. (AEO2, i3, L224-226) I put my Western hat on.
Creating a safe space	35	The professional development that focused on Indigenous issues created a safe space in the school for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members to learn about each other's knowledge systems	Your knowledge is being transformed. It is letting people see that. I said, "We are allowed to be honest here. Let's be honest." And afterwards, towards the end, there was still things that white teachers didn't want to say because they were frightened of offending people. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L360-365)
	36	Being more relaxed and open is what Aunty Rowena believes makes a safe space between the two knowledge systems	Being more relaxed and making people come to me. Those staff development days. By having that and making people aware. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L386-387)
	37	Aunty Rowena has also ensured that non- Indigenous teachers felt comfortable with asking her any cultural issues that arose in their day-to-day teaching.	Come and see me if you want to know something, come and see me, I am not going to chew your heads off. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L392-393)

Theme: Cultural interface	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
	38	Having time to talk to each other truthfully helps as well. The more educated people become about another culture's ways of living and knowledge the more these ways become accepted.	I find the more I started doing that the easier it is for me now. I am more open-minded now. (AEO2, i4, 2015, L398-399)

Theme: Ways of knowing, being and doing	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Ways of knowing, being and doing	39	Sharing ways of knowing, being and doing	I opened the development day in language and then told them why I did that. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L239)
	40	Ways of doing	Plus I do what I feel is right. (AEO2, i1, 2014, L61-62)
	41	Aboriginal ways	My way, the way that other Aboriginal people understand me. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L245)
	42	Influenced by experiences	Yes, because I tell it as it is and how it feels and my experiences. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L211)
	43	Differences in ways	I don't care what anyone says, Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people are different. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L434-435)
	44	Not conscious of changing behaviour at school	It's just an automatic thing you do. I'm not conscious of it only until that kid pointed it out. (AEO2, i2, 2015, L212-213)
	45	Protocols for Country	If someone tried to do it I would say aye don't you come here talking to me like that in my Country. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L318)
	46	Ways we do things	What makes black fullas tick? (AEO2, i3, 2015, L429)
	47		Why we think the way we do, why we do the things we do. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L 171-172)
Stick together	48		
Western views don't understand our (Indigenous) ways	49	Non-Indigenous people make Indigenous people complicated	They make us complicated when it comes to us as Aboriginal people. There are the ones that have got that line drawn down the middle. (AEO2, i2, 2015, L 34-35)
	50	Non-Indigenous people do not understand Sorry business	A lot of them were complaining about the amount of days absent for funerals.(AEO2, i3, 2015, L 164-165)
	51		A lot of them were complaining about why, when one family got to move, get up and go to a certain town for a couple of weeks, because like funerals you can travel all the way to Sydney. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L165-167)
Not learning Ways of knowing, being and doing	52	Aboriginal people not learning culture	Don't call yourself Aboriginal if you don't want to know about the culture. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L328-329)
	53	Teaching students culture as students are missing out	I am going to do cultural talks is because these kids are missing out on all the stories, and some of the language. (AEO2, i3, 2015, L338-339)

# Appendix H Jason Data Maps

Theme: Role	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Role when first employed	1		
Role now	2	Very little direction given by the Principal or teachers	Well just going off my timetable I was sort of looking for direction when I first came because I didn't really have, well I wasn't sure what I was meant to do. So I would often be in his [the Principal's] office yarning with him [for help]. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L38-40)
	3	A major focus on the well-being of the students	
	4	He seems to have little contact with the classroom teaching and learning	You know he [the teacher] just went about doing his thing. I wasn't asked to do specifics in the room. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L66)
	5	His time in the classroom mainly on behaviour management	The teacher wasn't that skilled I would say, and I would find myself doing a lot of behaviour management stuff in that class. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L62-63)
	6	Home visits – the bearer of bad news	But you know every time I did ring Mum she sort of knew it was for a negative reason so that sort of you know (AEO3, i1, 2014, L49-50)
			You know taking a student home because of a suspension, ringing up the mother.(AEO3, i1, 2014, L43-44)
	7	Implementing learning activities that using a hands-on approach and incorporating	So I started an outdoor maths program where they come over and we play games that are mathematics based. We've seen plenty of success there. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L103-105)
		Indigenous perspectives	Originally we'd play games with, you know, we'd have number lines with the dirrawong, you know, the goanna. That would be the number line. We use things like pipi shells as counters. I'd draw boomerangs as number lines and all sorts of different things. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L114-116)
Common thread	8	Well-being of the students	If it is not right at home they are not going to come and learn. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L105-106)
			If I see a student who I think might be having a bit of trouble or I know through other people that something is going on outside of school, I'll focus my attention on them for the day and assist them in class. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L108-109)
	9	Building students academically as well as confident people	My role in the school, I don't see my role as it is in a way building them academically but my role is also building them as people. It's not so much worrying about the curriculum. (AEO3, i4, 2015, 134-136)

Theme: Role	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
	10	Building strong relationships with students	They were more interested in getting to know me you know. And I was interested in getting to know them. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L99-100)
Decisions about the formulation of the role	11	Initially, the Principal and Jason but currently predominantly Jason	When I first started yeah there wasn't any real programs that were running. I sort of outlined my vision of what I wanted or what sort of things I wanted to do here and the school was pretty on board with that. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L123-125)
Current influences on its formulation	12	Aboriginal Education committee and the programs that they suggest he implement (e.g., Bro's speak)	Then through our Aboriginal education meetings I have come up with different programs here and there. I do at the moment I do Rock and Water with the boys out in the playground sort of stuff. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L129-130)
	13	Yarns with Indigenous students and members of the Indigenous community	None of the kids are shy to come and talk to me because they know that I will listen to them in whatever they have got to say. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L199-200)
How has it changed?	14		
What helps AEO achieve their role?	15		

Theme: Two-way strong	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Traveling between two worlds	16	Acts differently when he is talking to teachers.	You speak differently. You act differently. You communicate differently. (AEO3, i2, 2015, L85-86)
	17	Have learnt from parents	I have always grown up with Dad who has always been good at code switching and that is where I get it from. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L225-226)
	18	Travel to make people feel comfortable	I think we just know that how the families feel comfortable [so know how to talk to them].(AEO3, i4, 2015, L186-187)
	19	Discrimination for travelling between two worlds	Well I know it happens [discrimination for code switching]. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L223)
	20	At Indigenous parents' house more Indigenous language	But if I am at their house or talking to a kid in the playground or something it would be a lot more Indigenous. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L15-16)
	21	At school use more Western language	When I am in the school setting I would probably use a lot more Western language. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L13-14)
	22	Show students how to move between two worlds	I sort of try and portray someone that can fit into both sides so they can be aware of how to do it really. Aboriginal kids in a Western world so you have got to try and find that good middle ground to display. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L139-141)
	23	Is a strength	I think it's a strength. Well this day and age you need to be able to. You can't just be one or the other. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L87-88)
	24	Comes naturally	It just comes doesn't it [code switching]. You don't really think about it. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L186)
	25	Professionalism	Just professionalism. (AEO3, i2, 2015, L85-86) Yeah there is things I wouldn't say and the way I say it I would be semi-professional. (AEO3, i2, 2015, L92-93)
Aboriginal identity in the school	26	Proud Aboriginal person but also be able to work in Western systems	Like I said before, they're Aboriginal kids in a Western world so you have got to try and find that good middle ground to display.(AEO3, i3, 2015, L138-139)
	27	Does not lose his identity as he switches from one world to another	I am a model for these kids so I sort of try and portray someone that can fit into both sides so they can be aware of how to do it really. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L140-14)
Indigenous knowledges in schools	28	When redistributed it is slightly different	It's never going to be the same as it was [Indigenous knowledge being redistributed by non-Indigenous people]. It's like the old Chinese whispers, you know, it is never going to be the same.
	29	Indigenous knowledges slowly becoming more prevalent in schools	In the past yes [it has been one-way learning with Western knowledge] but it's moving more and more [to two-way learning with Indigenous knowledge]. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L93-94)

Theme: Cultural interface	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Transporting	30	Indigenous knowledges	
knowledges	31	Western knowledges	
	32	Teachers' behaviour towards Indigenous parents was different from how she would act with non-Indigenous parents	Sometimes I don't agree with some of the things that are done and sometimes said. Some people might be pressuring parents to do certain things and I know that is not the way to do it. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L53-55)
	33	At school Jason envisages that part of his role is to help Indigenous students become familiar with processes of a Western system	I just see it as I have a bit more of an insight into how to make it easier for the kids to transition if you know what I mean. I don't know, getting the kids to understand that they are in a Western setting. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L22-25)
	34	At times Jason forgets that the teachers do not always understand Indigenous perspectives and culture. He is occasionally shocked by the lack of knowledge that some teachers have with regard to Indigenous education and culture	Sometimes I suppose I am guilty of thinking the teachers know a lot more than they do. Then I am sort of taken aback at times and think how don't you know that and then I have to think well you all come from here [Western] and we come there [Indigenous]. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L176-178)
	35	Jason has to work at the cultural interface and between the two knowledge systems	
	36	But he sees attendance as an important issue and would like to see in place a policy that is more supportive of Indigenous parents	But I think our attendance policy and the way it is structured and sending out letters and that sort of stuff doesn't work for the Aboriginal families. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L152-154)
	37	Jason does question himself if he is too Westernised when it comes to the discipline of Indigenous students	Especially when it comes to discipline and stuff like that. Am I being a bit of a gubba (non-Indigenous person). Yeah no but what can you do. In the end it is what is best for the kids. I don't like being that fulla that takes kids home for being suspended but it has got to be done.(AEO3, i3, 2015, L206-209)
Creating a safe space	38	More understanding is needed to create a safe space	I suppose the understanding on this side [Indigenous] of things and the Western side of things [is what we need to get to a safe space between the two knowledge systems]. What do they call it? Cultural awareness and that sort of stuff. (AEO3, i3, 2105, L170-171)
	39	A safe space is created for Indigenous students and staff	I think I do [provide cultural safety for Indigenous students and staff] because Aboriginal culture is celebrated here. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L199)
Consequences of a safe space	40		

Theme: Ways of knowing, being and doing	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Ways of knowing, being and doing	41	Family	But when they do start figuring it out. [They're like] you're my Uncle and they start warming to you. (AEO3, i1, 2014, L94-95)
	42	Beliefs and values	So you learn those family values and then you go to school on the Monday and you would be back into those structures. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L200-202)
	43	Students are being removed from Indigenous knowledge	Kids have been removed from their immediate families. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L211-212)
	44	Acceptance on Country	I have sort of come back to Country. I live down in Starry. But this is my mob here and I was a bit nervous coming in because I haven't had much to do with people in this area. (AEO3, i3, 2015, L86-90)
Stick together	45		
Western views don't understand our (Indigenous) ways	46		
Not learning ways of knowing, being and doing	47		They don't know anything about their culture so you need to try and share it as much as you can with them. (AEO3, i4, 2015, L212-213)

# Appendix I Uncle Paul Data Maps

Theme: Role	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Role when first employed?	1	Not given a particular role	I was sitting there observing for about an hour and got bored. So I said can I do something. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L49-50)
	2	Sundry jobs predominantly involving resource development	So I said can I do something and she said you can sharpen pencils. I got right into sharpening pencils because I knew the kids wanted sharp pencils all the time. I always checked the containers to make sure there was the right number of pencils in it. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L50-52)
	3	Behavioural management of students	It sort of felt like I was just babysitting the children. Putting lids on hot pots or boiling pots. On kids that were getting pressured or stressed out over their work. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L62-64)
	4	Coercing students back into the classroom	After many attempts of doing that sort of stuff I got the knack of it after a while and I am not too bad at negotiating with children to come back to class. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L57-58)
	5	Chairperson ASSPA committee	I was designated to be the ASSPA chair at that time. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L70-71)
	6	Home visits	It used to be, Paul when are you doing a home visit. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L211)
What is the role now?	7	Language teacher	Me being the language teacher here now. (AEO2, i2, 2015, L 154)
			I am the next person and starting to carry on the language. To develop it and train some more people up and get it to continue on. (AEO4, i2, 2015, 157-159)
	8	What the teacher wants	Well in the learning in the classrooms usually sitting with them one-on-one or in groups with them. Do some group work or go through their stencils or their booklets or their workbook or their text books. Whatever the teacher has got for the day.(AEO4, i1, 2014, L156-158)
	9	Give Indigenous perspective	It took a little while [for me to be asked from an Indigenous perspective]. But usually if I was sitting in the class and they would talk about Aboriginal things they would ask me my opinion. And I think ohh I could be valuable here. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L274-275)
Common thread	10	Well-being of students	And talking to the kids when they had problems. Like I was sort of well-being the Goori kids, they'd [the teachers] would say well you're the Aboriginal person you go and sort them out. And I'd be like yeah well okay. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L54-56)
	11	Emotional well-being (calming students)	I would sit with those guys and try and support them, help them calm [down] and hopefully do their work.(AEO1, i1, 2014, L64-65)
	12	Preparing students to learn (equipment)	See [which] kids haven't got the things they use in the classroom like pens, pencils whatever. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L159-160)

Theme: Role	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
	13	Spiritual well-being (links to language and culture)	Then they come and saw me and put a bit of language in there with the acknowledgement. I said ok mate that is fair enough. You could see he was building up to be really proud of his speech. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L90-91)
Who made decisions about its formulation?	14	Predominantly classroom teachers when he commenced the role	Yeah they [teachers] would show me how to do things. Well, their way on how to do things. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L265)
What currently influences its formulation?	15		
How has it changed?	16	Important role in the language program	Yeah [the Indigenous students' identity is acknowledged at school] with the language program I am doing at the moment. I find that a real good thing. A good tool. When I do language the kids are starting to really open up and sit there and feel proud.(AEO4, i2, 2015, L70-73)
What helps the AEO achieve their role	17	Feeling included by the teaching staff	She said, really you shouldn't have waited to be asked. About a month later all the little plaques were off the table. I sit at the same spot now. I have for years. I sit where I can see everybody and then when people walk into the staffroom they are greeted by me because I am the first to see them.(AEOi3 & i4, 2015, L190-193)
	18	Strong and trusting relationship with parents, students and Indigenous community	I felt comfortable. I'm not a local but I do know plenty of people from playing sports up here for many years. And my family is pretty well known up here. I did feel comfortable. (AEO4, i1, 2014,L 226-227)
			But as I got here and got used the place, got used to the kids. Started talking to them. I'd just walk up to them. I'd yarn with them and joke around with them in class just to break that ice. Then the kids would say Uncle Paul's not bad aye. He's alright you can joke around with him. And I said that's the way I want to be with them. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L144-147)

Theme: Two-way strong	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Travelling between two worlds	19	Talking to Indigenous parents he is generally using Western knowledges	Our parents don't know a lot of their culture because of different things that have happened. So I speak to them in a Western way. (AEO4, i3 &i4, L16-18)
	20	Uncle Paul will talk differently to non- Indigenous staff members as compared to Indigenous staff members	The teachers are generally Western. There is Ben Hill [he is Aboriginal] who works up at the school and we will talk differently with one or two other male teachers, "you doin' the" and "eyahh there". (AEO4, i3 & i4, 2014, 18-20)
	21	Capable of adapting to both Indigenous knowledges and Western knowledges as required	You can't be biased on either side. I find I try not to be bias I listen to the teachers and think how would I do it. Why do they do it that way?(AEO4, i3 & i4, 2015, L24-26)
	22	Working with both knowledge systems	You are dealing with both sides. (AEO4, i3 & i4, 2015, L24)
	23	All students learn about Indigenous knowledges helps to strengthen the identity of Indigenous students	Yeah [the Indigenous students' identity is acknowledged at school] with the language program I am doing at the moment. I find that a real good thing. A good tool. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L70-71)
	24	Western strategies dominate over Indigenous	Generally Western [strategies are used in the school] but it moves too. (AEO4, i3 & i4, 2015, L11)
	25		
	26	It is a strength	Yeah having Indigenous and Western knowledge is a strength because you can see both angles. You can try and work out where they are coming from. (AEO4, i3 & i4, 2015, L46-47)
	27	Schools don't accommodate Indigenous students	[Schools have not changed to accommodate our kids] They still don't understand our kids. (AEO4, i3 & i4, 2015, L107)
	28	Act different at school compared to home	Yes. I talk differently. I am different at school to how I am at home. When I am at school I am not the real me. You are always looking over your shoulder to see if someone is watching you.(AEO4, i3 & i4, 2015, L205-207)
Aboriginal identity in school	29	Students feel proud in language classes	When I do language the kids are starting to really open up and sit there and feel proud. Ahh it's the black fulla's word. They are starting to be inclusive too a lot of them. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L71-73)
Indigenous knowledges in the school	30	More work on Indigenous strategies	There is still a lot more work to do to bring in more Aboriginal strategies. (AEO4, i3 & i4, 2015, L54)

Theme: Cultural interface	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Transporting knowledge	31	Indigenous knowledges are still being learnt to pass on	But then there is people like us that weren't allowed to learn it when we were little but now we are starting to pick it up in our senior years so we can try and hold onto to it so we can continue it on. (AEO4, i3, & i4, 2015, L40-43)
	32	Indigenous knowledge	It's [Indigenous knowledge] acquired in different ways. There is not a specific way to acquire. (AEO4, i3 & i4, 2015, L38)
	33	To have Indigenous knowledges shared schools need more professional development days	Having more open days or professional development days form an Indigenous perspective. (AEO4, i3 & i4, 2015, L 93-94)
	34	He is continually working in the safe area as he is learning and teaching between the two knowledge systems all the time	[In the AEO role you area working in the safe area] because you are dealing with both sides you have got to play the role. (AEO4, i3 & i4, 2015, L24)
	35	Western strategies dominate in schools	Generally Western [strategies are used in the school] but it moves too. So it is moving slightly but they are only at the tip of the iceberg. There is still a lot more work to do to bring in more Aboriginal strategies. (AEO4, i3 & i4, 2015, L11-12)
Creating a safe space	36	Safe space not created with students	The teachers don't ask the kids what the problem is. I never get angry at the kids when they are mucking up badly. (AE04, i1, 2014, L99-100)
Consequences of having a safe space	37	Indigenous students can be in touch with their identity and work between the two knowledge systems of Indigenous and Western.	

Theme: Ways of knowing, being and doing	No.	Sub-theme	Accompanying quotes
Ways of knowing, being and doing	38	Knowing where you come from	Just knowing my roots where I come from. Knowing the family structure. (AEO4, i2, 2015, L108)
	39	Way Aboriginal people have done things for thousands of years	How did our people do it for so many thousands of years you know survive and look after our children. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L284-285)
	40	Spirituality	All those spiritual stuff you know with our families so yeah. (AEO4, i1, 2014, L285-286)
	41	Influences	[It] depends who they grow up with, who they get around with and influences or parents at home. (AEO4, i3 & i4, 2015, L88-89)
Stick together	42		
Western views don't understand our (Indigenous) ways	43		
Not learning ways of knowing, being and doing	44		

## Appendix J Nakata's Cultural Interface Model

