

**INDIGENOUS FEMALE EDUCATIONAL LEADERS IN NORTHERN  
TERRITORY REMOTE COMMUNITY SCHOOLS:  
ISSUES IN NEGOTIATING SCHOOL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

**Submitted by**

**Martha Sombo Kamara**

**Higher Teachers' Certificate (HTC), B.A.Ed, M.Ed. Admin.**

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**School of Educational Leadership  
Faculty of Education  
Australian Catholic University**

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## STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP AND SOURCES

I hereby declare that this thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy received the approval of the relevant Ethics committee and is the product of my enquiry. The ideas and references of texts and other researchers have been acknowledged, and the work contained in this thesis has not been submitted for any other degree at any other university.



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Martha Sombo Kamara

Date: August 2009

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## **PREFACE**

In this study the researcher has chosen to follow the tradition of using the third person instead of the first person “I” to avoid personalising the study. As much as possible the researcher wanted the study to accommodate the voices of the Indigenous female principals in a context that would not compromise their worldviews or disempower them.

Throughout the study the terms “Aboriginal” and “Indigenous” are used interchangeably in the study to refer to Australian Aboriginal people since this group of people are being referred to as either “Aboriginal” or “Indigenous” in various Aboriginal and non Aboriginal texts.

## **ABSTRACT**

Over the years in the Northern Territory, there has been a growing interest among educators and Indigenous people in remote communities to improve community school leadership and school community partnerships as a means of improving Indigenous school outcomes. This study has investigated and recorded the stories of five Indigenous female school principals in the Top End of the Northern Territory on their leadership approaches in negotiating school community partnerships in their respective communities. The female principals are in many ways regarded as pioneering leaders of their remote community schools in their own right, and are held in high esteem in their communities – qualities which made them ideal participants for this study.

The study utilised a Biographic Narrative Interpretive Methodology (BNIM) to record, interpret and analyse the data for the study. Three interviews were conducted with each participant over a period of time. While the study revealed that Indigenous female principals have achieved major advancements in their individual and collective ways in working collaboratively with school communities, they also experienced enormous challenges and constraints in their efforts to demonstrate good educational leadership and work in partnership with their communities. Some of the challenges included their roles as women in an Aboriginal community; balancing school leadership, family and community commitments; and, complexities of working with the mainstream.

In narrating their stories, the female principals maintained that cultural values play a significant role in building such relationships and advocated for language and culture to be supported through commitment at the system level. Additionally, they revealed that community school leadership should be flexible and context bound as rigid bureaucratic structures are inappropriate for Indigenous community setting. As such they advocated for culturally appropriate relationships between systems and local communities.

Notably, among many other issues, they maintained that all appointments of principals in remote community schools must, at all times, be accompanied by

adequate consultation and effective participation of community leaders and/or their relatives and community representatives. Such collaboration and cooperation between communities, schools, and the system is likely to improve relationships between schools and communities. Additionally, the Indigenous female principals in this study emphasised the importance of supporting dimensions of leadership, for example, shared leadership as a reflection and relatedness of their culture. Such dimensions they believe are required for developing and sustaining school community partnerships.

## **GLOSSARY OF TERMS**

- Indigenous:** The term Indigenous as used in this study refers to the original inhabitants of Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. It also includes other Indigenous peoples of the world
- Aboriginal:** From the Latin word Aborigines, ab meaning from and origo meaning origin or beginning, the word has been in use since the 17th century and in Australia it is used to identify its Indigenous people as early as 1789. In contemporary Australian society, the term is used broadly to refer to the many regional groups that identify themselves under various local Indigenous languages
- Black:** Definition of Black in this study refers to a diverse group of people characterised by dark skin colour. In this study, it includes Indigenous Australians, people from African American background and sub Saharan Africa
- Yolngu:** It is a term used to refer to the people of north-east Arnhem Land
- Tiwi:** The Tiwi Islands comprising two major Islands located 100kms north of Darwin are home to approximately 2500 Aboriginal people known as the Tiwi
- Balanda:** Etymologically, this word comes from “Hollander” or “Balanda” meaning non-Aboriginal or white person. It is reported that during the trade with the Macassans in Indonesia Aboriginal people from Arnhem Land saw the Balandas who were white people and over time, the white person became known as Balanda

## ACRONYMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCO	Australian Council of State Schools Organisation
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
ARC	Australian Research Council
ARIA	Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia
ASSPA	Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness
ATEC	Aboriginal Teacher Education Program
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
BDC	Biographic Data Chronology
BDA	Biographic Data Analysis
BNIM	Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method
CDEP	Community Development Education Program
CEO	Catholic Education Office
CMS	Catholic Missionary Society
DAA	Department of Aboriginal Affairs
D-BATE	Deakin-Bachelor Aboriginal Teacher Education Program
DCC	Darwin Community College
DEET	Department of Employment Education and Training
DET	Department of Education and Training
DEST	Department of Education Science and Training
IESP	Indigenous Education Strategic Plan



MCEETYA Ministerial Council for Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs

MOM Methodist Overseas Mission

MSC Missionary of the Sacred Heart

NATSIEP National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy

NT Northern Territory

NTDE Northern Territory Department of Education

PaL Parents and Learning

PEPP Partners in Education Parent Policy

PINS Particular Incident Narrative

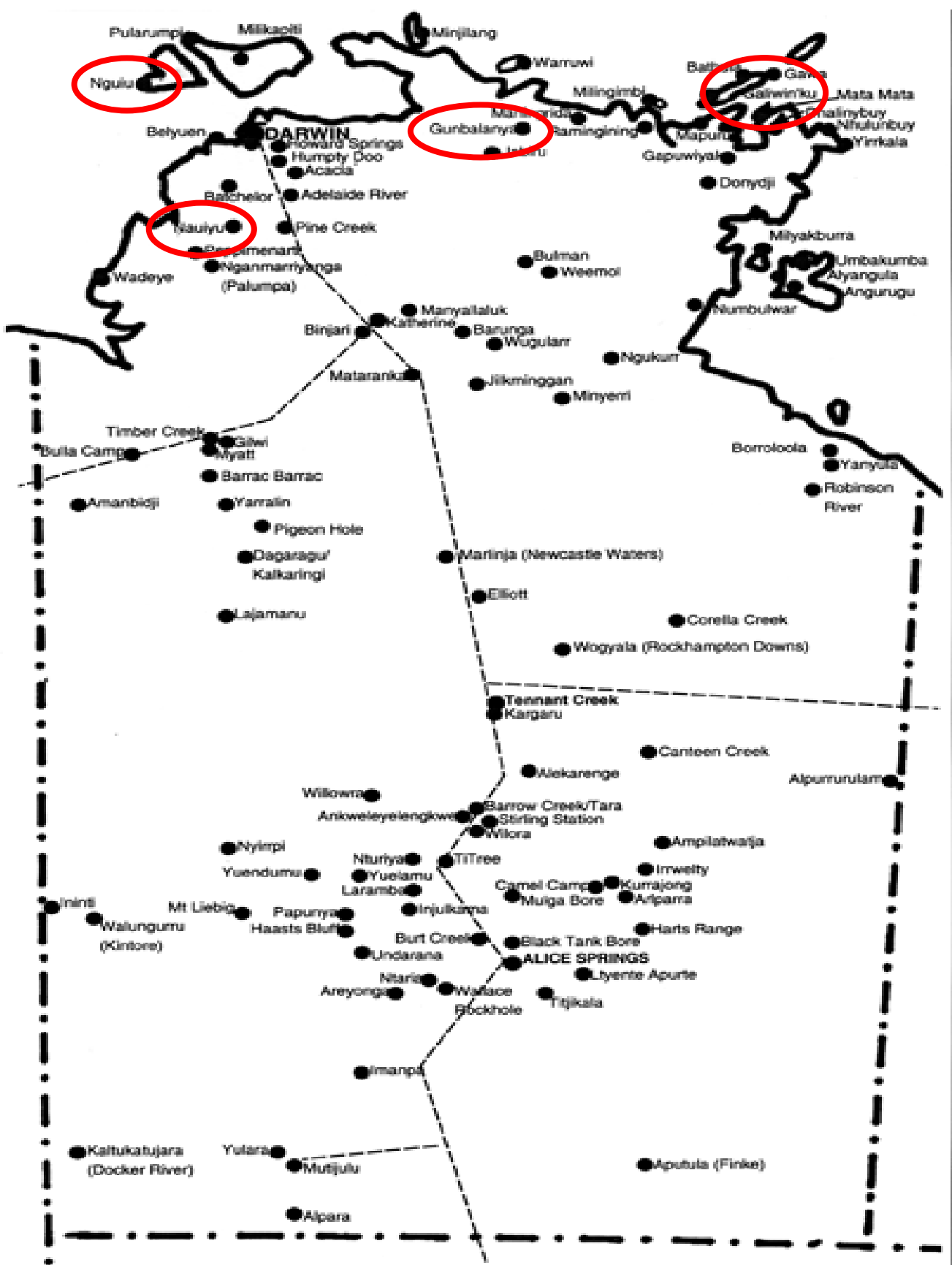
RATE Remote Area Teacher Education

SAL School of Australian Linguistics

TSS Text Structure Sequentialisation

SQUIN Single Question aimed at Inducing Narrative

Figure 1 Map of Northern Territory indicating Research Communities



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## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

The single greatest challenge for the Northern Territory Department of Education is to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students in partnership with Indigenous people and other agencies and jurisdictions (Collins, 1999 p. 1).

It is ten years ago since a comprehensive review of education delivery to Indigenous students in the Northern Territory. This review headed by the late former Senator Bob Collins endeavoured to establish key issues affecting educational outcomes on Indigenous children (Collins, 1999). It is reported that the review was the “most exhaustive consultation ever conducted with Northern Territory schools involving a wide range of interested individuals and organisations” (Collins, 1999, p. ix). While the 2000–2004 Indigenous Education Strategic Plan outlines some improvements in areas such as retention rates in schooling, increase in the number of Indigenous students achieving national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy, and an increase in the number of Indigenous students accessing and achieving in secondary school in remote communities of the Northern Territory, there is still a wide gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students’ achievements as indicated in Table 1.1.

**Table 1.1: Percentage of benchmark passes in government schools for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students 2004–5**

		<b>Remote Indigenous</b>	<b>Urban Indigenous</b>	<b>Non - Indigenous</b>
Reading	Year 3	20%	57%	87%
	Year 5	20%	67%	91%
Numeracy	Year 3	48%	80%	97%
	Year 5	16%	56%	89%

Source: Northern Territory Department of Employment, Education and Training, Annual Report 2004–5(2006, p. 42).

Regrettably, several issues continue to challenge Indigenous people and all Australians who have a stake in Indigenous affairs. Policies and reviews have so far failed to address the many issues confronting Indigenous Australians. This is evidenced in the latest Board of Enquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse report relating to remote communities in the Northern Territory which was released during the data collection for this study (Wild & Anderson, 2007). In July, 2006, the former Labor-led Chief Minister of the Northern Territory Government, Claire Martin, in responding to alleged sexual abuse in Aboriginal communities reiterated the stark contrasts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians even after so many reviews and attempts to address the problems facing Indigenous communities. She noted:

The gaps are such that it will take a national commitment, over a generation, to make a major difference to the disadvantage experienced by Indigenous Australians.....That's why I have called for a long term plan to improve housing, health, law and order, education and governance – Indigenous communities must also play their part (as cited in Wild & Anderson, 2007, p. 86).

The attempts of Federal, State and Territory governments to take shared responsibility to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous people have failed to make any significant progress. The early 1990s witnessed a significant change in Indigenous education and training with the introduction of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) intended to guide State and Territory governments' policies and programmes. The policy, articulating 21 long term goals, aimed at achieving equitable outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (MCEETYA, 1995). This was adopted by all Australian governments and recognised by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) (Appendix1). In the area of education, policy initiatives from the NT government outline as priority the active involvement of Indigenous communities in the education of children with the aim of delivering a strong and relevant education system that "gets results for Indigenous Territorians". School community partnerships have become an operational norm internationally and in Australia with the research literature accentuating the benefits of partnerships between schools, parents and the wider community (Boyd, 1997; Epstein, 2005; McInerney, 2002).

Debates about school community partnerships globally have increased significantly in the past decade (Desimone, 1999; Epstein, 1995, 2001) with calls for significant participation of parents and the wider community in school matters. In previous years, the participation of parents and the wider community in schools has been minimal due to the traditional principle that homes and schools were separate entities (Bhengu, 2007) that co-existed in educating children. Nonetheless, families and schools share a desire for students to succeed but are often uncertain about how to collaborate and support this achievement (Epstein & Sanders, 2006).

Calls for education reform in past years have sparked reframing the widely held view of school community partnerships (Epstein, 1995). This growing interest in promoting interdependence between schools and communities is attributed to a number of factors including, changing views of the role of schools, family demographics, appreciation of context, an interest in the development of children (Heath & McLaughlin, 1987) and a pressing need for additional resources to assist school institutions. Shore (1994) asserts that in addressing this need, schools would have to collaborate with their communities in a healthy co-existence. This growing interest in partnerships promoted research into distinct bodies of literature focusing on describing and understanding the nature, extent, determinants, and impact of parental involvement; others focused on describing and evaluating such involvements (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). Findings of such investigations have consistently linked successful student outcomes to parental involvement (Bhengu, 2007; Epstein, 1991), thus promoting the popular African proverb that “it takes a whole village to raise a child”. Consequently it has become a global trend and an acceptable fact that communities are a major part of school institutions, with parents and the wider community performing management functions that were previously the domain of central offices.

While these findings are encouraging, factors such as the role of the principal and the contexts in which such partnerships occur need to be examined. One of the key criticisms to have emerged in relation to Australian State and Territory policies is that “parents and families are treated as homogeneous groups of social equals, with similar beliefs, attitudes and skills (Australian Council of State Schools Organisation, 2004, p. 1). The context in Northern Territory Indigenous remote

community schools needs a closer examination in order to avoid the pitfalls of generalising discourses relating to school community partnerships.

## **1.2 CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH**

It is significant to bear in mind some characteristics of the wider NT context in which the study is located. As stated in the Indigenous Education Strategic Plan 2006-2009, the NT is a unique environment with:

Indigenous Territorians comprising 30% of the population [of approximately 200,000] most of whom live in remote communities spread across 134, 6200 square kilometres. Indigenous students represent 39% of the Territory Government student cohort; just 15% of working-aged indigenous Territorians had a mainstream job at the time of the 2001 census (Dept of Employment Education & Training, 2005, p.1).

The four communities in this study are very remote, located over 150kms from the nearest regional, urban, or town city. Compared to mainstream communities, facilities such as social and financial institutions, housing, and employment in these Indigenous remote communities are habitually in short supply, even non-existent in some. Reflective of colonial days, there is a strong non-Indigenous presence in many communities who provide necessities such as health, education, sports and other socio-economic activities.

Notwithstanding these influences, empirical evidence continues to show Indigenous cultures as significant and central to Indigenous life in numerous Indigenous communities in Australia (Cameron, 2005; Nolen, 1998), including the communities under investigation. These continue to espouse cultural practices such as traditional language speaking, observing kinship rules, and showing great sense of communal belonging (Nolen, 1998). Many traditional relationships are fostered and maintained through spiritual beliefs, family rituals, connections to the land, and need for wellbeing (Nolen, 1998; Trudgen, 2000). Even though Aboriginal groups do share similar cultural beliefs and practices, it is relevant to point out that each traditional group is unique with discrete cultural practices and beliefs. Further, it is important to note the different interpretations underlying the notion of communities where Indigenous people live. This does not in any way

represent cultural uniformity as many would want you to believe. Rather, communities represent a political construction originally aimed at rescuing Indigenous people from their heathen ways (Maddison, 2009; Nolen, 1998; Trudgen, 2000).

A primary concern nationally in Indigenous education over many years has been the complex factors that continue to plague Indigenous remote communities. Hughes (2008, p. 5) notes that “three generations of welfare dependence, poor education, and public housing have led to family and community dysfunction, so that teenage pregnancies, alcoholism, drug addiction, and crowded housing often undermine school attendance”. Three decades of policy initiatives ranging from assimilation to the current federal government intervention in the Northern Territory have delivered little difference to these policy initiatives with the intention of closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. To venture into finding a solution to any of these matters would require an enormous task. Indigenous education particularly in Northern Territory remote communities has deteriorated considerably over the years even with the concerted efforts from Federal and State and Territory governments to improve Indigenous education outcomes. As a way of committing to this concern, research into Indigenous educational issues continue to be a priority at both Federal and State/Territory levels. This research was attached to an Australian Research Council (ARC) (the peak Australian research body) linkage project that investigated Indigenous educational leadership issues in remote Indigenous NT community schools. Such a commitment points to the important role of educational leadership in Indigenous remote community schools.

Educational leadership issues in Indigenous schools are no different to other matters concerning Indigenous Australians. After almost thirty-five years of training in the Northern Territory, very few Indigenous people have aspired to educational leadership positions in remote schools. The women who have aspired to these positions have been in remote schools for over two decades and have dedicated their entire careers to improving themselves and the education of Indigenous children. Despite the multitude of responsibilities that community life demands, their commitment has been commendable. The five female Indigenous principals who collaborated in this study were born in the NT, grew up in their

communities, have all trained through Batchelor Institute in the Northern Territory and elsewhere in universities in Australia, and have worked in their schools for over 20 years commencing as Assistant Teachers and finally being appointed principals in their communities.

In the context of Indigenous remote communities the Department of Education and Training reports that there are 985 Indigenous communities with 51 homeland learning centres and 104 Indigenous languages and dialects registered by the NT Aboriginal Interpreter Service. Territory wide there are 188 schools (152 public and 36 private schools). Of this number 119 schools are located outside Alice Springs in Central Australia and Darwin in the Top End with 70% of Indigenous students located outside Alice Springs and Darwin (Department of Education and Training (DET), 2007).

Stewart (1994) notes educational leadership positions have always been the sacred domain of non-Indigenous people until the launch of a draft Aboriginalisation policy in the late 1980s aimed at appointing qualified Aboriginal teachers and administrators in positions previously held by non-Indigenous people. As a result Indigenous graduates from Batchelor Institute gradually aspired to educational leadership positions in the community schools where they have worked for more than two decades. Currently only seven out of all principals in Northern Territory schools are Indigenous, six women and one male at the time of this investigation. They are all located in Indigenous remote schools. It is within this leadership imbalance that Indigenous female principals are required to demonstrate effective leadership that involves community participation and collaboration.

Traditional literature in educational leadership is grounded in western thought, and research has indicated differences between theories of leadership and native worldviews (Johnson, 1997). Additionally, corresponding values have resulted in unique challenges for minorities in leadership positions who are constantly challenged by antithetical values that create a persona that is sometimes either not completely recognised in western circles or sometimes alienated at local community level (Fitzgerald, 2006). While leadership in western worldviews can be seen as authoritarian, individualistic, (Fitzgerald, 2003a; Johnson, 1997),

privileged and future oriented (Trujillo-Ball, 2003), leadership in Indigenous cultures is viewed as collective, interdependent, deeply connected to present, and of deep spirituality (Bond, 2004; Nolen, 1998; Trujillo-Ball, 2003; White, 2007). Current research on educational leadership advocates the need for culture specific leadership that fits the history and needs of the community it has served since leadership and life are interwoven (Trujillo-Ball, 2003). Johnson (1997, p. 269-270) cautions that “reducing leadership to behaviours without understanding the cultural beliefs and values, social conditions, historic influences and contexts as well as the individual behind the behaviours, trivialises the meaning of Native leadership”.

Though leadership theories may reflect some relevant leadership styles and behaviours, arguably, they are problematic in the sense that they have not widened the debate to include issues of ethnicity, colour, race and gender, and have been constructed from a western paradigm that ignores factors of cultural diversity. To ensure a more inclusive leadership discourse, there needs to be a shift towards a cultural diversity perspective (Banjunid, 1996; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Foster & Goddard, 2003; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998; Heck, 1998) that will provide a genuine opportunity to include minority voices that were hardly considered in the development of leadership theories. In the context of Northern Territory Indigenous remote community schools, any investigation into educational leadership and school community partnerships must take into consideration historical, socio-economic and cultural values that may influence leadership practice and partnership negotiations. The Indigenous Education Strategic Plan (2006-2009) advocates active partnerships between Indigenous parents, students and community schools funded by NT Department of Education, and Training (DET) through programs such as Remote Learning Partnerships, (Dept of Employment Education & Training, 2005) and Parent and Learning (PaL) (Hanrahan 2004). At a national level, similar programs also exist elsewhere in Australia, for example the Federal Government National Framework developed by Australian Council of State Schools Organisations – ACSSO, (2004) is fully committed to school community partnership initiatives.

Notwithstanding the 'good intention' underpinning such programs, there are disadvantages experienced by Indigenous school leaders, parents and families through school community partnership programs (Hanrahan 2004). Having taught Indigenous principals from many remote communities in the NT for ten years (1995-2005), the researcher is aware from students' stories of the dichotomy that exists in some schools between school authorities and community leaders on how partnership programs are initiated and promoted in remote communities. This situation is reflected in many bureaucracies that increasingly exercise greater influence in defending goals and policies and in mobilising greater support for or opposition to particular programs (Rizvi, 1986, as cited in Stewart, 1994). Thus school programs that mirror economic achievement are often arguably bureaucratic and, as Rizvi (1986, p. 27) notes, bureaucratic practices produce "technical rationality" - which could be an obstacle to mutual dialogue between school principals and system administrators. The current Northern Territory emergency response by federal government into child abuse in remote Indigenous communities is a glaring example of the suppression of basic human rights and a denial by the federal government to engage communities in decision-making (Maddison, 2009). During the course of this study, the federal government's national emergency intervention in the Northern Territory unleashed another blow to Indigenous Australians that the rhetoric of self determination was still very much a reality of their lives. This was an exemplification of systemic bureaucratic top-down decision making in stark contrast to consultation and full participation of Indigenous Australians on issues that affected their lives.

In August 2007 with the suspension of the Racial Discrimination Act (1975) the former Federal Minister for Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs revisited the cliché of desperately seeking a solution to "the Aboriginal problem" (White, 2007). As a result the government ordered the compulsory health screens for Indigenous children, abolished the Aboriginal Land permit system (a permission granted by Indigenous communities for anyone travelling to remote Indigenous communities), introduction of home ownership, suspension of Community Development Education Programs (CDEP), and the compulsory school attendance of children tied to welfare benefits. Inconsistent with international human rights standards the Howard government decided on a "heavy handed, ill-thought out, paternalistic and draconian" (Dodson, in Maddison,



2009, p.15) approach to save little children from their own people. During the data gathering for this study, as one participant regrettably commented, “these people have come in to make decisions for us”. The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Referendum in 1967 was an annihilation of Indigenous people’s rights to make decisions on matters directly affecting them.

### **1.3 THE RESEARCH PROBLEM**

Reviews and policy initiatives on Indigenous education in the NT and elsewhere in Australia (Harris 1990; Cameron, 2005; Collins, 1999) aim at restoring dignity to Indigenous Australians. A key objective of these reviews is to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students in an effort to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. One of the key initiatives at both the Federal and State/Territory levels has been building bridges between schools and communities that would involve partnerships and engage both parties in decision making regarding the education of Indigenous children (Beresford & Gray, 2006; Cameron, 2005; Collins, 1999). Consequently, recommendations from these reviews have led to numerous and significant policy changes in the educational, social and cultural discourses of community schools (Iffe, 2002). Governments have also recognised that the challenges regarding the improvement of Aboriginal education lie not only in policy and curricula developments, but also in negotiating effective partnership frameworks between schools and their communities and effective educational leadership (Beresford & Gray, 2006).

One of the proposed outcomes of the NT Indigenous Education Strategic Plan 2006 -2009 is to improve community and school partnerships (Appendix 2). The strategic plan notes a number of variables that affect the value of the school to the local community. Among others, these include; interference of school and education department system structural arrangements with the cultural obligations and community lifestyle; methods of teaching and the requirements of learning based on a western cultural context that can seem irrelevant to many Indigenous people, and, in some cases, too few Indigenous teachers and staff at the school to provide a visible link to the community.

It is also argued elsewhere that part of the problem is due to many partnership policies in Indigenous education still holding a limited conception of what constitutes an appropriate model of school community partnerships (Beresford & Gray 2006). As a result, government policies result in practices that fail to live up to their own rhetoric (Ashton & Cairney 2001). While the safety and well-being of all children is paramount, the Howard government's intervention two years ago introducing punitive coercive measures for non-attendance in remote schools is an attempt to shift the respect of the principal away from the family and community towards institutions. Indigenous principals thus find themselves in a tenuous position that leaves little room for partnership negotiations with communities.

Over the years, a number of recommendations have been identified that point to the need to create more effective partnerships between Indigenous communities and the education system (Cameron, 2005; Collins, 1999; Stewart, 1994). Such recommendations have emphasised the importance of negotiation on education to include Indigenous staff, parents and community leaders who have a primary responsibility for the welfare and education of Indigenous children. Increasingly, there have been calls for the involvement of Indigenous teachers and executives as part of the effort to improve school outcomes (Collins, 1999). Additionally, such recommendations have identified the critical role played by school principals in any meaningful involvement of Indigenous people. The anniversary of the referendum in Australian history witnessed an erosion of any sustainable partnerships as the Howard government's top-down intervention in NT remote communities introduced a new role for school principals who found themselves policing school attendance that further eroded shared responsibility and trust in school partnership negotiations.

In NT remote community schools, a small number of Indigenous school principals among the many principals in remote community schools are women (Nolen, 1998). Despite the NT government's decisive policies, as well as attempts to ensure cooperative partnerships between Indigenous schools and their communities, families and parents (DEST, 2004), problems of negotiating such partnerships persist (Collins, 1999; Beresford & Gray, 2006). Since school community partnerships continue to be a critical issue in Indigenous education, it

was imperative to research the problem from the perspectives of the Indigenous women principals. It sought answers to how they negotiate school community partnerships in an attempt to address the problem. It was in this context that this study was proposed and the following identified questions designed to address the problem:

The central research question:

1. How do Indigenous women principals negotiate partnerships between their schools and respective communities?

Arising from the central research question were the following:

2. What leadership skills and strategies do Indigenous women principals employ to encourage community involvement in schools?
3. What impact and influence does culture have in negotiating school community partnerships?

#### **1.4 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

The impetus for this study grew out of the ongoing relationship spanning the ten years the researcher has with the study participants. Discussions in workshops at Batchelor Institute and numerous visits to remote communities over this duration revolved around challenges in educational leadership practice and school community partnerships. In contrast to their non-Indigenous counterparts, it has been the researcher's experience that remote Indigenous women leadership functions extend far beyond the confines of the school environment. It is critical that in any debate or research on educational leadership the voices of Indigenous women educational leaders are represented. As a consequence, it was imperative that these issues be further explored from the perspective of the women principals who are at the forefront of negotiating school community partnerships.

Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how Indigenous women principals in remote Northern Territory community schools negotiate women educational leaders are represented. As a consequence, it was imperative that these issues be further explored from the perspective of the women principals

who are at the forefront of negotiating school community partnerships.

Thus, the purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate how Indigenous women principals in remote Northern Territory community schools negotiate partnerships with Indigenous remote schools and the communities. Notably, research into Indigenous issues over the years has not delivered much justice to Indigenous Australians. Arbon (2007, p. 178) believes that “approaches to research have been set within a context where western philosophies and western scientific positions on knowledge are legitimised and underpinned by dominant thinking”. This claim is consistent with Indigenous scholars and researchers who echo the sentiment that research conducted by non-Indigenous people, on and with Indigenous people have resulted in exploitation (Martin, 2003; Smith, 1999; White, 2007).

With this in mind, the researcher was mindful in this study to make sure that reference to contemporary thinking in social science would accommodate the voices of the Indigenous female principals in a context that would not compromise their perspectives or disempower them. In order to investigate this phenomenon the literature review focused on three major bodies that were relevant to the study and provided a framework that underpinned the research questions. These were:

1. Culture and society
2. Leadership skills and strategies, and
3. School community partnerships

Fundamental to understanding the school and community partnership negotiation process, it was necessary to construct a research design that would adequately accommodate the perceptions and meanings they would bring to the study based explicitly on their practice of school leadership and school community partnerships.

In searching for a range of values and ideology, there was an effort to bring to the fore influences such as social, cultural, and historical contexts that are important factors that could be considered in the discussion of knowledge claims. Hence,

social constructionism (Geertz, 1973) was considered as most appropriate in accordance with Indigenous worldviews. It was assumed in the study, that Indigenous female principals bring to their leadership practice their various social and cultural experiences that are critical to negotiating school community partnerships. Through a campfire metaphor, the study generated insights into leadership skills and strategies and the impact and influence of culture in negotiating school community partnerships and as a means of improving school community relationships in remote NT community schools. This metaphor has always had a significant place in the cultural activities of most Indigenous cultures globally that include spiritual, cultural, and social practices. This activity of 'storytelling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the "diversities of truth", within which the story teller rather than the researcher retains control" (Bishop, as cited in Smith, 1999, p.145). This claim is supported by Briskman (2007, p. 154) who believes "narrative research or oral histories or storytelling are powerful tools in capturing the voices of Indigenous peoples and placing an alternative to dominant accounts on the public record". Thus sitting round the campfire holds both a public and sacred significance, as a forum to inform, educate, and share knowledge through storytelling and oral instruction. As Ah Kit, an eminent Northern Territory Indigenous elder and former minister in the Martin Labor government succinctly puts it:

... I remember those campfires and they are my personal light on the hill I am working towards a future where we might gather around the campfire in the companionship of family and community...my work here in this place finds inspiration in that simplest of human activities: gathering around the campfire in the companionship of family and community, yarning about the past, talking about the present, and finding hope for all of us in the future (Ah Kit, 2002, n.p).

Ah Kit's reflection reveals one of the ways children acquire Indigenous systems of knowledge. In many Indigenous cultures it is through story telling around the campfire that young Indigenous children acquire fundamental traditional values, beliefs and relationships. These are vital ingredients that shape their attitudes and prepare them for adulthood, and also help them interact and relate meaningfully to their society.

As a technique in narrative interviewing, the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) was deemed suitable in gathering and analysing data from the five participants of this study. Drawing on gestalt theory BNIM focuses on “biography and its methodological and sociological elaboration to reconstruct a two-layered biographical structure of life history and life story” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 232).

## **1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH**

While documented achievements in Indigenous students’ performance in Northern Territory remote community schools reveal improvements in areas such as retention rates and increase in achieving benchmarks (Dept of Employment Education & Training, 2005), there is still a gap existing between educational performances of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Cameron, 2005). The Northern Territory Department of Education is committed to closing this gap through strategic alliances with schools and building strong relationships with families and communities. The Department of Education and Training Chief Executive Margaret Banks noted in this statement:

[that] in this day and age, excellent schooling requires high quality teaching, learning and strong school leadership. Principals and teachers need to form strong partnerships with parents and the wider school community. Nowhere is this more apparent than in a remote Indigenous community or township, where a good relationship between the school and the local community is a major foundation for educational success (Dept of Employment Education & Training, 2006, p. ii).

This statement has been endorsed in similar policy documents (Australian Directions in Indigenous Education, 2005-2008; Community Engagement Charter, 2005; Indigenous Education Strategic Plan, 2000-2004) related to Indigenous remote schools and their local communities are identified as an area of priority, this study was significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, the conventional notion of school community partnerships was problematised to provide a better understanding of leadership and school community partnerships in remote Indigenous contexts with a view to impacting on policy and practice at both the system and local level. Secondly, it made a unique contribution to the growing

body of knowledge on Indigenous women educational leadership practices and experiences. Thirdly, Australian Indigenous women principals, like other marginalised Indigenous minorities globally, had an opportunity to express their views, voices, and vision of educational leadership “not as a harmonious choir but as a cacophony of voices that celebrates distinctiveness” (Fitzgerald, 2003a, p. 12-13). Additionally, the study made a significant contribution in addressing the gap in the educational leadership literature and generated new knowledge about Indigenous women educational leaders and issues in negotiating school community partnerships. Essentially, the findings of this study will contribute to improved support structures for Indigenous principals in the practice of educational leadership and improve school community partnerships in remote communities.

## **1.6 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study investigated only a small sample, five Indigenous female principals, from four remote communities in the NT. It is the researcher’s choice to focus on women as educational leaders in order to generate literature in this much-needed field of study. Because there are so few Indigenous women in this position a larger sample was not possible.

As the focus was on remote communities in the Top End of the Northern Territory the results cannot be generalised beyond them as each Indigenous community is unique in its history, demography and composition. The results however provide ample diversity for enhancing our understanding of Indigenous women’s educational leadership practices in remote contexts.

The literature on Australian Indigenous women in educational leadership is scarce and the dearth of literature that exists internationally labels all Indigenous women as one category irrespective of geographical location, social circumstances, ethnicity and language (Fitzgerald, 2006; Nolen, 1998). As a result, this study relied predominantly on related work conducted overseas involving Indigenous women educational leaders and the dearth of research on Indigenous educational leadership in Australia. Despite its limitations, this study will make a unique contribution to educational leadership and school community partnerships.

It is possible that the researcher's previous experiences and access to some of the participants' educational and cultural thoughts and deliberations during their studies at Batchelor Institute limited her capacity to provide a thorough investigation, and perhaps advertently or inadvertently drew her to unwarranted and uncritical construction of conclusions of which the researcher was aware. In an attempt to counter this, rigorous methodology and ethical guidelines were employed to reduce this risk. Arguably, this previous knowledge of participants together with the established relationships between researcher and participants was a potential source of strength in this research. Without this the research was unlikely to be as deep or rich because an enterprise such as this relies on relationships of trust and reciprocity.

Additionally, since the researcher is not an Australian Indigene, this could have been a limiting factor in this study. However, a recognition and awareness of the differences of the researcher's heritage and cultural experiences compared with those of the participants led her to be cautious in influencing and or prompting participants in biased ways. However, there was a strong awareness of sharing a colonial and oppressive history as an Indigenous woman that provided a base from which she positioned herself to empathise and understand.

## **1.7 STRUCTURE OF THE THESIS**

The study researched Indigenous women school leaders in Northern Territory remote community schools and issues involved in negotiating school community partnerships. In order to explore the issues, the study was organised into seven chapters including this chapter which establishes the context of the study and the problem under investigation. It also identifies the purpose and significance of the study, its limitations, and the study structure.

Chapter Two presents a review of the relevant literature that underpinned the study, providing an overview of the history of education in remote Indigenous communities, with particular reference to western education and associated Territory and Federal policies. The notion of culture and society was central to the study as it was assumed that a multiplicity of factors had an influence on the



issue under investigation. A review of the literature indicated that a gap exists in the area of the practice of school leadership in Indigenous contexts. No studies have previously investigated issues relating to school community partnership negotiations within remote Indigenous community school context particularly involving Indigenous women principals.

An exploration of the literature on leadership uncovered that the models and concepts that have dominated the leadership literature over the years are largely from an Anglo-American paradigm that marginalises minority group voices. Furthermore, essentialised views on gender and leadership have marginalised Indigenous women by disregarding issues such as culture and context in the practice of leadership.

As a result it was critical to investigate the issues with the expectation that findings will provide a deeper understanding into these practices and afford some understanding on the issues. Such findings will have implications for a number of stakeholders with an interest in Indigenous education.

Chapter Three provides the research design and discusses the theoretical underpinnings and justification. It also includes information about the five participants in the study and a justification for selecting them. As research ethical considerations involving Indigenous Australians are considered of paramount importance the AIATSIS guidelines for any research into Indigenous issues are outlined as protocols adhered to in the research process.

Chapter Four details the individual stories of the women divided into lived life and told story as an outcome of the biographic narrative interpretive method. It is through the understanding of the socio-cultural and historical life of the women that we come to appreciate their subjective views in the narratives.

Chapter Five covers the analysis and findings which are discussed according to themes that emerged from the study. In Chapter Six, the challenges and often the pain associated with the practice of educational leadership, particularly issues regarding school community partnerships are presented.

Chapter Seven, as a concluding chapter, outlines the main lines of the argument, and suggests possible implications for various educational bodies. It also includes recommendations of the findings, and the researcher's final thoughts on the issues relating to the study.

## **CHAPTER 2      REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE**

### **2.1      INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a review of the literature to form a provisional framework in order to address the research questions outlined in Chapter 1. In undertaking any research, exploring and clarifying traditional concepts and perspectives from a sociological base is an essential starting point. It has been the norm in education and other fields to conceive of models of concepts from an ethnocentric Anglo-American cultural premise (Arbon, 2008; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2003a; Parker, 2004; Trujillo-Ball, 2003; White, 2007). Notably, such models have assumed that all people's experiences are the same and have therefore used research procedures from a single cultural lens to conjecture concepts that are understood and experienced differently in other cultures. It is only by exploring such universal western theories and practices that one can fully understand the gaps that need redressing in academic literature and thus attempt to make a significant contribution to the debate.

Formal education in Australia and most western countries have inherited a western process-oriented practice in design and implementation (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Dimmock, 2000; Duignan, 2006), with little consideration of the importance of culture and its role in the education of children in schools. It is common practice to design school models within the societal culture in which they have been developed. While there is a good argument that societal culture determines what is appropriate and inappropriate in schools, such ideological cloning can be damaging for schools in the twenty-first century where there are particularities of other cultures within the same country or between schools.

The concept of leadership, for example, is one that is difficult to embrace through a single socio-cultural lens simply because the practice of leadership is deeply related to the values, traditions and customs of the people and the context in which such a practice occurs (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2003b, 2004). In the area of school community partnerships it is expected that leaders accomplish functions in a school environment that is context driven. It is

erroneous and becomes contentious in assuming that all leadership practices in schools should be based on one dominant cultural model.

Firstly, definitions of culture, society and community will be examined. Secondly, the chapter examines the concepts of leadership and the various transitions within the field over a period of time with a further examination of gender and leadership, Indigenous leadership, Indigenous women and leadership, and finally educational leadership. Since the study examines how Indigenous female principals negotiate school community partnerships with their respective schools, discussion of the literature on school community partnerships internationally and in the Australian context will be undertaken. Contextualising leadership in Indigenous remote community schools requires an understanding of the history of education in Indigenous remote schools and the various policies that have impacted on such communities. In particular, policies that have impacted on education with a focus on the Northern Territory will be explored. Collectively, this literature provides the framework upon which the study examines how Indigenous female principals negotiate school community partnerships in Indigenous remote community schools.

## **2.2 CULTURE AND SOCIETY**

There is growing body of literature that emphasises the importance of culture and society in education (Cameron, 2005; Heck, 1998; United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), 2002; Quong & Walker, 1998). Others focus on the influence of culture in educational leadership (Fitzgerald, 2003a; Foster & Goddard 2003; Nolen, 1998; Stewart, 1994; Wicks, 1999). Generally, culture and society are terms that do not lend themselves to a normative universal definition - they comprise many definitions. Their origins come from anthropology and sociology respectively. From an anthropological perspective culture refers to a socially constructed phenomenon that “defines clear beliefs and rules which prescribe how we relate to others” (Vecchio, Hearn & Southey 1996, p. 46). Culture as defined by Dimmock and Walker (2005, p. 7), constitutes “a whole way of life of the members of a society or group of people”. In keeping with these views James (1999, p. 194) proposes that:

Culture consists of a dynamic and complex set of values, beliefs, norms, patterns of thinking, styles of communication, linguistic expressions and ways of interpreting and interacting with the world that a group of people has developed to assure its survival in a particular physical and human environment (James, 1999, p. 194).

Subscribing to this view, Edgar Schein one of the most prominent theorists of organisational culture defines culture as:

a pattern of basic assumptions-invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration-that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (Schein, 1991, p.9).

Schein's (1991) extensive work on organisational culture extends this definition further to include the influence of leadership in creating organisation cultures. In his view culture and leadership are two sides of the same coin, emphasising the only thing that leaders do is to create and manage culture. Hence in a school context "one of a leader's most decisive function may well be the creation, management, and if when they become necessary – the destruction of culture" (Schein, 1991, p. 2).

Beare (1989, p. 173, cited in Dept of Education, 2002) draws attention to the notion of school culture to include "manifestations of organisations such as buildings, and how they look, the people in them, their behaviours, what they say and do, their art, songs, language, and knowledge - all constitute their culture". He goes on to argue, that a school culture begins to show in:

the way the school is run, its furnishings, its rewards and punishment, the way its members are organised and controlled, who has power and influence, which members are honoured, which behaviours are remarked upon and so on. All these things create the climate in which children learn, and which is powerfully pervasive in those learnings (1989, p.19).

Consistent with this analysis, culture is a critical ingredient in determining people's behaviours, attitudes, and activities in school organisations and other environments where people work. Subscribing to this view, Hallinger and Leithwood (1998, p. 107) suggest "that societal culture exerts a significant influence on [school] administrators beyond that of the specific organisation's culture". These definitions of culture are seen as having an interrelationship with the definition of society.

Defining society is as complex as defining culture. The compact Oxford English Dictionary of Current English (2005) defines society as:

Noun; 1. the aggregate of people living together in a more or less ordered community; 2. a particular community of people living in a country or region and having shared customs, laws, and organisations.

Geertz (1973) suggests that society is the actual arrangement of social relations while culture is made up of beliefs and symbolic forms. Thus human societies are characterised by patterns of relationships between individuals. In this context members of a society may be from different ethnic groups, for example, Mendes and Limbas, or a broader cultural group, for example western society. Defining society in this context (Bordas, 2007) notes that bonds of cultural identity, and social solidarity are some of the elements that are considered. Hence, societal culture is exhibited in the way individuals within a particular society relate to each other in accordance with the customs and values that they share. This may then lead one to think of the interrelationships between societal cultures, the organisation of schooling and the practice of leadership (Dimmock & Walker, 2005).

Theory and research investigating broader social cultures (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998) have directed attention to ways in which culture manifests itself within organisations. The landmark study of Geertz Hofstede from 1968 through 1972 involving 117, 000 IBM managers, employers, and supervisors across fifty countries and three multi county regions offers a useful analysis. Hofstede (1991, p. 5) defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another". This

definition has complex implications for the workplace where the dominant majority transfer cultural patterns of primary socialisation with little or no recognition of race, ethnicity, culture or gender. The study focused mainly on work-related values and identified five basic cultural dimensions that illustrate differences across the fifty nations he studied. These are:

- Power/distance,
- Uncertainty/avoidance,
- Individualism/collectivism,
- Masculinity/femininity and
- Long-term orientation (Hofstede, 1991, p.5).

Implicit in Hofstede's study is the notion that, while culture does not totally determine a person's behaviour in any given cultural situation, it serves as a powerful framework "in which each person comes to understand themselves and the reality in which they can act" (Vecchio et al, 1996, p. 688).

Although his work has been widely recognised as an influential piece of cross-cultural research, the empirical validity of Hofstede's framework has been widely critiqued in cross-cultural scholarly circles on the grounds that the cultural dimensions are too general and over simplistic (Nicholson, 1991; Roberts & Boyacigiller, 1984). Others have cautioned that the model dimensions may be a product of his time. Nevertheless, these cultural dimensions are widely acknowledged and have been used extensively and successfully in a variety of empirical and conceptual studies across numerous disciplines (Yates & Cutler, 1996) and continue to be accepted as valid, reliable, and stable.

Dimmock and Walker (2005) in their extensive work on cross-cultural educational leadership present a framework that aims to promote an understanding of the interface between societal cultures, educational leadership, schools and their environments. Such interrelationships are critical in the discussion of teaching, learning and the practice of educational leadership particularly in cross-cultural settings. The model presents two interrelated parts; the first part, which constitutes schools, has four elements:

- organisational structures
- leadership, management and decision processes
- curriculum and,
- teaching and learning.

The second part applies at a societal regional level with a set of six dimensions:

- power-distributed/power-concentrated
- group oriented/self oriented
- consideration/aggression
- proactivism/fatalism
- generative/replicative and
- limited relationship/holistic relationship.

At an organisational culture level, the dimensions are:

- process/outcome oriented
- person/task oriented
- professional/parochial
- open/closed
- control/linkage,
- formal/informal
- tight/loose
- direct/indirect and,
- pragmatic/normative. (p. 26-28).

The model is developed with the understanding that there is an interrelationship between societal cultures on the one hand and the organisational culture on the other. This framework is useful in the investigation of complex school communities such as remote Indigenous communities where a multiplicity of cultures exists within power structures that are bounded by the cultural values of the coloniser. Additionally, Dimmock and Walker (2005) note the usefulness of the framework in targeting educational leadership as expressed through the dimensions and



elements of schooling. It is useful in explaining why educational leaders behave the way they do in performing their roles in different cultures. Dimmock & Walker's (2005) framework reflects some of the emphasis on Schein (1991) who has done some extensive work on organisational culture. In Schein's view organisational culture has three critical constituents: "shared learning; manifestations of shared learning that are stable; and a capacity for integrating disparate elements into a whole" (as cited in Dimmock & Walker, 2005, p. 64). In the context of the study Indigenous principals work within environments that are largely controlled by central systems that are premised on Anglo-American worldviews where the culture of such worldviews is transmitted in organisations (such as the schools in this research) through strategy, structure, processes, reward and control systems, and daily routines (Schein, 1991). With more and more school reforms, schools are expected to work in partnership with their immediate communities. In *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, Freire (1972, p. 31) argues that "the solution is not to integrate them into the structure of oppression, but to transform that structure so that they can become beings for themselves".

Individuals are born into a culture and introduced to primary socialisation through that culture very early in life. Duignan, (2006, p. 75) notes that "values are important for determining our sense of who we are". Duignan (2006) further states that "the task of developing the child and the development of cultural values "over time is influenced by family, education, peers and a whole range of experiences, both good and bad, that have helped shape us" (p. 75). As such, this socialisation process has defined principles that must be followed and obeyed.

Duignan's (2006) claim has serious implications for societal and organisational culture with particular reference to formal education for Aboriginal people where institutions are largely influenced by western cultural and intellectual frameworks. (Arbon, 2008; Cameron, 2005; Maddison, 2009; Martin, 2003). Organisational culture is a portion of a broader societal culture (Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998).

Within the broader societal culture, organisations exist to exercise their unique internal cultures. Simply defined, organisation culture according to Vecchio et al, (1996, p. 688) is "the shared values and norms that exist in an organisation that are taught to employees". Thus, such norms may vary from organisation to

organisation within the same geopolitical boundary. Through formal education, schools transmit values, norms, customs and expectations of wider societal culture. They are dynamic and organic systems with parts that are interrelated (Fullan, 2001), with nested levels from micro (school) to macro (national). Dimmock (2000) notes the importance for “studying the relationship between schools and their micro and macro environments”(p. 61) as knowledge of such relationships is important; as children make the transition to school life they further develop a mental programming through the curriculum that is largely prescribed by the state. McInerney and McInerney, (as cited in Vukovic, 2008, p. 2) note that primary socialisation which is “the internalization or adoption of values or attitudes as well as preferences and habit patterns in the early years of life, leaves a sustaining impact on the individual”. Exporting western values into schooling disadvantages children who are of a different culture with their own beliefs, common linguistic heritage, attitudes, perceptions and mores (Vukovic, 2008).

Two broad interconnected themes of society and culture provide some understanding of how one is influenced by the other with a more complex relationship as other factors such as socio-political, organisational culture and subcultures interact. Schools exist within communities and as communities are influential elements in society there is the expectation that the cultural influences of such communities are likely to influence schooling. Nonetheless, communities are a microcosm of the larger society that influences the processes and patterns of schools. Hence, school leadership requires a closer investigation of the context in which such leadership is practiced, and of how themes such as culture and society influence and impact on the negotiation of partnership which are at the heart of the exercise of leadership in the Indigenous communities under consideration.

### **2.3 DEFINING COMMUNITY**

The concept of community needs to be defined in order to contextualise the topic within a school community partnership. The word community, like ‘culture’ and ‘society’ is a concept that has been imported into the social science discourse and has had immense difficulty in arriving at a generic definition. Used in a multitude

of contexts, the definition has always had a contested interest. Thus one can refer to the business community, or the church community, with each community believing in common interests that bind them together. Notably, it is members who develop boundaries of understanding and definition and ascribe features that are easily apparent with a specific group yet untenable in others. For clarity and understanding it is essential to define 'community' since it is created from multiple perspectives. Starting with the Macquarie dictionary:

community is n. 1. a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government and have a historical and cultural heritage. 2. a group of people within a society with a shared ethnic or cultural background (Macquarie Concise Dictionary, Australia, 3rd ed. , 1998).

Within such a definition the community could refer to a whole country where irrespective of the presence of multicultural communities within it, there are common elements that bind them together as an entity. On the other hand, a village community could refer to features such as kinship, spirituality, and customs.

McInerney (2002) defines community as "a social group with similar interests, social structures, values and life styles" (p. 3). In the context of schooling, scholars have used the concept of sense of community to explain or highlight social differences between schools (Boyd, 1997). From an educational perspective Tierney (as cited in McInerney, 2002), defines schools as social organisations embedded in communities of difference, and learning as a profoundly social act. Education scholars such as Sergiovanni (1994) have highlighted the "centrality of shared values and beliefs in school communities, where, in communities, we rely more on norms, purposes, values, professional socialisation, collegiality and natural interdependence" (p. 217). He notes the centrality of shared values and beliefs in school communities.

Stefkovich and Shapiro's (2002) research on school administrators, focuses on collectives with which principals identify. They viewed values and beliefs among a group of people to be an important aspect of ethnic and/religious, professional and personal communities. Epstein (2004; p. 12) describes a "school learning

community as one that includes educators, students, parents, and community partners who work together to improve the school and enhance students' learning opportunities". As such the term community encapsulates the school environment and organisations within the external environment with a common interest in education (Dimmock, 2000).

Sergiovanni (1994) offers a more complex view of school communities which highlights the centrality of shared values and beliefs:

In communities the connection of people to purposes and the connections among people are not based on contracts but on commitments. Communities are socially organised around relationships and the felt interdependence that nurtures them. Instead of being tied together to purposes of bartering arrangements, this social contract bonds people together in special ways and binds them to concepts, images and values that comprise a shared idea structure. This bonding and binding are the defining characteristics of schools as communities. Communities are defined by their centres of values, sentiments and beliefs that provide the needed conditions for creating a sense of *we* from a collection of *I* ...In communities we create our own social lives with others who have a similar intention to ours...Communities are confronted with issues of control. But instead of relying on external control, communities rely more on norms, purposes, values, professional socialisation, collegiality and natural interdependence (p. 217).

Sergiovanni's (1994) view of school communities has implications for definitions of school communities as defined by Davis and Karr-Kidwell (2003). In their research on school leaders and community, they note that communities encapsulate the external environment. In their view, schools by their very nature have a "culture that is powerful, with an underlying force that shapes the attitudes, activities, and interactions of the school community and neighbourhood" (p. 5). As such there has been much interest in the sociological research on schooling with a particular reference to the relationship of the school and community. Essentially, if relationships between school and community involve political, institutional and network dimensions (Carrol & Carrol, 2001), there are implications for the relationships of local communities and larger organisational communities. Plucker (2000) notes that both are interdependent and critical to the success of schooling.

In an Indigenous Australian context, Remote communities in Australia's Northern Territory today are places with people from many different cultures and language groups. During the colonisation period, because there were minimal consultations or negotiations with Aboriginal people in the establishments of missions, groups were forced through government policies and police actions to live together and conform to the dominant European culture, following the national trend in loss of culture, language and identity (Nolen, 1998). The term "community" Maddison (2009) claims, came into use to describe areas with a predominantly Aboriginal population in the early 1970s with the Whitlam government policy of self-determination, to replace terms such as "missions" and "reserves" (p. 148).

An Aboriginal community for example is often referred to as a community with inherent "allegiances and natural solidarity" (Maddison, 2009, p. 144) with the notion that Indigenous people are one and the same people even though they are a diverse group with many different cultures and language groups. In contemporary Australian society this misunderstanding of whole communities or community organisations places enormous strains on Aboriginal people. To engage fully in a definition of Aboriginal communities, the historical context in which they exist must be fully understood. Maddison (2009) is of the view that the term community has become central to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous political rhetoric (p. 147). As such the term has been used to represent "an Aboriginal nation" (Peters-Little, 2000, p. 2) and sometimes in political rhetoric the term community is used as a benchmark in the provision of infrastructure and services. Aboriginal communities are either demonised or romanticised depending on the circumstances (Maddison, 2009). She further notes that people in the wider Australian society tend to demonise Aboriginal communities as being riddled with dysfunction, welfare dependency, violence, alcoholism, petrol sniffing, and child abuse, while others have a romanticised view of Aboriginal communities represented in the caring, sharing and solidarity among Aboriginal people. What is normally left out of the equation is the fact that such Aboriginal communities are comprised of different kinship groups that prior to colonisation would have occupied different territories of different language groups, and of people dispossessed of their land (Nolen, 1998). These factors place enormous strain on relationships among people as unresolved conflicts resurface with tension on all

sides. Contextualising this notion of community, most remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory fall within this definition.

Nationally, the use of the term remote is derived from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia (ARIA) under a classification defined by the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care. For legislation and policy reasons, it became imperative that a standard definition be adopted nationally. Consequently, five divisions were developed in the classification namely; major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote, and very remote. This classification takes into account geographical distances from all essential services. Most regions where Indigenous principals are located in the Northern Territory are classified as remote or very remote.

The Indigenous school communities in this study are typical examples of remote and very remote in the Top End, located over 150 km from their nearest regional, urban town, or city. Maningrida for example in the Top End of the Northern Territory is a large Aboriginal remote community by NT Aboriginal community standards that is home to approximately 1,800 people with twelve distinct language groups. Facilities equivalent to those enjoyed by mainstream communities of this size, for example social, educational, financial institutions, housing, and employment, are often in short supply or non-existent. There is a strong non-Indigenous presence among providers of service such as health, education, and commercial services.

## **2.4 LEADERSHIP**

Leadership is the pivotal source behind all organisations (Bennis & Nanus, 2003). Historically, the concept of leadership is “locked in a time-warp, constrained by imaging archetypes of heroic warriors and wise but distant fathers” (Sinclair, 1998, p. 2), with a focus attempting to ascribe characteristics to great historical men such as Moses, Gandhi, Churchill and Roosevelt thus “failing to speak to women in the way it does to men” (Sinclair, 1998, p. vii). Perspectives on leadership also have roots that are very representative of the values and practices of their time and of disciplines such as business and education (Bass, 1990). This makes it

difficult to synthesise the research connected, as it is, to such multidisciplinary and most recently, multidimensional constructs such as gender, race, colour, and ethnicity. Additionally, changes over time in social and political complexities extending back beyond the twenty first century have created an intricate web of expectations that defy being defined as a coherent construction. Attempting to prescribe and present a smorgasbord of qualities and capabilities utilising a single lens, makes such a definition impotent and highly questionable. Smith and Peterson (1988, p. 8) argue that “an acceptable definition of leadership needs to be sound both in theory and practice, able to with stand changing times and circumstances and be comprehensible and integrative rather than atomic and narrow in focus”.

Dubrin (2000) cites 35,000 definitions of leadership in academic literature, yet the concept remains ‘elusive and enigmatic’ (Avery et al, 2004). Even though it is one of the most fascinating topics in organisational behaviour (Owens, 1995), there is no unitary explanation of what it means to exercise leadership in contemporary society. The following section provides a general overview of the evolution of leadership based on theoretical studies.

The collective body of leadership theory and research in the last hundred years distinguishes among traits (Stogdill, 1974) behavioural, (House, 1971) situational, (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977), process (Burns, 1978) and quite recently, values (Segiovanni, 1992; Starratt, 2004) with related theories of servant (Greenleaf, 1977) and authentic (Duignan, 2002) leadership practices. Though these theories reflect some good leadership styles and behaviours, in my view they are problematic in the sense that they have not opened the debate to include issues of diversity that include ethnicity, colour, race and gender and have been constructed from a western paradigm (Anglo-American) that denies the inclusion of marginalised groups (Fitzgerald, 2003a; 2003b). To ensure a more inclusive leadership discourse there has to be a shift towards a cultural diversity perspective (Banjunid, 1996; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Foster & Goddard, 2003; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998; Heck, 1998) that will provide a genuine opportunity to include minority voices since traditional notions are “deeply embedded in cultural mythology” (Sinclair, 1998, p. 179). Unfortunately, these voices were not

considered in the development of leadership theories. Eight leadership theories developed over the years will briefly be discussed.

The *Great Man* theory prevalent in the 1930s and 1940s created the foundation from which the current multifaceted body of leadership literature has emerged, hence marginalising 'Great Women' such as Joan of Arc, Elizabeth 1, and Helen of Troy from this practice in its evolution. This proposition that one man embodies the characteristics of leader (Bass, 1990) reinforces a concept of leadership as primarily a masculine reality. Essentially, leadership was the realm of great men who were portrayed as heroes and considered successful warriors. While this view had credibility in previous eras, it tended to reinforce the concept of the leader as a person endowed with unique and superior qualities that differentiated him from his followers. The need to identify these qualities, gave rise to *trait theories*.

Rost, (1991, in Avery et al, 2004) explained how leadership became linked to personality, social background and abilities and how these were used as barometers for predicting the success or failure of potential leaders. The trait theory as it became known focuses almost exclusively on the leader and his (her) biological attributes and characteristics, such as height, intelligence, charisma, strength, personality and physique (Bass, 1990). These attributes were deemed significant in choosing political and organisational leaders during the Second World War, and later to run the great industrial organisations that came to dominate the Cold War period. Some problems with trait theory are that firstly, with over 100 personality attributes of successful leaders identified in the literature there seems to be no consistent pattern. Moreover, studying personalities is problematic as the list of traits is unending and researchers seem to disagree on which should take precedence. Secondly, while physical and constitutional factors such as height, weight, appearance, physique, energy and the like may assist an individual to rise to leadership positions as in the military or police, these characteristics have not been proved to be good predictors of performance. These attributes are also not generalisable as requirements for leadership positions in other organisations. Moreover, these factors are also linked with other leadership concepts such as situational factors thus making this argument flawed. Thirdly, the multidisciplinary nature of leadership requires that leadership is practised



within the diverse contexts and this calls for diverse skills. For these reasons researchers came to regard the trait theory as unproductive in describing and predicting successful leadership.

Because of the failure of the trait model in predicting successful leaders, studies in leadership switched to the structures and functions of groups. This gave rise to *behavioural theories* (Blake & Mouton, 1964) focusing on what leaders do and how they do it rather than the attributes that leaders possess. Researchers such as Blake & Mouton (1964) believed that effective leaders assist followers in achieving goals within the organisation through relationships. They identified leadership styles in *decision-making such as autocratic, democratic, consultative and participative*. Nonetheless behavioural theories failed to explain how leaders behave in different situations, or to acknowledge the idiosyncratic characteristics of individuals. This led to the discovery of contingency models of leadership.

*Contingency or situational theories* focus on dynamic relations between the leader, the followers, and the situation (Hersey & Blanchard, 1977; Yulk, 1989). Hoy and Miskel (1991, p. 270) note “leadership effectiveness depends on the fit between personality characteristics, and behaviour of the leader.” These situational variables permit leader behaviours and characteristics to be effective in a given situation such as the nature of the task to be performed by the group or the nature of the external environment. There is significant value in theories of contingency and situational leadership. However, Yulk, (2002, p.13) notes that “different attributes will be effective in different situations, and that the same attribute is not optimal in all situations”. Critics like Sergiovanni, (1990, p.19) maintains “too much attention is given to the instrumental and behavioural aspects of leadership and not enough to the symbolic and cultural ones” which creates a problem for the invitation of a diverse group to the leadership debate.

In the late 1960s a new leadership discourse emerged that called for leaders to be agents of change, by transforming organisations. This was a period of increasing turmoil and turbulence and a time of fundamental change. In a pioneering study of male political leaders, Burns (1978) developed what became known as process leadership theories with two major variants: *transactional and transformational*

*leadership* positioned at extremes of the leadership continuum adding a moral dimension to the study of leadership. According to Burns (1978) transactional leaders are involved in a process whereby one individual, in this case the leader, uses intentional influence to guide, structure and facilitate activities and relationships. Here leaders and followers interact and negotiate agreements; they are engaged in a transaction where both rewards and incentives are an essential part of this bargaining.

In contrast, the transformational approach reframes issues and appeals to followers' values and their sense of higher purpose. It aims to articulate problems in the current system, challenges the status quo and has a compelling vision of what a new society could be and adopts a long range broad perspective. The leaders here are visionary, charismatic, and inspirational. Beare, Caldwell and Millikan (1989) argue that transformational leadership is far more powerful and productive as it motivates and empowers followers. This is further supported by Leithwood et al (1999) who reported that transformational practices contribute to the development of capacity and commitment. Other studies examining the success of transactional and transformational approaches in leadership styles have found more positive outcomes related to transformational leadership in organisations (Gardner, 1997; Seltzer & Bass, 1990; Yammarino et al, 1993) Clearly, process theories do have some gains over trait and behavioural theories but may fall victim to 'Machiavellian' tactics in transactional approaches and limit followers in taking the initiative to some extent. Fine and Buzzanell (2001) in their review of leadership theories, including Burns (1978) process theories, concluded that most approaches are essentially 'manstories' promoting the identity of Anglo-American ethnocentric perspectives.

Moving beyond this, researchers such as Greenleaf (1977) began searching for other ways of conceptualising the topic. Greenleaf (1977) pioneered the concept of *servant leadership* that involves "increased service to others, taking a more holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, within and between an organisation and the greater community, sharing of power and decision making and a group oriented approach to work in contrast to the hierarchical model" (Kelly, 1995, p. 196, cited in Nolen 1998, p.57). Fine and Buzzannell, (2001, p.143) are critical of Greenleaf's generalisation of "the experience of servant,

maintaining organisational structures and never questioning the ways in which gender relations may make servant leadership a very different process for men and women". It is however interesting to note that Holiday (2006), a Native American woman in her study of native American female leaders, embraces servant-leadership as a theory that favours Indigenous characteristics such as maintaining the survival of their people, thus putting the needs of people foremost rather than the needs of leaders. The findings are consistent with Nolen (1998) in her study on Australian Indigenous leadership perspectives and Fitzgerald's, (2006) study on Indigenous Australian, New Zealand Maoris and Native Canadian female educational leaders.

In the late 1990s *authentic leadership* emerged as a leadership theory. This theory focuses on the leader demonstrating a commitment to values such as "credibility, believability, trustworthiness, ethics and morality, in the behaviour of leaders, managers, and their followers" (Duignan & Bhindi, 1997, p.196). Since a critical aspect of authentic leadership is to articulate values to followers, it is essential that leaders also serve. The current global climate is calling for leaders with moral values. One has to recall the fall of giant corporations such as Enron to realise the urgent need for a new kind of leader; charisma and ability are no longer the only criteria for demonstrating good leadership. Leaders of such corporations have shocked the business world by their unethical behaviours, a call for authentic leaders with characteristics such as integrity, commitment to building enduring organisations, true to core values, and service to society.

Arguably, the debate on leadership theories that has dominated the leadership literature over the years is largely from a mainstream paradigm which marginalises minority group voices. Although the theories do offer some practical benefits they are more suited to western-oriented organisations, and therefore should not be generalised beyond western management organisations and institutions. Leadership discourses should commence from a platform that embraces a negotiated forum where meaning is constructed from multifaceted paradigms, and it should embrace a non dominant cultural organisational perspective which is gender and culture inclusive. Leadership theories, as reported by Heifetz, (2001, p. 1) "lack comprehensiveness and [demonstrate] minimal if any integration" of other perspectives.

## 2.5 GENDER AND LEADERSHIP

The argument for and against gender differences in leadership have been a constant topic in research literature (Holiday, 2006; Johnson, 1997; Sinclair, 1998). Empirical studies contributing to this debate have mainly focused on leadership experiences in a variety of fields such as business (Kanter, 1989; Rosener, 1990) and education (Astin & Leland, 1991; Holiday, 2006; Johnson, 1997). Much of this debate has been locked within essentialist stereotypes of masculine and feminine gender which are no longer credible (Collard & Reynolds, 2005).

The literature on leadership often portrays women's leadership in essentialised ways and suggest that women often exercise traits described as "flexible, supportive, nurturing, collaborative, collegial, and socially just" (Fitzgerald, 2003a, p.10) while men are modeled on particular hegemonic male images of being strong, able to make the hard decisions, being independent, taking unilateral action (Blackmore, 2005, p. 187). To date empirical studies are inconclusive on such prescriptive oppositional debates, often couched in early leadership theories that have been generally gender blind.

While pursuing the tangential debate on gender and leadership, Nieva and Gutek (1981) in their book *Women and Work*, report that "traditionally women are seen as lacking the necessary attributes for leadership. They are believed to be compliant, submissive, emotional, and having great difficulty in decision making" (p. 83). These attributes unfortunately are not promoted positively for leadership in the traditional masculine hegemonic leadership discourse. Nieva and Gutek (1981) further reviewed studies on gender and leadership and concluded that it is dependent on who is doing the observing and reporting thus pointing to reflections of social perceptions.

A study carried out by Astin and Leland (1991) of seventy-seven women leaders in leadership positions in 1950s, 60s, and 70s from educational institutions, government agencies, and other organisations utilised a four step model – leader, context, leadership processes, and outcomes. In their findings, the leaders viewed

leadership “as integral to social change” (p.156); attributes such as consistent performance, passionate commitment, and collective action characterised leadership experiences of their respondents.

In a study examining the leadership behaviour of women and men leaders within the fields of government, business, and other professions, Rosener, (1990) found three attributes that were characteristic of women leaders which she defined as “components of interactive leadership” (p. 120); these were “sharing power and information, encouraging participation, and enhancing self worth” (p. 120). Her findings challenged the traditional command-and-control hierarchical model of leadership which had gained credibility in earlier leadership studies as the only successful way of practice.

In Hegesen’s (1990) study of leadership narratives of women, he discovered that the women were unable to compartmentalise their lives in the manner of their male respondents. Additionally, Hegesen (1990) found that the women routinely acknowledged the importance of issues such as relationships, mentoring, childcare, and participatory leadership in shaping their leadership approaches and practices. Mintzberg (1973) utilising a similar research method as Hegesen (1990) in his study of male managers found that men viewed their work lives and personal lives as separate realities.

Thus research predicated upon essentialised views of gender as often predominated the literature on leadership. Such views have not considered components such as ethnicity, culture and the context in which leadership is practised. Contemporary studies have emerged that no longer give credibility to such ideology. Factors such as gender, race, ethnicity and context must be considered in any debate on the practice of leadership.

## **2.6 INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP**

An extensive search of the leadership literature identified few contextual and empirical studies on Indigenous people and leadership (White, 2007). However, traditional patterns of leadership in Aboriginal societies have existed for as long as

the societies have been in existence (Nolen, 1998). A well organised structure was conferred through kinship structures and clan membership, age, wisdom and knowledge (Nolen, 1998). Trudgen (2000) claims that in Yolngu traditional society:

Clans select their political leaders not as a law unto themselves but as appointed keepers of the *Madayin* way, protecting the individual and collective political rights of the clan citizen-especially the rights to their own clan estates and resources against trespassers or thieves (p. 14).

The young were educated through ceremonies that taught them the *Madayin* way and such children grew up with an understanding of traditional laws as kinship and clan relationships. All life was governed by relationships that included relationships with the land and sea, relationships with families, relationships with neighbouring groups and relationships with ancestral beings (Arbon, 2008; Isaacs, 1980; Martin, 2003). Although the scant writings on Indigenous traditional leadership report the dominance of male authority and leadership, women had their own patterns of authority and leadership in Aboriginal communities (White, 2007). Yunupingu, (1989) defines three types of leadership within traditional Aboriginal society – “the born leader, the male leader, and lastly, the leader-in-training” (p. 15). However, he goes on to question whether teachers see themselves as leaders-in-training.

As well as these studies, there are numerous Dreaming stories that tell the leadership stories of men and women who protested against white invaders of their courage as warriors, and later, the early freedom fighters who petitioned the King of England for Aboriginal representation in parliament (Dodson, 2003, in White, 2007).

Similarly, (Maddison, 2009) notes that:

[in] traditional Aboriginal culture, there is a direct relationship between responsibilities to land and an individual’s cultural seniority and leadership. While power was not evenly distributed throughout traditional Aboriginal society, neither did the patterns of social organisation allow for an absolute monopoly on power or cultural knowledge. Political authority is accorded to senior men and women who gain ceremonial standing and political autonomy by fulfilling their obligations. These leadership rights do not extend

beyond a leader's own country or nation. Power was often exercised communally, with ultimate authority resting with a group of elders and delegated authority being carried by those with particular relationships to kin and country. Leadership in these terms was not seen as a reward but as a responsibility, in contrast to many non-Aboriginal notions of leadership which are more focused on "winning office" (p. 95).

This was the pattern in many Aboriginal communities prior to colonisation. With the arrival of Europeans, the colonisers disrupted traditional ways of living and communities lost control of their leadership structures and patterns (Arbon, 2007; Dodson, 1998; Maddison, 2009, Trudgen, 2000). Loss of language, culture and identity led to devastation in many communities and elders lost control of the traditional leadership and authority they exercised prior to colonisation. Government policies and actions with the aim of "civilising" the natives forced different cultures and language groups that never belonged to each other not only to live in communities but to conform to the western way of living (Trudgen, 2000). As such they failed to "recognise the traditional Aboriginal social structures and Aboriginal people were physically brutalised and legally ignored" (Maddison, 2009, p. 45).

The village councils were replaced by local councils set up under constitutions requiring elections that did not resonate culturally with the Aboriginal people. This was in opposition to traditional Aboriginal practices (Trudgen, 2000). Gradually, younger generations who attended formal western schools took over leadership in communities and organisations such as local government councils, schools, and other agencies. This social and political change was in dissonance with patterns of traditional Indigenous leadership where elders have a responsibility Anderson states "to get the future generations right by making sure that communities are safe for our children to grow up in" (as cited in Maddison, 2009, p. 174). As more and more of the younger generation gain a university education the pressure will increase on Indigenous traditional forms of leadership and this will create an intergenerational conflict. This is already visible in communities where the leaders seem to have lost control of their responsibilities. The debate among Indigenous people pertaining to leadership issues in contemporary Australia seems to be gaining some momentum. Huggins (2009) for example is among senior Aboriginal

women who believe that the younger Indigenous generation need to “earn their stripes”. She believes that:

This idea of young versus the rest; there’s always been a camp, and I’m not one of the people who have always been in that camp, that thinks you just can’t get up there and be a leader unless you’ve done your apprenticeship. And they won’t like to hear me saying this, but it takes you up to thirty-five years of age before you’ve done that apprenticeship (cited in Maddison, 2009, p.178).

This view has implications for leaders who are appointed to western institutions such as schools in Indigenous remote communities especially where such appointments are made by central offices based on western criteria.

## **2.7 INDIGENOUS WOMEN AND LEADERSHIP**

It is important to locate the place of Indigenous women in society mainly because of previous conflicting research opinions on their roles in Aboriginal society (White, 2007). While they have always played a significant role, early anthropological research reports have given scant recognition to their strategic place in Aboriginal society. Notably, this oversight could partly be attributed to marital laws that required wives to live in their husband’s country (Forest, 1994).

While much has not been reported about their leadership role, Aboriginal women had a central role within Aboriginal government and in spiritual ceremonies having their own leadership and authority exercised differently to men. In their roles they administered traditional laws, educated the young women, maintained spiritual sites, and practised spiritual rituals which are widely recognised as “Women’s Business” (Bin-Sallik, 2000; White, 1998 cited in White 2007). Such ceremonies play a vital role in traditional Aboriginal society. While the men hunted for kangaroos and geese and bandicoots, women went out looking for mud crabs, mangrove worms and mussels. They would also make dilly bags out of paperbark and pandanus which they used for storing bush tucker (Pye, 1977).

Marriage laws were strict and in some cases it is reported that at birth female babies were given their future husbands and polygamy was encouraged.



Nonetheless, husbands and wives respected one another and there was very little family breakdown. Family laws were respected and at a very young age children were taught about kinship and clan relationships which are governed by a complex and intricate system of rules. Women respected and obeyed these laws and played roles in administering them. Recent research has given Indigenous women better justice by expanding on the authority they hold in Indigenous society. White (2007) notes that women gained power in their own right and women with very strong personalities achieved a separate but similar status to men. Equally, they had women's secret ceremonies just as men had secret ceremonies. They would teach girls their obligations and rights to customary law.

For Aboriginal women, the coming of Europeans dislocated these patterns of family life and eroded their leadership roles in traditional society. Initially, their roles were stable and intact but that changed with the establishment of missions and reserves. The removal of children from their parents denied the women their parenting roles. More damaging was the denial of cultural practices which Europeans believed were heathen and the conditioning of Indigenous people to believe anything traditional was not valuable. The imposition of new cultural values and standards impacted on Aboriginal people, both socially and economically, and distorted the traditional male and female roles. Spirituality and kinship, the basis on which traditional law was practised, were completely disrupted leaving them a deprived race. For women their roles were greatly devalued as some of them became sexual slaves to the colonial masters (Maddison, 2009). The introduction of European legal systems and values devalued their leadership status within their communities rendering them invisible. Maddison (2009) further notes that men on the other hand gained a better status through European policies. Their perspectives were more respected and given greater consideration. These changes relegated Aboriginal women to second class citizens. Thus, they suffered a triple bind of cultural genocide, racism, and sexism.

The status of Aboriginal women in communities drastically changed as they suffered violence from their own people. Research reports (Bell, 1983; Maddison, 2009; Scutt, 1990) a combination of factors was responsible for this. Firstly, they suffered grossly from sexual subordination to Aboriginal men, with reinforcement

by the wider Australian society of such practices. Secondly, there was breakdown of traditional social order as a result of European invasion and the imposition of European cultural structures. Thirdly and most devastating, was the introduction of alcohol in communities that resulted in violence and abuse of women.

Among prominent Aboriginal women there are reports of prevalent patriarchal values in the wider Australian society which have resulted in subordinate roles for Aboriginal women. Similarly, Huggins (2009, in Maddison, 2009, p. 200) notes that “there’s always been the boys club” and in her experiences working on the review of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) she has often seen the “boys ganging up against the women”. Alison Anderson, the current Minister for Indigenous Affairs in the Henderson-led Labor government in the NT, relates her experiences of being the only woman on the ATSIC board during the last term and she argues that despite the overt sexism among her colleagues she maintained her role and stood firm reporting that:

It’s about your own capacity to deal with these issues and stand up. You don’t have a mandate from them to bow down to them or to please them. You’re there with one mandate and one mandate only and that’s the mandate of your people to make things better for them (As cited in Maddison, 2009, p. 200).

In Indigenous remote communities, women have also struggled for political recognition on governing bodies such as the local government councils where women are still outnumbered by men (Hunt & Smith, 2007, p. 9 cited in Maddison, 2009). In some regions this has led women to advocate for a Women’s only council. Lena Cavanagh from Santa Teresa in defending the need for such a council reports that:

I want women to be strong as the men. All the women can stand together and have a meeting. Men is too strong on the council, got to be more Council ladies strong. All the women can have their own council. They can speak about their land if they want to. They don’t have to stand back and let the men do all the talking (As cited in Maddison, 2009).

Despite the practice of such sexism Indigenous women have never relented in their efforts to make a contribution both politically and economically. In Indigenous

remote communities women are economically strong and have endeavoured to re-establish their previous roles despite major setbacks. At the international level they have been engaged in campaigns in the United Nations and elsewhere in an effort to redress the disadvantages they encounter on almost a daily basis. In contemporary Australia, Aboriginal women have succeeded in education and are found in executive positions in schools in remote communities and in tertiary education. At a political level they continue to take on leadership positions in the struggle for redressing the disadvantages that challenge Indigenous Australians.

## **2.8 EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

In the field of education, there has been a growing concern for effective leadership during much of the twentieth century (Blackmore, 2005; Sergiovanni, 1996; Still, 1998). One of the reasons for this pursuit of knowledge was to demystify the 'enduring masculinism' (Blackmore, 2005, p.174) of the universal corporate image that has clouded the leadership discourse over the past decades. It became necessary globally to deconstruct the leadership debate and reconceptualise the meaning. New leadership genres such as democratic, emancipatory, and feminist, were introduced in the discourse. Research and writing that was gender-focused emerged written by women and about women that was defined as a 'masculinist enterprise' (Ozga, 1993). Much of the research and writing had a feminist approach ranging from liberal feminism (Hall, 1997; Biklen & Brannigan, 1980) to critical feminists, (Blackmore, 1999; Fergusson, 1984) and postmodern perspectives (Sinclair, 1998; Grogan, 1996). In leadership theory Burns (1978) transformational leadership theory seemed to be the perfect fit for preaching change and advocated for leaders to be visionary change agents. New leadership genre such as instructional, emancipatory, feminist, participative management and a call for democratic processes were promoted worldwide. At this time, while women were over represented in the teaching field few advanced to the top position as educational administrators.

Women have been consistently marginalised in the workplace on the basis of gender through stereotypes and entrenched ideas (Shakeshaft, 1987). This marginalisation of women persists particularly in management and leadership

positions “despite the introduction of legislation designed to address gender imbalances in the workplace” (Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 202). The traditional Anglo-American views on leadership came into question more and more as researchers began linking the practice of leadership to local cultural contexts in an effort to have a deeper understanding of the discourse. Dimmock and Walker (2005, p. 1), for example, argue that educational leadership is a “socially bounded process, subject to the cultural traditions and values of the society in which it is exercised”.

Current research on educational leadership advocates the need for culture specific leadership that fits the history and needs of the community it serves since leadership and life are interwoven. Johnson (1997) in her studies of Native American women leaders cautions “reducing leadership to behaviours without understanding the cultural beliefs and values, and social conditions, historic influences and contexts as well as the individual behind the behaviours, trivialises the meaning of native leadership” (p. 269-270). For these reasons it is essential that the gender debate that has largely excluded the multiplicity of voices across the globe, namely, those reflective of diverse race, colour, gender, and those with less socio-economic standing (Fitzgerald, 2006) be brought to the fore.

To ensure a more inclusive gender leadership discourse there has to be a shift towards a cultural diversity perspective (Banjunid, 1996; Foster & Goddard, 2003; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998; Heck, 1998; Dimmock & Walker, 2005). This will provide an opportunity to include minority voices such as Indigenous Australians and, particularly, Indigenous principals in remote community schools.

Globally, Indigenous women are relatively new to educational leadership and studies involving Indigenous educational leaders are limited (Fitzgerald 2006; Parker, 2004; Ozga, 1993; Johnson, 1997). Unfortunately, research undertaken by females “reflects attitudinal neglect and the absence of research on successful minority women in leadership roles denotes lack of respect for minority women as leaders” (Brumer, 1999 in Trujillo-Ball, 2003, p.56). In the feminist debate the use of the term ‘sisterhood’ as a model for feminist intercommunity relations has done little justice to women of colour. Hooks (as cited in Oyewumi, 2001) claims sisterhood among women of racially cultural groups is possible but only when the divisions of race are conquered. Similarly, Weeden (2002) confirms “many white

women have taken the colour blind position' with the pretence to homogeneity of experience covered by the word sisterhood that does not in fact exist" (Lorde, as cited in Weeden, 2002, p. 116). Smith (1999) notes that western feminism has been challenged by non-western scholars as 'conforming to some very fundamental western European worldviews and value systems towards the Other' (p.43). Without addressing this dichotomy, Lorde further notes the 'sister outsider' will be denied class privileges and a prominent place in leadership literature (as cited in Oyewumi 2001). Though limited, there are a few studies that have been conducted both internationally and in Australia on Native American women, Canadian Indian, Maori in New Zealand, and Indigenous Australians. This is significant as the literature on women educational leaders has mainly concerned western women.

Johnson (1997) conducted studies of twelve Native American women educators representing older, younger and same generation peer groups. In the study she found that these native women educational leaders present other ways of conceptualising leadership, which are "not about assessing one's performance in the normative mainstream sense" (p. 265). In her findings she concluded that there are features in the way these women conceptualised leadership that are different to the older western concepts but however had similarities with aspects of the more recent ones such as transformational leadership. In summary her findings revealed that:

- Leadership is focused on a group-centred process that creatively responds to constantly changing forces.
- Leadership is relational, organic, and synergistic.
- Power is used as a force that empowers others to change or improvise for change, rather than control others to respond/react to change, and,
- Life and leadership are woven into one.

She concluded that, since leadership is synergistic, it needs to be studied holistically "as embedded in both the person and the context in which he or she operates" (Johnson, 1997, p. 271).

In a similar study, Holiday (2006) examined the qualities, core meanings, and fundamental nature of the success and effective leadership of three Native American Navajo women leaders in education. Her findings portrayed Native American leadership as a circular process where everything is interconnected. It requires balance and shared responsibility of all and to all. Listening as the most important skill rather than communicating. They do not separate personal and professional aspects of life from each other because a person has to continually be balanced emotionally, spiritually, and physically, as these parts intertwine. In their view leadership cannot take root unless a man or woman has 'hozho' (balance and order) (p. 7) in his/her life which begins with oneself. Only then can the individual be in a better position to assist in establishing balance in other lives. They also embraced current characteristics of servant leadership - listening, empathy, healing, awareness, persuasion, conceptualisation, foresight, stewardship, commitment to growth of people, and building community (Spears, as cited in Holiday, 2006).

In another study Trujillo-Ball (2003) examined the social constructions of identity and the ways those affect experiences of four, Mexican American female educational leaders, who are successful Mexican American female principals of schools in a 'Hispanic ghetto'. She highlighted that traditionally in American society, Mexican American females are characterised as "submissive, docile, weak, incompetent, and sexual" (p. 169). The results of her study show that the identities they use are very dependent upon the situation and audience. In their growing up from around the 'kitchen table' where they have been influenced by traditional expectations, they have learned to adopt a chameleon identity that changed according to the assigned attributes and expectations of society, family, and culture. They often find themselves in a cycle of perpetual negotiation portraying the identity that will be acceptable in any given social situation. There is a broad agreement among the women that male characteristics of leadership traditionally projected in leadership literature are seen as being more valuable and worthy than the female attributes and they must adopt an identity closely related to the male identity. This is consistent with findings such as Blackmore (1995), Shakeshaft (1987), and Sinclair (1998). The women also felt that the context and environment was an important aspect of leadership practice; they saw the "Hispanic ghetto as "having fit and passion and feeling comfortable" (Trujillo-Ball,

2003, p. 181) where they were surrounded by family and had an understanding of family life.

Continuing to investigate lives of minority women Umpleby (2007) examined the role of seven First Nation's women in supporting social and educational opportunities in their villages and in society at large. She used individual narratives that are consistent with 'kwakwakawakw' (a name which means those who speak kwa' kwala, the name of the groups language) practices and protocols. In her findings she reported that these women spoke of the importance of family extending beyond the 'western' nuclear family; ties to tribe, clan, extended family and ancestors were cultural foundations for identity. The following themes also emerged from the narratives; the importance of formal education with emphasis also on the tangential "acknowledgment of traditional Indigenous worldview that comprehends learning and knowledge very different from the ubiquitous western perspective" (p. 202). Citing Battiste and Henderson's definition of Indigenous knowledge to deconstruct the meaning attached to Indigenous worldviews, she notes:

Perhaps the closest one can get to describing unity in Indigenous knowledge is that knowledge is the expression of the vibrant relationships between people, their ecosystems, and the other living beings and spirits that share their lands... All aspects of this knowledge are interrelated and cannot be separated from the traditional territories of the people concerned (cited in Umpleby, 2007, p. 202).

As evidenced in other studies this philosophy is consistent with the findings of Nolen, (1998), Trujillo-Ball, (2003), and White, (2007). Of increasing relevance was the way the women portrayed knowledge and power as a discourse. They spoke openly about power relations that relate to the empowering of others within their sphere of influence, in the context of the potential of education to strengthen their communities and to lift individuals from their passivity. They appeal to the government to give them back power that would make a difference in their lives. Fitzgerald (2006, p. 210) in her observation of New Zealand, Australian Aboriginal and First Nation women states that the women were constantly "walking between two worlds [that] involved interpreting the games that operated in a white man's world", that of the Indigenous and Western which happen to be two polarised

worlds. This is consistent with White's (2007) investigation of career development of Australian Indigenous women.

Foster and Goddard (2003) conducted studies in Northern Canadian schools involving educators, parents, students, and community. Their research investigated stakeholder perceptions of educational leadership and the relationship between leadership and culture in the schools. One of the findings of this study was related to the role of the principal between the community and the school. The principals 'believed their chief responsibility was to provide a "bridge" between the school and community. Implicit in their use of the word "bridge" was "recognition of differences and potential tensions between the cultural norms and values students experienced in the school, and in their homes" (Foster & Goddard, 2003, p.11). Their findings concluded that stakeholders in the northern schools they investigated often have multiple and conflicting perceptions regarding the purposes of curriculum and schooling. They suggested it is time to reconsider leadership in these communities and propose a redefinition of leadership that is more "holistic and collaborative", "inclusive" and sensitive to issues of culture, ethnicity and gender (Foster & Goddard, 2003, p18).

In the Northern Territory of Australia, Nolen's (1998) research investigated emerging models of Indigenous educational leadership in five remote Indigenous community schools. Her research concluded that leadership and management can be exercised in different ways as each community is unique in its historical circumstances. As in international studies of other Indigenous leaders walking between two worlds is a constant battle as "they strive to fulfil their cultural and family obligations as well as meet the demands arising from their positions within the school" (p. 150). Team leadership is a pattern that emerged from this study where principals in some schools are more comfortable with team leadership that is consistent with Indigenous practices and protocols.

In a comparative study Wicks, (1999) investigated valued educational leadership services across three Indigenous schools in Canada, New Zealand, and Northern Territory, Australia. He sought to discover common themes and theories of educational leadership across all schools. Emerging from this study were common themes specific to educational leadership that recognises and respects the local



culture as it permeates through the school community, acknowledges the importance of relationships, acknowledges the school as a site of local cultural maintenance, negotiation, and reproduction.

In another study conducted by Fitzgerald (2006) over a period of three years, she investigated the professional biographies and experiences as educational leaders of four Maori school principals, three Australian Aboriginal women and three First Nations women from Canada. Her findings reveal that gender and ethnicity presented a dual challenge for the women. Additionally the women were challenged on several other fronts such as walking and working within two worlds – Indigenous and non-Indigenous, community expectations and responsibilities, felt they were judged by non-Indigenous communities who provided little support. In spite of the challenges they experienced they had a deep compassion and commitment to community. These findings are consistent with Holiday, 2006; Nolen, 1998; Wicks, 1999 and White, 2007).

These studies collaborating with Indigenous educators represent a voice for Indigenous minorities who are experiencing similar plights. With limited studies in leadership on Indigenous women in general, and Australian Indigenous women in particular as educational leaders, building on these studies will generate literature for further research and scholarship and, additionally provide a vehicle their minority voices to be heard with the intention of providing vital information for educators and system personnel on policy direction and implementation.

## **2.9 SCHOOL COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS**

Historically, home and schools were visualised as separate entities that had different, goals, roles and responsibilities (Epstein, 2001). The role of parents stopped at the school gate and beyond this, they had no influence or hardly any input in instructional matters. With sweeping reforms in advocating a democratic culture worldwide it became necessary to change the dynamics of relationships between schools and their communities. Over the past three decades educational researchers have recognised the positive influence of having parents involved in their children's education (Boyd, 1997; Epstein, 2001; Epstein & Sanders, 1998;

McInerney, 2002; Stevens, 1985; Swap, 1993). Over the past twenty five years, there have been significant changes in school reform and restructuring advocating the need to explore the landscape in schools in the post-modern era. With such global interest in this area the discourse linking schools to their respective communities has been given centre stage. The growing interest in promoting this relationship worldwide is attributed to a number of factors including:

- changing views of the role of schools,
- changing family demographics,
- a growing appreciation of 'contextualism' and 'ecological settings'; and
- a sincere desire to develop multisetting, collaborative partnerships.

All of these are designed to promote the healthy development of children (Smith, Connell, Wright, Sizer, Norman, Hurley & Walker, 1997, p. 340). These factors worldwide appeal for a kind of leadership that is different to that practised in schools some decades ago. It did not take long for promoters of major school reform to positively respond to the popular African proverb "it takes a whole village to raise a child" (Boyd, 1997, p. 188).

Contemporary school reform in the United Kingdom, America, Australia, and other countries around the globe have responded positively to this paradigm shift in organising schools. This shift is in response to competition for global economy (Boyd, 1997) that organisations in both the public and private sectors have had to contend with. Consequently, new thinking in managing and leading organisations has emerged. Kanter (1989) argues that the "winning game in organisations would require faster action, more creative manoeuvring, more flexibility, closer partnerships with employees and customers than was typical in the traditional corporate bureaucracy... corporate giants, in short, must learn to dance" (p. 20). This has an important entrepreneurial implication for organisations including schools. In line with this wave of thinking was restructuring organisations, and a new blueprint in managing and leading organisations including schools. In the educational context of schools, new market metaphors emerged such as 'business of education', 'education means business', and 'market-driven education' (Burke, 1997). The role of parents, students, and their relationships also changed with parents and students being referred to as customers. This has

meant that the idea of the traditional school as having nurturing and the social responsibility attached to this became subsumed in corporate language such as cost effectiveness, efficiency, performance management, quality assurance, accountability and benchmarking, while education for students became outcomes driven (Burke, 1997).

The 1973 Karmel Report changed the way Australians thought about school and its governance. This report contended that “responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation with the parents of pupils they teach and, at a senior level, with students themselves” (as cited in Rizvi, 1994, p. 1). An interpretation of this meant devolving a considerable amount of school responsibilities to schools and their communities thus dismantling the bureaucratic centralised decision-making structures (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988). Recent studies on school community partnerships have highlighted certain barriers that impede the active participation of parents, families, and community people in school functions and activities. Principals must therefore develop and employ strategies to understand and remove these impediments (Christenson, 2004).

Block, (1993) asserts that partnerships occur when control shifts from the leader to the group members in a move away from authoritarian behaviours to one that includes sharing of decision making. According to him, four things are necessary for a valid partnership; a) exchange of purpose; b) joint accountability; c) a right to say no, and, d) absolute honesty (p. 4).

Boyd (1997) discusses some best known models that he sees to have a variety of diverging implications. A bureaucratic model is very much linked to the traditional bureaucratic Weberian style where there is less input from clients and it is regarded as a closed system.

This ill defined notion of community makes it complex when discussing school and community partnerships. Developing partnerships involves developing relationships that extend far beyond the boundaries of school grounds. Moreover, the contexts of such partnerships vary from school community to school

community. Of increasing relevance is the need to involve all key players as equal partners in the process if genuine outcomes are to be achieved.

Central to this analysis, it is essential to deconstruct the definition and nature of partnerships. The Australian Council of State Schools Organisations Partnership issues paper, (2004) defines partnerships as:

a sharing of power, responsibility and ownership, with each party having different roles, a degree of mutuality, that begins with the process of listening to each other and which incorporates responsive dialogue and 'give and take' on both sides. It also involves shared aims and goals based on a common understanding of the educational needs of children and a commitment to joint action in which parents, students and teachers work together. (Australian Council of State Schools Organisation - Issues paper, 2004, p. 3-4).

To promote this type of partnership, school principals should endeavour to develop and sustain a sense of trust (Foster & Goddard, 2003), where staff and community people can enter into a relationship with shared power, responsibility and ownership. Equally, principals should provide staff, parents, and community people, the opportunity to fully dialogue, as in "developing "dialogic practice" what gets said and what gets listened to is always understood to be marked by unequal powers" (McInerney, 2002, p. 8). This is an important thrust in setting up partnerships in schools.

The issues paper, published as part of a project to enhance partnerships between Australian schools and their families recognised the role parents and the wider community play as first educators of their children (ACSSO, 2004; Department of Education Tasmania, 2002). As a result, all state/territory governments have developed policies that discuss the role of parents and communities. A key criticism that has emerged from these policies is that "parents and families are treated as homogeneous groups of social equals, with similar beliefs, attitudes and skills" (ACSSO, Issues paper, 2004, p. 1) The paper further reports that "anecdotal evidence from the community suggest problems of implementation that are often patchy, uncoordinated and under resourced" ( p. 2) and that official policy in the public domain is not necessarily a good indicator of the quality and extent of partnerships in schools. While considerable efforts are being made

through “consultations, and reconceptualising the curriculum, it is evident that family school community partnerships are not being supported by legislation, resource commitment, a strong research effort, or the creation of professional networks” (2004, p. 2).

The current shifts in educational policies are premised on the recognition that good relationships and partnerships between schools and communities benefit school children. What is lacking presently is a consensus as to how these effective relationships should be achieved, who holds responsibility for what, and where power and control should reside in making educational decisions (Beresford & Gray, 2006).

For Indigenous remote community schools the rhetoric does not easily translate into practice, even though structures that seem to encourage self-determination and self-management have been instituted. The leadership in such settings is constructed by audiences such as superiors, at the system level. Some writers (Avery et al, 2004; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Heifetz, 2001; Sinclair, 1998) argue that leadership is a social construction and the behaviour is context driven. As such, subordinates, peers, and followers must be engaged in the construction of such an identity.

In Australia a National Action Framework was developed in a document entitled ‘Family-School-Partnership Framework’ for community wide discussion in 2004. The dimensions outlined in the framework include:

- Understanding of roles
- Connecting home and school learning
- Communicating
- Participating
- Decision-making
- Collaboration beyond the school, and
- Building community and identity

While such a generic framework allows schools to include their specific operational needs, other factors such as language of communication, culture of the school community, level of participation in decision-making, policy development and implementations for such partnerships are equally important. Boyd (1997) discusses some well known models that he considers to have a variety of diverging implications. The first model, which he refers to as the bureaucratic model is very much linked to the traditional bureaucratic style where there is less input from its clients and it is regarded as a closed system. If partnerships are about open communication, collaboration, and participation in school matters, bureaucratic models characterised by closed systems are inappropriate for partnership formation.

The professional model is more flexible where the professional needs both of schools' staff and their clients are emphasised. Professionals have the answers for what is most suitable for their clients. The professional model normally has components of both the bureaucratic and the professional. Professional models and bureaucratic models often conflict as they do not have the same authority structures. In order to determine student success, resources in the immediate community are equally important. Children are socialised into a culture in schools that ultimately develops a holistic view of life that contributes to society. School staff and community working in collaboration where knowledge from all parties is respected and utilised is a necessity. In schools with a contestation of worldviews, equal sharing of power that allows each party to freely participate in curriculum matters is of paramount importance. Professional models characterised by a mix of bureaucratic models may not be as functional in communities of this post-industrial era where many constitutive values are shared (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987).

The third model is democratic and more suited to the self-managing school (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988) which involves staff, parents, and community members. This model is a balance between the bureaucratic model and the professional model. The market driven model emphasises efficiency and excellence where competition for customers is the norm. The co-ordinated collaborative model combines bureaucratic and professional elements with an emphasis on co-operation and collaboration (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988). Cultivation of partnerships

at this level holds promising results where community resources are highly encouraged and members are seen as professionals who can contribute to children's learning.

There is growing interest in today's democratic society in embracing diversity in organisations. It encourages values of social equality, the idea of schooling for a fair go, and the inclusion of a diversity of approaches to learning. In particular it is inclusive of marginalised groups, and encourages participation, decision making and the need to help create a more compassionate and democratic society. Goodman (as cited in McInerney, 2002, p. 132) gives the democratic model a more suitable practice in schools among other models.

Each of the three models, Bureaucratic, professional and democratic seem to have credibility in specific contexts. In Australian schools all three models and others suited to schools nationally are in operation. However, if today's schools are about democratising and the inclusion of minority voices such as those of Indigenous Australians in education, the democratic models will be best suited to this type of environment still struggling with past historical issues that have affected their communities. The model encourages issues of social justice, inclusivity, taking into account economic, cultural, and social diversity of communities that encourages educative dialogue within communities (McInerney, 2002).

## **2.10 HISTORICAL EXAMINATION OF INDIGENOUS EDUCATION IN THE NORTHERN TERRITORY IN AUSTRALIA**

In order to contextualise the nature of schools and leadership in remote Indigenous community schools, a historical overview of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory is critical to understanding the current practices and challenges experienced by the Indigenous principals who collaborated in this study.

Prior to British settlement, Australian Indigenes inhabited the land spanning thousands of years and living a simple sophisticated lifestyle characterised by

hunting and gathering without domesticated animals except the dingo (Thomson, 1988). As early as the 1600s, there were recordings of non-European contact with Australia's Indigenous people through trade relations that later became an important economic and social benefit for the Indigenous people and the Macassan traders (Rowley, 1970). Such interactions did little to disrupt their traditional lifestyles and their patterns of law. An enduring relationship flourished with such traders with no reports of antagonism between the Aborigines and the traders who visited the land.

Although there have been recordings of European contact as early as the 1600s, the most devastating and lasting contact happened in 1788 when the British invaded Australia and made a permanent settlement declaring the land *Terra Nullius* and giving them the right to claim the land as their own (Edwards, 1988). At the time of European settlement, there were approximately 300,000 Aborigines in Australia divided into about 500 regional groups or tribes. The invaders were different in race and culture and not very long clashes occurred over land and lifestyle (Edwards, 1988). They held Aborigines as people who were physically unattractive, mentally deficient, amoral, degraded savages and somewhat less useful than domesticated animals. Not prepared to live with such a race, the invaders embarked on an annihilation mission, vowing to kill the last Aborigine on the land. It is reported that for the first seventy-five years of Australian history, the Aboriginal population decreased rapidly (Moore, 1995). As a people who were accustomed to living on the land and saw it as integral to their wellbeing, they became very restricted in their movement and also made efforts to fight the invaders. Despite the invaders' intentions to annihilate the original occupants they soon began to associate with Aboriginal women as they were lacking enough population of their women (Edwards, 1988). This resulted into the birth of 'half-caste' children who were lighter in skin colour than the traditional Aborigines.

By 1838, the British parliament was forced to legislate a protection policy (as cited in Cameron, 2005) whereby Aborigines became British subjects with very limited facilities and segregated from Europeans. There were no plans to educate them since in their view Aborigines were intellectually inferior and ineducable beings (Burney, 1995). As a result of this protection policy the era was characterised by an evangelising mission with still pockets of genocidal practices (Rowley, 1970) in



various parts of the country. Despite this calculated onslaught on Aborigines they survived as a race with the invaders left with nothing less than to embark on assimilating them into the wider mainstream society. As a result the Assimilation policy (1951) was born out of the need to Europeanise Aborigines whereby the policy required “Aboriginal people to completely discard their own distinct culture and identity” (Perkins, 1995, p.77) and replace these with European ways that were considered more ‘superior’ and sophisticated (Cameron, 2005). This was met with resistance from the Aborigines who were proud of their cultural heritage and lifestyles. This policy translated into one of Christianising and civilising. It became the aim of all European contact with Aborigines and missions that were later established to follow a similar view (Edwards, 1988). Notably, implementation of such policies hardly involved the consultation and participation of Aborigines as such was considered irrelevant.

It is against this background that the formal education for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory (NT) was established. From the initial stages many Aboriginal people saw education and schools as sites of colonisation and assimilation (Arbon, 2008; Bin-Sallik, 2001; White, 1998). It is little wonder that even today there is little achievement in remote Indigenous schools that continue to reflect these colonial practices.

As early as 1877, Stewart (1994) reports missionaries from the Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist and Anglican denominations established missions across parts of the NT. Some prominent communities with mission establishments included Hermannsburg (1877), Daly River (1886, 1901 and 1955), Roper River (1908), Bathurst Island (1911), Goulburn Island (1916), Groote Island (1921), Elcho Island (1921), Milingimbi (1922, 1942), Port Keats (1935), Santa Teresa (1937), Yirrkala (1935), Areyonga (1944), Papunya (1946), Numbulwar (1952), Umbakumba (1958), Mijilang (1966). Mission education played a significant role in Aboriginal education which aimed at effecting social change. Their primary aim was to convert the ‘natives’ to Christianity and break down the influence of tribal life and its accompanying influences such as promised marriages and ceremonial obligations. Unaided by the Commonwealth government and restricted financially the missionaries developed small Christian communities that had a European orientation.

In the year Bathurst Island was established as a Catholic mission settlement, the Commonwealth took over responsibility for the Northern Territory (Beresford-Manning 2008; Gardiner, 2008). There was no intention of providing education for Aboriginal children as formal schooling was intended to be restricted to only European children. However the Commonwealth considered it necessary to remove 'half-caste'<sup>1</sup> children from their families and parents, some for very long periods of time and others never to see their families again. In 1913, the first government school was opened in Kahlin Compound in Palmerston for European and 'half caste' children. While they were being privileged with having an education, such education was limited in nature and less sophisticated than that provided for European children. Bleakley, (as cited in Nolen, 1998, p. 14) stated in a report that:

Until the Territory is further developed and facilities for the education of white children are provided, any attempt at compulsory education [of Aborigines], would be out of the question. The rescue of half-castes from the camps and education in institutions should be compulsory

For the majority of Aboriginal children on mission settlements missionaries contributed to providing facilities such as basic education, health, and housing. More importantly, they made sure the Christianising agenda (Beresford-Manning, 2008) was the ultimate. While missions provided a sanctuary for Aboriginal people it resulted in loss of language culture and identity (Nolen, 1998). The Commonwealth Office of Education controlled Aboriginal education and South Australia controlled public education (White, 1991). However, there were already mission schools operating in the NT. By 1950, Nolen (1998) reports, there were twelve mission schools with five hundred and ninety-seven students.

The assimilation policy introduced by the government in 1951 'privileged' Indigenous people to join the Australian society in "enjoying the same rights, and accepting the same responsibilities, observing the same customs and being influenced by the same beliefs, hopes and loyalties" (Lippman, 1992, p.38). In reality, as is often the case, policy guidelines and frameworks ensured protection and segregation based on, and supported by, scientific and institutional racism

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<sup>1</sup> This term 'half caste' is offensive and it is used within the confines of its historical context referring to Aboriginal Australians of mixed descent usually Aboriginal mother and white father.

(Gould, 1988). By 1956, there were fourteen government schools and fourteen mission schools specifically for Aboriginal children. By the 1960s and 1970s the mission schools gradually came under the control of the Commonwealth government. Within five years of administration, Aboriginal education was transferred to the Commonwealth Welfare branch of the Northern Territory Administration Department of Territories until 1974 (Nolen, 1998).

In the 1960s significant developments were introduced. The Watts/Gallacher (1964) Report on an Investigation into the Curriculum and Teaching Methods used in Aboriginal Schools in the Northern Territory prompted a policy statement on formal education for Indigenous people in the NT. Essentially this instigated further plans for Aboriginal teacher training as the participation of Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal schools was now a reality. Notably, at this time the assimilation policy was meant for all Aborigines as it was deemed important to fully assimilate them into white society. Reynolds, (as cited in Cameron, 2005, p.139) reports that at the Native Welfare Conference in 1961 it was agreed that:

All Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected to attain the same manner of living as other Australians, and to live as members of a single Australian community enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs, as other Australians

As a result residential Colleges were established. Pre-schooling commenced at Milingimbi, Elcho Island and Oenpelli. A referendum held in 1967 overwhelmingly supported the inclusion of Aborigines in census with the Commonwealth assuming responsibility for Aboriginal schooling system in 1972. Not long after, the Watts, Tandy and McGrath (1973) Report which investigated Bilingual education in Aboriginal schools was submitted with strong recommendations to encourage bilingual education in Aboriginal schools. As a result Bilingual education commenced in five schools. The assimilation/integration policy was revoked and replaced with self-determination giving Aboriginal people an opportunity to participate in decisions pertaining to their lives and the education of their children. White (1991) reports self determination prompted establishment of Action Groups in schools to assist in taking control of education and decision making with the first Action Group established at Yirrkala.

By the 1980s and 1990s there was considerable progress in provision of Aboriginal schools with the development of 11 Community Education Centres and 40 outstation schools. Aboriginalisation programs commenced with the training of Aboriginal teachers to become principals in their communities. Reviews of Aboriginal education were on-going with the most significant happening in 1999 with the late, former Senator Collins heading a review into the delivery of education to Indigenous students in the NT (Collins, 1999). Though there had been some improvements in Indigenous education, the report revealed Indigenous students in the NT were still performing poorly compared to all other Australian students. The implementation of recommendations from the review led to a variety of programs in NT remote Indigenous schools. (Information on these matters is further developed in the section under government policies).

### **2.10.1 Batchelor College**

There are a number of contextual factors impacting on Indigenous education, localisation of leadership positions and involvement of communities in decision-making. Over the past thirty-five years, Nolen, (1998) reports Batchelor Institute as is now called has played a major role in the education and training of Indigenous people particularly those from remote communities stretching from Arnhem Land in the North to Central Australia in the South in the Northern Territory. The Institute began in the mid-1960s as a small annexe of Kormilda College intended to serve the needs of Indigenous remote communities in the Northern Territory (Uibo, 1983). Over these years the Institute has undergone dramatic changes due to a demand from Indigenous clients for a diverse range of courses, growth in student population and responding to community aspirations.

The initial concept of the Institute commenced as far back as 1953 when approval was granted to employ Aboriginal Teaching Assistants in NT Aboriginal schools to “assist European classroom teachers with a range of supervisory tasks, discipline of students, caring for school equipment and assisting in correcting pupils work” (Ingram, 2004, p. 2). By 1960, the first training course was implemented with the enrolment of 20 Aboriginal Teaching Assistants with this number increasing to 60 by 1964 with the success of this training.

In 1964, the Watts/Gallacher, (1973) report that the investigated the curriculum and teaching methods in Aboriginal schools in the NT was released. Unfortunately, though the report made a brief mention on education for adults nothing was followed up until another report identified a stronger need for Aboriginal staff in paraprofessional roles in schools. The report recommended a year's training with no expansion on the nature of such training. By 1965 Carpentaria College in Darwin provided short courses for teacher aides and assistants. Later, in 1968, the training was transferred to Kormilda College at Berrimah, which was initially established to provide secondary education for Aboriginal children. At this venue a one year full-time teacher training course was designed providing a career structure for Aboriginal Teacher Aides that would advance them to TA1 (Teacher Aide level 1) and TA2 (Teacher Aide level 2). At this stage there were no plans to extend training to teaching positions as this was not a significant plan for further education and training. However, five years later with the success of the courses, a third year TA3 was added for students who successfully completed TA2. This was arranged through the Darwin Community College (DCC). This qualification led to a certification and an acceptance to the Commonwealth Teaching Service for teaching only in Aboriginal schools (Ingram, 2004).

In 1974, Uibo (1993) reports the Aboriginal Teacher Education program was relocated from Kormilda College in Darwin to Batchelor, a small township 100 kilometres south east of Darwin and renamed the Aboriginal Teacher Education Centre (ATEC). At commencement, the administration was a bit complex with the Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), the Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDE), and the School of Australian Linguistics (SAL) sharing responsibility in one way or the other.

In 1976, a trial teacher training program commenced on site at Yirrkala (Hastings, 1988), an Aboriginal community in East Arnhem Land with Aboriginal Teaching Assistants undertaking part-time studies and working part-time as Teaching Assistants (White, 1991). This trial program soon spread to other Aboriginal communities with the support and approval of the wider community. In 1979 the Aboriginal Teacher Education Centre gained independence from DCC and later became Batchelor Institute funded through the Commonwealth. In 1983, the College Council was established (Ingram, 2004) comprising a small number of

Aboriginal people from remote communities with the responsibility of advising the NT Department of Education on operational issues. This was a significant step in the history of the Institute with further recommendations for a three year Associate Diploma of Teaching (Aboriginal Schools) and an additional year for a Diploma of Teaching (Aboriginal Schools). Uibo (1993, p. 45) notes that “the agenda for this training was set by staff and various government agencies with little consultation between communities and the students” since the understanding was Aboriginal people had little or no understanding of tertiary education. Meanwhile, the on-site teacher training that commenced at Yirrkala was in full operation in eight remote communities and became known as the Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) program with a small number of non-Aboriginal staff in remote communities taking on the responsibility for tutoring the RATE students. A further extension of the RATE was the mixed mode delivery with a combination of workshop based studies held at Batchelor Institute or in communities (Ingram, 2004).

In 1983, the first students graduated with an Associate Diploma of Teaching (Aboriginal Schools) with an evaluation of the program conducted in 1985 by Deakin University staff. The report highly supported the RATE program and made certain recommendations laying out the principles that should drive the Institute and a conceptual framework for expansion and diversification such as further development of advanced courses in other areas of professional and vocational education. Significantly, the Deakin report gave high credibility to the philosophy of “both ways” education (Ingram, 2004) which “ brings together Indigenous Australian traditions of knowledge and western academic disciplinary positions and cultural contexts, and embraces values of respect, tolerance and diversity” (Batchelor Institute, 2007 cited in Ober & Bat, 2008, p. 57). The philosophy also had a strong emphasis on application of learning in communities. Though the concept of “both ways” seemed to be credible staff experienced great difficulty in applying it in practice as Morgan, (1988 cited in Ingram, 2004, p. 136) notes:

It is almost (some would say undoubtedly) a contradiction in terms to have an apparent “Aboriginalised” course of instruction in a centralised western-style institution. It is this apparent contradiction that is the central dilemma faced by all those black and white, who are part of Batchelor Institute, be they staff, student, or administrator. And yet it is this dilemma that is the dynamic of the College that continually throws up the questions that have to be

faced and answered, that challenge all preconceptions about teaching styles, content, and philosophy.

To date, this debate continues in various forms among students and staff at the Institute.

One of the key issues of the report was the pedagogical aspects of the Institute. Essentially the program strengthened bilingual education at the schools where Aboriginal teachers continued working on language and literacy, as well as training in other areas for their development as teachers. The teacher education program involved development of knowledge of “both-ways”; assisted community development; assisted the development of Aboriginal perspectives on contemporary issues, and, reflected community aspirations and expectations (Ingram, 2004). This arrangement proved convenient for most students at Batchelor Institute for a number of reasons. Firstly, there was an opportunity for intensive workshops at home with the presence of community based lecturers; secondly, there was maximum support in classroom team teaching with input from specialist teachers such as Teacher Linguists; thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, students could stay in their communities to train instead of having to make lengthy stays at Batchelor that were social and cultural impediments to Aboriginal lifestyle.

As reported by Henry and McTaggart (1987) Deakin University’s involvement with Batchelor Institute saw the development of another program called the Deakin-Bachelor Teacher Education program (D-BATE) leading to a BA (Ed) qualification from Deakin University. The course was delivered through the mixed mode as was the practice at Batchelor with Deakin staff delivering the course and Batchelor Institute providing the venue. The course proved quite successful with students graduating for the first time with a BA (Ed) recognised as any other qualification in the mainstream (Hastings, 1988).

By 1988, Ingram (2004), reports the Institute had expanded with a campus in Alice Springs in Central Australia, and the establishment of two schools namely: Teacher Education and Community Studies. Essentially new courses were developed and student enrolment increased significantly with plans for a

restructure of the Institute to an effective Aboriginal tertiary institution. The initial aim to provide education for remote Aboriginal people in the NT had expanded prompting changes in the management and courses offered at the Institute. There were now three schools - Education, Health and Community Studies offering courses ranging from Teacher Education, Early Childhood, Environmental and Mental Health, to Community development and Graduate Certificates in Applied Linguistics and Hearing Impairment.

A significant development was the accreditation of two new post-graduate education courses, the Graduate Certificate and Graduate Diploma courses in Educational Administration in 1995. The development of these courses was a response to the changing needs in Aboriginal schools in the NT. As a result of the successful training of a significant number of Aboriginal teachers in remote schools, a few pioneering ones such as the participants in this study, started to work in school administration and management positions. This also coincided with the devolution in schools whereby a significant amount of school management was devolved to schools with a draft policy on Aboriginalisation thus, making way for Aboriginal senior staff to take over the positions of principals in their schools for the first time in NT education history. The courses aimed to provide students with practical knowledge and skills to work more effectively with people, resources, tasks and processes, secondly, allowing students to explore and develop their self understanding as an educational leader within a specific context (Marshall & Kamara, 1997).

By 1998, there were plans already in place for succession planning for the position of an Indigenous Director to take over from the long serving non-Indigenous Director John Ingram. The task of accomplishing the vision for an Indigenous independent tertiary institution headed by an Indigenous person and under the control of Indigenous people set within their own cultural contexts and informed by community values and aspirations was to be achieved. On July 1, 1999 Batchelor Institute was established as Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education under the Institutes Act of the NT Legislative Assembly (Ingram, 2004). As an Indigenous tertiary institution it gained autonomy with Indigenous people as full representatives on the council and given power to award degrees at all levels. In 1999, Veronica Arbon an Indigenous educator from the NT became the first



Indigenous Director of the Institute. She held this position for five years and was briefly replaced by the former Director John Ingram only for a short period of time until the appointment of another Indigenous Director Dr Jeannie Herbert in 2006. She is currently in that position. The Institute has undergone significant restructuring since then with demand from Indigenous clients for a diverse range of courses.

This brief historical background sets the context in which the participants in this study have been able to chart careers for themselves and their communities. As pioneers in Aboriginal education their efforts in collaboration with their communities have transformed education to reflect a culturally appropriate learning environment in their community schools where parents and the wider community are partners in education.

### **2.10.2 Government Policies**

A number of policies have impacted on Indigenous education nationally and in the Northern Territory since European contact. From the outset policy was derived from the 'macro frame of the British civic culture with its ideas on imperial expansion and Indigenous 'advancement' (Cameron, 2005, p. 45). Essentially, a legislated policy of self-determination, among the many legislated policies launched by the Labor Whitlam government in 1973, gave Indigenous people the right to be fully involved in local decision making especially that which influenced their lives including a vision for education. As such, the concept of self-determination was meant to include community controlled organisations such as health, education, and local government. This, however, assumed a level of prior education and knowledge. This policy led to other policy developments in the Northern Territory that have impacted on education and other Indigenous issues.

A departmental policy document Northern Territory Schools- *Direction for the 80s* was disseminated in 1983, setting out the principles of the Northern Territory Government's policy on education. In response to this policy, the Northern Territory Government developed twelve areas of priority in education for all

Territorians and one specifically for Indigenous students. The broad objective for the policy was stated out as follows:

While recognising the differing backgrounds and needs of Aboriginal students, school programs shall create the necessary conditions for students to significantly improve their academic performance so that they may be able to take advantage of training courses leading to skilled occupations and to higher educational qualifications (Northern Territory Dept of Education, 1983 p. 22-23).

This was a significant responsibility for the Northern Territory Government (NTG) since half of the schools in the Territory were in Aboriginal communities that were isolated in many respects. In order to provide adequately for Indigenous Territorians, the NTG established the NT Aboriginal Consultative Group-Feppi (Indigenous term meaning rock or foundation). Feppi's major role was to advise the minister on policy issues for Indigenous people. Significant changes were introduced such as the expansion of bilingual education, teacher training at Batchelor Institute and at Darwin Community College.

Another significant development was the establishment of the NT Board of Studies responsible to the Minister for Education for system wide curriculum and assessment. Feppi was represented on this board. One of the policy initiatives urged parents to abandon the attitude of "leave it to the experts" and to become actively involved through their school councils (Cameron, 2005). Parents were to have specific responsibilities for such things as regular attendance, participation in activities, maintenance of discipline, and support the efforts of schools. Essentially, parents were to share responsibilities for their children's educational outcomes. This initiative was for all schools in the Territory as the focus was to engage communities in decision making. Initially, schools were given the option of establishing school councils but increasingly it became mandatory. This obligation, however, was less observed in Aboriginal communities for a number of reasons ranging from resistance on the part of 'gate-keepers' in community schools to the lack of confidence of Aboriginal clients to take on such huge responsibilities that would require them to be involved in management functions. These responsibilities were however administrative rather than political (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988) with decisions at the school level being made within a framework of local state or

national policies and guidelines with schools remaining accountable to the central authority (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988). With more Aboriginal trained teachers, community aspirations for Aboriginalisation became stronger, paving the way for Aboriginal trained and qualified teachers to take over the running of their schools (Stewart, 1994).

From *Direction for the Eighties*, (DET, 1983) the NTG developed another policy document as an improvement and evaluation on the previous policy (Cameron, 2005). The emphasis in this policy was on school improvement plans with more devolution of management functions, school appraisals and performance related mandates. At this time the Commonwealth established the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP)* 'with a view to developing a comprehensive long-term approach to Aboriginal education policy' (DEET, 1989, p.6-7). A task force headed by Paul Hughes, an Indigenous academic, presented priorities to the federal government which were substantially endorsed. The AEP identified 21 long term goals and four main priorities which were,

- To ensure Aboriginal involvement in decision making
- To provide equality of access for Aboriginal people to education services
- To raise the rates of Aboriginal participation in education to those for all Australians, and
- To achieve equitable and appropriate educational outcomes for Aboriginal people (Cameron, 2005, p. 253).

These four were written into policy and were known as Partners in Education Parent Policy (1994), NT Board of Studies Common Curriculum Statement (1992), Common Assessment and Reporting Statement: Preschool to Senior Secondary, (1998).

The *Partners in Education Parents Policy* (1994) was an important document like others but more specifically addressed the issue of partnerships with schools and their communities. Feppi and the Aboriginal Student Support and Parent

Assistance (ASSPA) were major contributory bodies. The rationale that underpinned the policy was:

That education began in the home and continued throughout life in the home, the school, and the community, that parents' knowledge of their children was unique, and that they had the right to be involved in their children's learning and to be informed about it and to contribute to related decision-making. It was stressed that partnerships between parents and schools enhanced students' learning outcomes and that when parents and teachers' talents, interests and skills were combined, they enriched the lives and education of children (Partners in Education Parent Policy, as cited in Cameron, 2005, p.1-2).

The 1990s were contentious times in Aboriginal education. It was a time, notwithstanding all the intentions of parental and community involvement, when Indigenous children were performing woefully in education. It was also a time of contested debates on phasing out bilingual education, and structural changes both at school level and system level. A document was developed in 1998, *Schools...Our Future: Shaping Territory Education, to redirect public education in the NT*. Some of the structural changes were to include flattening structures based on responsibility and trust, shared vision and values, and, the principalship as the pinnacle of an education career, to name but a few. As an outcome of this plan an *Aboriginal Education Branch* was developed within the Schools Services Division with functions ranging from staff support to development of policy for Aboriginal education. Another major outcome of *Schools...Our Focus* was a review of education for Indigenous Territorians. In early 1999, the former (now late) Senator Bob Collins was appointed to head the review. The report tabled 151 recommendations on action to address issues that were highlighted. Some priority areas were giving parents and communities involvement in and ownership of their children's education, working in partnership with providers to improve attendance, teaching and outcomes in all schools, restoring to Indigenous communities management of and authority over their youths 'education for life' (Collins, 1999). A most disturbing statement of *Learning Lessons* was that despite the annual commitment from Strategic Initiatives Program since the inception of AEP, the NTDE could only demonstrate marginal achievement in some outcomes by Indigenous students in NT schools (Cameron, 2005).

Following *Learning Lessons* (1999), the Indigenous Education Branch compiled an *Indigenous Education Strategic Plan 2000- 2004: Educating our future generation together*. This coincided with a change to a Labor government led by Clare Martin and this led to further structural changes. The Martin-led Labor government had as its priority a focus on Indigenous education. It immediately resolved to implement the recommendations suggested in *Learning Lessons*. The following six key elements were to realise the recommendations:

- Students go to school regularly,
- Students are fit and able to learn,
- Students have good schooling,
- Students are tracked and their educational outcomes are measured,
- The Indigenous education program is managed with full accountability, and
- Indigenous families, communities and governments share responsibility for education outcomes (DEET, Indigenous Education Strategic Plan, 2000-2004, p. 2).

This provided the proposal to address the countless issues affecting Indigenous education in NT. In 2005, a review of the strategic plan was undertaken and a plan for 2006-2009 was developed with five outcomes namely:

- Valuing school,
- Coming to school,
- Learning and achieving at school,
- Staying at school, and
- Choosing opportunities after school. (DEET, 2006, p.10)

The NTG is committed to 'doing it better' and 'doing it differently' in the triennium with identified action areas of access to education, health and well being of learners, access to job and career pathways, leadership and workforce development, and stakeholder agreements and partnerships. Presently, a spin off from the initiative is the establishment of Remote Learning Partnerships with an emphasis on engaging Indigenous remote communities in taking responsibility

once more for Indigenous children's education. This is currently being implemented as a trial project involving 15 communities with a review date to be established. Some communities have already signed a contract with DEET on this project.

Other issues related to the wellbeing of remote Indigenous children surfaced in 2006. The NTG under the *Inquiries Act* set up an inquiry into the protection of Aboriginal children from Sexual Abuse. The board of Inquiry's task was to:

- Examine the extent, nature and the factors contributing to sexual abuse of Aboriginal children, with a particular focus on unreported incidents of such abuse.
- Identify barriers and issues associated with the provision of effective response to and protection against sexual abuse for Aboriginal children.
- Consider practices, procedures and resources of NTG agencies with direct responsibilities in this area and also consider how all tiers of government and non-government agencies might contribute to a more effective protection and response network.
- Consider how the government can help support communities to effectively prevent and tackle child sexual abuse. (Wild & Anderson, 2007, p. 41)

Implementation of recommendations made by this board is underway currently with reviews in place by the Rudd-led Labor government for its continued implementation. The timing of the intervention Tait (2007, p. 619) reports, "has been viewed by some with cynicism".

A significant development in the NTG was the appointment of Marion Scrymgour, an Indigenous Territory woman, as Minister for Education. In April, 2008 she released a statement, *Transforming Indigenous Education*, intended to overhaul the delivery of remote education, with a focus on involving Indigenous communities, getting children to school regularly and allowing them to concentrate on getting basic literacy and numeracy skills. The main thrust was to involve

communities as a key part of changing attitudes to education in Indigenous communities, and to ensure that going to school received the highest priority. She said:

Some Indigenous parents and communities put a high value on education – others don't, and we need to change those attitudes. While we are rolling out our *Closing the Gap* package to improve outcomes across a range of areas, including education – *Transforming Indigenous Education* includes further and broader policy reforms that go to the delivery of education (Media Release, Dept of Education and Training, April 30, 2008, p.1).

She announced five new major policy directions would be pursued by the Government to transform Indigenous education:

- The establishment of Community Partnership Education Boards, in the first instance in the Warlpiri Triangle (Lajamanu, Yuendumu, Nyirripi and Willowra) and East Arnhem, the Miwatj or Yolngu Matha speaking communities. These Boards will give the communities strong and genuine community ownership over a range of education services in their area, from schools and libraries to school based nurses. The model could include a regional residential hostel;
- In partnership with the Federal Government, investigate the establishment of early learning and development family centres. These centres should ensure that Indigenous children in remote communities are born healthy and have health care and education in early childhood;
- The establishment of community based residential hostels so young people in remote Indigenous communities can access a quality secondary education in or near their home communities;
- Investigate establishing Fit for Learning services to provide health, welfare and wellbeing needs for Indigenous students in town camps so they can concentrate on learning at school; and
- The expansion of Growing Our Own, to build the Territory's local Indigenous education workforce – increasing the numbers of, and skills among, Indigenous school based and departmental staff (Media Release, April 30, 2008).

Unfortunately, Minister Scrymgour resigned as Minister for health reasons but it is note worthy that her term in office saw some significant developments in policy in Indigenous education.

This brief discussion provides the backdrop to negotiating school community partnerships. Approaches to policy development in the main have been imperialistic, *ad hoc* in consultation, and fragmented with racist undertones (Cameron, 2005; Stewart, 1994). What has been largely lacking is the recognition of diversity in cultural perspectives and an acceptance that Aboriginal lifestyle was far more sophisticated than the colonisers thought. Thus policy implementation responded and conformed to the dominant cultural perspective. As a result of major policy reforms Indigenous people have aspired to leadership positions in remote schools. It has been the intent of major policy reviews to involve Indigenous communities in sharing responsibility for the education of their children. However, policies informing such partnerships is developed at the system level and implemented locally within departmental guidelines. While this generally the way things are done in schools nationally, it does limit community responsibility.

### **2.10.3 Indigenous Educational Leadership in the Northern Territory**

A proposal to launch a process of 'Aboriginalisation' in Indigenous schools by the Northern Territory Department of Education coincided with devolution in education across NT schools. A departmental policy document *Direction for the 80s* (1983) established a framework whereby school councils could determine how their schools functioned in partnership with the government and the community.

With more Aboriginal trained teachers from Batchelor Institute, community aspirations for Aboriginalisation became stronger, paving the way for Aboriginal trained and qualified teachers to take over the running of their schools. By the late 1980s there were a few trial Aboriginalisation programs in the Top End providing an opportunity for Aboriginal teachers to work in promotional positions mainly principals-in-training alongside senior experienced non-Indigenous executives. Mentoring became more formalised with a trial at Ngukkur and later Yirrkala with



executive teachers undergoing a period of acculturation into their new roles with an emphasis on both professional and personal development (Stewart, 1994). The success of the trial programs had a profound effect on education in remote schools and other schools soon followed with the aim of replacing non-Indigenous administrators. For Indigenous people this was a great achievement since the possibility of Indigenous leadership was until now the exception (Nolen, 1998) rather than the rule. Mentoring programs established by the Northern Territory Department of Education were established as:

a professional development process which created opportunities for the individuals involved to further develop their educational knowledge, skills and practice. It is flexible, open to changes in design, pace, strategies, style and direction as aspects of individual mentoree and mentor confidence and competence develop within their working context (Northern Territory Department of Education, 1998, p. ii).

A number of male and female Indigenous principals were mentored through programs established by both the NTDE and the Catholic Education Office. However, the main criticism of the program has been the lack of structure, the ad hoc nature of the program and the choice of inexperienced mentors (Stewart, 1994).

In 1994, Batchelor Institute was approached by communities to develop an accredited course in Educational Administration for remote Indigenous executives. This was accredited and implemented in July 1995 (Ingram, 2004). The courses provided an opportunity for Indigenous executives to develop their perspectives on educational administration with emphasis on practical knowledge, educational processes of schools within NT and understanding of bureaucratic communication and procedures (Marshall & Kamara, 1997).

While the courses have been successful there have been problems with implementation and a lack of collaboration with key stakeholders. The nature of Indigenous principals' roles in remote schools disadvantages them from fully engaging with the courses mostly delivered at Batchelor Institute. Reliance on distance education materials as a way of teaching is considered inappropriate for full engagement with the courses. Additionally, inadequate negotiations at the

system level, schools, and Batchelor Institute has led inevitably to difficulties for the principals in benefitting as fully from the course as was initially intended. With the decline in the number of Indigenous principals there is an urgent need to re-establish dialogue with all key stakeholders at both a community and system level.

## **2.11 RELEVANCE OF RESEARCH TO THE LITERATURE**

The scope of the literature review employed in this study has attempted to integrate a broad set of topics, ranging from culture and society to Indigenous educational leadership in the NT and school community partnerships. This was meant to incorporate the views and theories of various scholars and researchers in the field of school leadership and school community partnerships, as well as placing the study in the context of the conventional norms of research. The aim was to identify, analyse, and synthesise the central issues and ideas in the literature that were pertinent to the study and its specific focus - which is, to understand how Indigenous female principals in remote NT communities school negotiate school community partnerships.

The review focused on three major bodies of literature that were relevant to the study. These were:

- Culture and society
- Leadership
- School community partnerships

The review of the literature showed a number of gaps that need addressing. Firstly, the voices of Indigenous principals with particular reference to women's voices need further exploration. Secondly, concepts of leadership are still too narrowly focused on western worldviews with marginalisation of race, culture, gender and ethnicity. Such concepts continue to dominate and promote western worldviews that are inappropriate in Indigenous contexts. Literature on school community partnerships in Indigenous contexts is scanty and current literature fails to address factors such as culture, gender and contexts of school community partnerships.

The Policy debates on partnerships with schools and communities in NT Indigenous remote community contexts need further exploration as major policy initiatives continue to be developed at system level. Significant policy changes in the educational, social and cultural discourses of Indigenous community schools lie not only in policy and curriculum developments but also in negotiating effective partnership frameworks between schools and communities. There continues to be a gap in partnership negotiation with all key stakeholders. Hence the objective of ensuring successful school community partnerships appears to have no obvious solution with challenges at the system, school and community levels. It is therefore imperative to research the problem from the perspective of the Indigenous female principals. Essentially, the study will be an original and unique contribution to the body of knowledge on Indigenous women's educational practices and school community partnerships within a cultural context.

Given that controversy is inherent in most research conducted on Indigenous people some consideration was given to an appropriate methodology (White, 2007) that would explore the views of the Indigenous female principals. Issues about partnerships between school and communities are not a new venture in Indigenous education. While there are quite a number of schools in Indigenous remote communities, the number of Indigenous principals in such schools is remarkably lower. Hence, it is significant that a conscious effort is made to give Indigenous women school leaders an opportunity to voice their perspectives on issues pertaining to educational leadership. As a way of capturing their voices, narratives as an "inclusive [and] non-colonising" (Briskman, 2007, p. 152) methodology has been chosen as most appropriate to the study. In chapter three the design of the methodology is fully discussed.

## CHAPTER 3 DESIGN OF THE RESEARCH

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses and justifies the research design chosen to investigate how Indigenous female principals in Northern Territory Top End remote Indigenous communities negotiate school and community partnerships with their respective communities. In making this choice, it was necessary to consider a research design that would address the phenomenon in its real context. As an African “Indigenous” black woman, the researcher was aware that this study involves a marginalised group that has experienced social, political, and educational disadvantages through oppressed circumstances of colonisation. Like Indigenous people in most colonised world, Indigenous Australians have suffered from the “devastating impact of European cultural invasion and political sovereignty” (Bell, 1998, p. 18), traces of which are still present in today’s wider Australian society in many walks of life, including education (Arbon, 2008; White, 2007; Martin, 2003).

Indigenous researchers (Arbon, 2008; White, 2007; Martin, 2003) continue to note that Research into Indigenous issues has delivered little justice to Indigenous Australians. Arbon (2007, p. 178) notes that “approaches to research have been set within a context where western philosophies and western scientific positions on knowledge are legitimised and underpinned by dominant thinking”. Building on this proposition, Arbon (2007, p. 178) further argues “early research methodology and methods permitted the definition and designing of the ‘problem’ and the method, and blunder on to write the solutions to many of the debilitating situations faced by [Indigenous people], resulting in cultural and ontological subjugation with others “speaking” solutions on [their] behalf”. This claim is consistent with those made by other Indigenous scholars and researchers (Martin, 2003; Smith, 1999; White, 2007), who echo the sentiment that research conducted by non-Indigenous people, on and with Indigenous people has resulted in exploitation. In support of this claim, Fitzgerald (2004) a prolific non-Indigenous researcher notes that relationships between researcher and participant has been traditionally premised on a dualism with the Indigenous participant in a less powerful position.

Drawing on these claims, the researcher was mindful in this study to make sure that reference to contemporary thinking in social science would accommodate the voices of the Indigenous female principals in a context that would not compromise their worldviews or disempower them. As a product of European colonisation and a victim of similar exploitation, the researcher resisted being party to further exploitative practices through research. It is relevant as well to note a philosophical position as an educator and as an African black woman in this study. This philosophical position surrounds the view that there is much to be gained in understanding the subjective reality of individuals (Crotty, 1998). It is further argued that this western positioning when applied in Indigenous inquiries (as this one) has the potential to disempower and refuse them a voice in striving towards self-determination.

Fundamental to understanding the school and community partnership negotiation process of the Indigenous female principals, was the design of a theoretical framework that would adequately seek and record the perceptions and meanings the participants bring to the study based explicitly on their practice of school leadership. This conforms conveniently to Greenfield's (1978) claim that:

Unless there is a close match between the world as researchers construct it and the world as people perceive it and act in it, researchers' efforts to establish social truths will be a self-contained and ultimately self-deluding pastime (p. 13).

This claim among others was fundamental in designing the theoretical framework for this study.

### **3.2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Given that past research activities and the impact on Indigenous people have been controversial, the choice of a theoretical framework representative of the realities of the participants' lives as envisaged by them was a paramount consideration. In essence, it was vital in considering the inclusion of Indigenous methodological components in order to give further authentication to the design. The theoretical framework for this study encompasses four critical constituents

essential to all research designs: *Epistemology*, *Theoretical perspective*, *Methodology* and *Methods*. A discussion and justification of each critical element follows.

**Table 3.1 Theoretical Framework of the Study**

<b>Epistemology</b>	Constructionism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Social constructionism</li> </ul>
<b>Theoretical Framework</b>	Interpretivism <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Symbolic Interaction</li> <li>• Hermeneutics</li> <li>• Phenomenology</li> </ul>
<b>Methodology</b>	Biographic Narrative approach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indigenising Methodologies</li> <li>• Campfire metaphor</li> <li>• Case study</li> </ul>
<b>Methods</b>	Lightly structured depth interviews <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Document analysis</li> <li>• Reflective teams</li> <li>• Journal reflection</li> </ul>

### 3.3 EPISTEMOLOGY

In searching for a range of values and ideology that would do justice to, and answer the research questions, great consideration was given to *constructionism* as the most appropriate approach in accordance with claims that Indigenous people have a worldview that is dissimilar to the dominant European group in Australia (Arbon 2007; Trudgen, 2000). Consequently, in defining the epistemology for this study an effort was made to bring to the fore influences such as social, cultural, and historical contexts as important factors that could be considered in the discussion of knowledge claims. Prior to embarking on any further theoretical discussion on epistemology, it is essential to provide some definitions of the terms *constructionism*, and *constructivism*. While the meanings of these terms are essentially different, people tend to use them interchangeably.

A distinguishing feature of constructivism is “the belief that new knowledge is constructed internally or metacognitively with little or no influence from the social context” (Brooks, 2002, p. 1). In this same classification, “social constructivism” acknowledges the role of “social” in the construction of knowledge with a restriction on the nature of interactions between the novice and the expert (Brooks, 2002, p. 1). On the other hand, constructionism is understood as being about “the way knowledge is constructed by, for, and between members of a discursively mediated community” (Hruby, 2001, cited in Brooks, 2002, p. 2). The inclusion of the word social extends the meaning of social constructionism to include the cultural and historical dimensions of the social contexts. Social constructionism, as a theoretical perspective, involves the sociological theory of knowledge that uncovers ways in which individuals and groups participate in their perceived reality. This construction and knowledge Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue has an inevitable historical and socio-political dimension that is interpreted not in isolation but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices, and language.

The Indigenous female principals in this study bring to their leadership and negotiation of school and community partnerships their varied social and cultural experiences that are critical to understanding why they do things the way they choose to do them.

Notably, a number of scholars in the field of educational leadership believe the practice of educational leadership is a socially bounded process (Dimmock & Walker 2005; Fitzgerald, 2006; Heck, 1998; Sinclair, 1998) with cultural and social structures influencing the way human beings think and behave as they engage with the world around them. In this process, Creswell (2003, p. 8) states, they develop “subjective meanings of their experiences”. This development is firmly set within a political and historical context. In affirming this view, Guba and Lincoln (1985) state that realities are multiple, constructed and holistic; when we start to understand, accept, and appreciate these realities then we give others an opportunity to enrich not only their lives but also the lives of those with whom they interact. Guba and Lincoln (1985) further assert that the researcher and the object of inquiry are dependent on each other. In this investigation, both the researcher and participants bring Indigenous worldviews from different historical and socio-cultural contexts. Shared understanding is possible in terms of beliefs, the nature

of relationships, kinship structures, and a reliance on interdependence through “social interactions and cultural frameworks such as shared understandings, practices, [and] language” (White, 2007, p. 84). The realities of all human beings are embedded in these interactions and in the frameworks they use to make sense of their everyday lives. While there is no claim that epistemological perspectives of the researcher and the participants are identical, mutual understandings exist because of a shared history of colonisation, oppression, and marginalisation as Indigenous women and as people engaged in leadership practices.

### **3.4 THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE**

A typical theoretical framework in qualitative inquiry illustrates the ‘big picture’ of the perceptions and similar concepts that are engaged in the conduct of a particular inquiry (Crotty, 1998), and identifies the links between them (Fisher & Goblirsch 2007; Denzin, 1989). The significance of these links has been pointed out by Radhakishna et al (2002, p. 692), who argue that “almost all research studies in social and behavioural sciences regardless of disciplines/programs, require a rationale or base for conducting research, that is often called theoretical framework”.

In search of a suitable interpretive approach, three key variables: *symbolic interaction*, *hermeneutics* and *phenomenology* were considered. The interpretivist approach “looks for culturally derived and historically situated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67). “Through the filter of socially constructed perceptions” (Neuman, 2006, p. 42) Indigenous principals can challenge structures and reflect on how they create, negotiate, and include culturally appropriate ways that work productively for the community and school, thus seeking “understanding of the [complex] world in which they live and work” (Creswell, 2005, p. 56). Each of the three streams *symbolic interaction*, *hermeneutics*, and *phenomenology* has a compelling potential to represent the voices of the female principals.



### **3.5 SYMBOLIC INTERACTION, PHENOMENOLOGY, HERMENEUTICS**

Given the context in which the study is conducted, there is a parallel concern with other Indigenous scholars regarding early traditions of philosophical thinking. Such theorising has western hegemonic claims that are likely to perpetuate injustice in any research involving Indigenous participants (Arbon 2007; White 2007). The three streams of the interpretivist philosophical stance were chosen for the study had a persuasive justification for the overall framework of the study.

#### **3.5.1 Symbolic Interaction**

Symbolic interaction as a theoretical perspective “deals directly with issues such as language, communication, interrelationships and community” (Crotty (1998, p.8). These key elements were essential to this investigation, and particular attention was paid to ensuring that the language of communication, and the relationship with participants was amicably pleasant so as to provide the participants opportunity to narrate their stories at their convenience, and in the manner they chose to express themselves. Symbolic interaction, Blumer (1969) claims, has three key aspects. Firstly, culture and social processes such as values, norms, and beliefs influence human beings. Secondly, we act towards situations based on the interpretations we have for them, and thirdly, we derive meanings from interaction with others and modified through an interpretive process. Hence, cultural symbols such as language play a significant role. Language as a symbol is significant because “a sensitive understanding of people’s lives requires shared symbols, meanings, and vocabularies” (Madriz, 2000, p. 840).

For these reasons, symbolic interaction was suitable as a perspective that addresses such shared values of participants in this study. Within the broader Australian society, Indigenous Australians have a distinctive culture based on “the belief that the primary unit of life and existence is relationship” (Trudgen, 2000, p. 21). This is antithetical to the dominant European culture seen as “reductionist, linear, singular, and fragmented” (Trudgen, 2000, p.127). These differences in worldviews understandably set the parameters for interaction that is consistent

with Indigenous peoples' lives, including educating Indigenous children and demonstrating educational activities in schools. In the context of telling stories around the campfire, the Indigenous female principals in this study asserted their voices "not as a harmonious choir but as a cacophony of voices that celebrates distinctiveness within an Indigenous framework" (Fitzgerald, 2003a, p.12-13).

Importantly, while noting that some research studies have been carried out involving Indigenous people worldwide, Indigenous people remain sensitive to research practices due to the nature and process in which these studies were conducted (Arbon 2007). Similarly, studies on leadership theories have been inextricably linked to European imperialism and colonialism (Fitzgerald, 2003a; Johnson, 1997, Kamara, 2006; Trujillo-Ball, 2003). Notably, Smith (1999) equates the relationship between the researcher and those being researched to that of oppressor and oppressed thereby neglecting voices of marginalised groups such as Indigenous people. Indigenous scholars such as Arbon (2007), Kamara (2006), Martin (2003), Smith (1999), and White (2007) argue for a research paradigm inclusive of Indigenous worldviews and the socio-cultural context of their lives.

Linda Smith (1999, p. 29) in her book "Decolonising Methodologies" criticises western academics who "having written all the rules by which the Indigenous world has been theorised, have until now remained impervious to the resulting silencing of Indigenous voices". While alternative ways of thinking about the world persist, Indigenous voices are readily "marginalised, intellectually discredited, [and even] dropped from the curricula of schools and universities" (Hoppers, 2002, cited in Connell, 2007, p.xi). The symbolic interactionist perspective has the potential to regain the dignity that has been lost through research set within alternative western approaches that disempower Indigenous participants. Such an approach with an illuminating potential has the possibility to direct and guide an investigator "to take to the best of [her or his] ability the standpoint of those studied" (Denzin, 1978, p. 99).

### **3.5.2 Phenomenology**

Phenomenology as a theoretical perspective, with roots in philosophy and human science, studies a phenomenon as experienced by the individual. The philosophical position of scholars such as Husserl has contributed immensely to this approach in social science which urges the phenomenologist to open their eyes and have a worldview that is pregnant with multiple and potential realities. Methodologically, phenomenology calls researchers “to lay aside, as best we can, the prevailing understandings of those phenomena and revisit our immediate experience of them, [allow for] possibilities for new meaning [to] emerge for us or we witness at least an authentication and enhancement of former meaning” (Crotty, 1996a, in Crotty, 1998, p. 78). Fundamentally, this would require revisiting prejudiced viewpoints to “set aside all previous habits of thought, see through and break down the mental barriers which these habits have set along the horizons of our thinking... to learn to see what stands before our eyes” (Husserl, 1931, p. 43). In collecting and analysing the data, the researcher was aware of Crotty’s (1998) caution of imposing and constructing any presuppositions on the data. Hence, at every stage of the research process an awareness of power dynamics between participants and researcher that might create such a climate became a central focus.

### **3.5.3 Hermeneutics**

As a philosophical stance, hermeneutics is “about treating our awareness of the world as if it were some complex texts with phenomenology being the art of reading and interpreting that awareness” (Shank, 2006, p. 133). This prerequisite necessitated the choice to locate the methodology within a western paradigm that permitted the expression and interpretation of Indigenous worldviews from their perspective. This discussion draws on the influences of German philosophers such as Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911), Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989), Heidegger, (1962), and Moustakas(1994). Historically located in biblical studies, and etymologically derived from the Greek word *hermeneuein* meaning “to interpret or to understand”, hermeneutics came to be known as the interpretation of biblical texts. Since then its migration to other fields of scholarship has accommodated a

number of different approaches. As an art or science of biblical interpretation of the scriptures it rejects that there is a truth “out there” with which facts correspond and rejects as illusory the idea of objective truth. Through hermeneutics, “interpretation has become part of our cultural understanding, that only as historically and culturally located beings can we articulate ourselves in relation to others and the world in general” (Rundell, 1995, in Crotty, 1998, p. 91).

In hermeneutics, Wilhelm Dilthey one of the eminent philosophers emphasised that life and history are inextricably intertwined a philosophy that is central to biographic narratives in this study. In Dilthey’s view, Marias (1967, p. 383) reports “philosophy is the science of the real; that is of all the real without truncations that humans often bring to their interpretation of the “other”. Dilthey conceives of a worldview that guides our actions that is grounded not in the intellect but in life, a life that has a historical character with us as humans placed in it encountered from the subjectivity of human consciousness, which he calls “the objective mind”. In Dilthey’s view, Crotty (1998) claims:

The texts humans write, the speech they utter, the art they create and the actions they perform are all expressions of meaning. Inquiring into that meaning is much more like interpreting a discourse or a poem than investigating a matter of natural reality through an experiment in, say, physics or chemistry (p. 94).

Dilthey’s sociological position is a transformation from an earlier psychological pursuit. This sociological pursuit allows the interpreter’s own beliefs to be down played and the author’s world given prominence. The biographical narrative semi in-depth interviews conducted with the principals provided the capacity for the researcher as an interpreter to move from the text and throw a lens on the historical and social circumstances of the author, as the researcher attempted to reconstruct the world from which the text came to be and to situate the text within it. This is precisely what Dilthey wants the author’s position to be as you move in and out of the text thus creating the “hermeneutic circle”.

Gadamer (1989) another strong proponent of hermeneutics takes a philosophical position on the historical, which he claims, is linked with tradition of the past that we are able to interpret what has been handed down. Gadamer proposes two

philosophical thoughts. Essentially, there is a deep connection between tradition and language. Consequently, language is fundamental in the understanding of tradition. He further argues that “the essence of tradition is to exist in the medium of language” and “the fusion of horizons that takes place in the understanding is actually the achievement of language” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 378,). The centrality of the historical in the past and present cannot be trivialised in the interpretation process. The study endeavoured to interpret stories of Indigenous female educational leaders “through their eyes” and provide a context that is historical of their traditions, historical in the context of their education journey and educational leadership practices within a complex structure. It is only by “working out the historical horizon of the text that we truly comprehend the mediation between past and present” (Gadamer, 1989, p. 577). Biographic narrative interpretation is central to Gadamer as well as other scholars’ hermeneutic philosophical positioning.

Although symbolic interaction, hermeneutics, and phenomenology are located within the western scientific academy, they provided the potential for an understanding and interpretation of the stories from an Indigenous perspective that would contribute significantly to the practice of Indigenous educational leadership in general and negotiating school community partnerships in particular in Indigenous remote community schools.

### **3.6 METHODOLOGY INTRODUCTION**

The consideration of a suitable methodology required an understanding of the socio-political situation of the participants, the nature of schooling in Indigenous remote contexts, the process of partnership negotiation and the impact it has on school leadership. While there are quite a number of schools in Indigenous remote communities, the number of Indigenous principals in such schools is remarkably low. Hence, it was significant that a conscious effort is made to provide the women the opportunity to voice their perspectives pertaining to these issues. As a way of capturing their voices, narrative was considered as an “inclusive [and] non-colonising” (Briskman, 2007, p. 152) research methodology with a potential to illuminate their perspectives. For a richer data gathering strategy, case study

complemented the choice of narratives. As a “unit of human activity embedded in the real world” (Gillham, 2000, p. 1) it has a uniqueness and capacity for understanding complexity in particular contexts” (Bassey, 1999, p. 36) such as the one under investigation.

### **3.6.1 Narratives**

Historically, the interest in narratives and storytelling can be traced to two notable scholars and researchers, Jan Niecislaw Bandounin de Courteney and Swiss Ferdinand de Saussure. In the mid 1900, their main interest for studying narratives was an interest in texts which quickly spread beyond literary interests to the humanities and social sciences. By the end of the 1970s, the use of narratives had spread into disciplines such as psychology (Polkinghorne, 1988), and sociology (Richardson, 1990). The ‘narrative turn’ in the last three decades has provided a medium to generate literature situated within the social sciences (Wengraf, 2001). The practice of this inquiry, “rooted in interpretive hermeneutics and phenomenology” (Josselson, 2007, p. 7 in Bamberg, 2007), “provides a voice for seldom heard individuals” (Creswell, 2005, p. 477). Additionally, narrative advocates were interested in grasping human conduct via the notion of such inquiry. Atkinson and Delamont, (2007, p. 195) suggest narratives as social phenomena are among the many forms through which social life is enacted where the focus must be on the social and cultural context in which such tales are told.

Over the last three decades, there has been an interest in narratives and storytelling in many other disciplines including education (Creswell, 2005; Czarniawaska, 2004; Hendry, 2007; Wengraf, 2001). Connelly and Clandinin (1990, p. 2) agree, “the main claim for the use of narratives in education research is that humans are storytelling organisms who, individually and socially lead storied lives”. The study of narratives uncovers ways humans experience the world. Additionally, Creswell (2005, p. 476) in support of this claim notes that as “a popular form of narrative in education, researchers report the use of educational stories to capture lives of teachers, professors, administrators, school board members, and other educational personnel”. This, Creswell (2005, p. 490) reports, “has emerged as a popular form of qualitative research and a viable way of

studying educational settings” Similarly, Cooper (as cited in Johnson, 1997) claims narratives had been useful as a central focus in the study of leadership as experienced by school principals. This positioning is towards a more embracing model that gives dignity to the existence of marginalised people and also promotes an understanding of behavioural patterns in organisational life.

Narratives and storytelling have a great deal of value within many Indigenous societies. For Australian Indigenous people storytelling is still “an integral way of life and holds significance in cultural life. Similar to other tribal cultures, they tell public stories, sacred stories, men-only and women-only stories and combination stories” (Shepperd, n.d, p. 2). The invasion of the white population Shepperd (n.d, p. 2) claims, “actively discouraged Indigenous storytelling and many important tales were lost”. This invasion did not deter this age -old tradition cherished for years and has re-established the cultural identity and vitality of Indigenous groups without others appropriating or exploiting their stories. In the same age-old tradition Shepperd notes, they are:

Gathered around the campfire in the evening, on an expedition to a favourite waterhole, or at a landmark of special significance, parents, Elders or Aunts and Uncles use the stories as the first part of a child’s education. Then as children grow into young adults, more of the history and culture is revealed. Adults then take responsibility for passing on the stories to the following generations. In this way, the Stories of the Dreaming have been handed down over thousands of years. (p. 3).

This activity of storytelling is seen as “politically relevant and important as a liberating process” (White & Epston, as cited in Gergen & Gergen, 2007, p.135) and has become “an integral part of all indigenous research” (Smith, 1999, p.144). As a research tool, Bishop (as cited in Smith, 1999, p.145) further notes that “storytelling is a useful and culturally appropriate way of representing the ‘diversities of truth’, within which the story teller rather than the researcher retains control”. This claim is supported by Briskman (2007, p. 154) who believes “narrative research or oral histories or storytelling are a powerful tool in capturing the voices of Indigenous peoples and placing an alternative to dominant accounts on the public record”. Recent studies elsewhere such as Canada (Johnson, 1997; Umpleby, 2007) and New Zealand (Fitzgerald, 2006) have used narratives to

investigate groups of Indigenous educational leaders' approaches to truth and meaning of educational leadership

In this study, by telling their stories from their perspectives, the female Indigenous principals provide valuable insights into the organisation of their life experiences within a social context that structures understanding of their personal and organisational life. As a research tool, it “expresses their voices without the imposition of already identified hypotheses” (Johnson, 1997, p.59). As a technique in narrative interviewing the biographic narrative method utilised in this study was most suitable for investigating the perspectives of the Indigenous principals. The practice of such narrative inquiry rooted in interpretive hermeneutics and phenomenology (Josselson, 2007, p. 7 as cited in Bamberg, 2007) aimed at situating research material within its appropriate social and historical context. The following section discusses an overview and analytical procedures of this method.

### **3.6.2 Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM)**

The rise in popularity of biographical research tools “lie in their aptness for exploring subjective and cultural formations and tracing interconnections between the personal and the social” (Chamberlayne & King, 2000, p. 9). Since this study involves investigating Indigenous educational leaders, the above quote authenticates a point of view that an agency could be created within methodologies that will bring to the fore the subjective perspectives of marginalised groups. In this section, a brief historical overview of the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) is provided, its applicability in the area of qualitative research involving marginalised groups such as Indigenous groups and the location of this qualitative study within case studies are discussed.

The Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method is a powerful tool in research covering the human and social sciences (Davis 2003; Miller, 2000; Roberts 2002; Wengraf 2007), migration inquiry (Meares, 2007), gender and culture inquiry (Pratt & Yeoh, 2003), argumentation and lived texture (Rosenthal, 2004), and disadvantaged groups (Chamberlayne, Bornat, & Wengraf, 2000).



Just as different scholars in various fields such as science and education hold different views about the beginnings of research methodologies in those disciplines, so do scholars in social science and, in particular, those associated with biographic research studies. To many of these scholars the use of biographic narratives in traditional forms of qualitative research is not new. It had been in existence since the days of Augustine, in the fourth century (Meares, 2007) amidst other qualitative approaches such as narrative-interviewing methods (Lieblich, Tuval-Mashiach & Zilber 1998), sociological research (Chamberlayne & Rustin 1999), dialogue and narrative design (Jovchelovitch & Bauer 2000), and ethnomethodological approaches (Kessler & McKenna 1978).

On the other hand, scholars such as Wengraf (2007), Chamberlayne (2005a, 2005b) , Chamberlayne, Bornat, & Wengraf (2000), claim that it was only in the last 15 years or so that Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method became a major qualitative approach to research, and has since been employed in different research studies in human and social sciences. Drawing on these varying views, the biographic methodology employed in this study is akin to the fundamental work of Fritz Schutze and associates at the Berlin Quatext School who are widely accredited with the founding of BNIM (Wengraf, 2001).

Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method is a development in the traditions of Rosenthal (1993) and was used as a research method after World War 11 to collect life stories and family histories from both perpetrators and survivors of the holocaust and their descendants (Meares, 2007). Drawing on gestalt theory, the method focuses on biography with a methodological and sociological elaboration to reconstruct a two-layered biographical structure of life history and life story (Wengraf, 2001, p. 232). In affirming its suitability for narrative research, Wengraf (2007) notes the methodology:

Supports research into the lived experience of individuals and collectives. It facilitates understanding both the inner and outer worlds of historically evolving persons in historically evolving situations, and particularly the interactivity of such inner and outer world dynamics. As such BNIM lends itself particularly to both the 'psycho' and the 'societal', and without requiring any particular theoretical approach... it particularly serves those researchers wanting tools that support a fully psycho-societal understanding in

which neither sociology nor psychological dynamics and structures are neglected or privileged, and in which both are understood not statistically but as situated historically. This can provide a firm basis for better practice (individual and team) and better policy (p. 12).

Consequently, the methodology serves the purpose of investigating educational leadership within a socially bound context and in this case, Indigenous female principals in remote community schools. It also provides a foundation for a way of understanding the worldview from which they locate their practice of leadership without the imposition of the worldview of the researcher.

Located within the general rubric of social constructionism biographic narratives are deeply rooted in phenomenological hermeneutical approaches. Proponents of narrative research in qualitative studies in many cases take a phenomenological approach. As such, the link between narrative and phenomenology is extensive. Polkinghorne (1988) has had a profound impact on phenomenological approach in qualitative research. Traditional phenomenologists believe that meaning is a property of the world that is discovered like any other phenomena.

With major developments in this area, later philosophers like Heidegger (1962) questioned the meaning that can be interpreted independent of the interpreter. For Heidegger and other philosophers meaning occurs as we try to make sense of a world that comes with no rules or instruction manuals. Hermeneutics, which is “the theory and practice of interpretation and understanding in different kinds of human contexts” (Chelsa, 1995, p. 65), recognises that there is the “possibility of many equally possible interpretations” (Jones, 2001, p. 52). Further, Moustakas (1994) insists that “accounts of experiences are a necessary part of any scientific understanding of any social phenomena” (p. 21). As such, hermeneutics is often employed in qualitative research to seek understanding of human consciousness as the key to understanding the world that is historically and culturally grounded.

On the level of analysis, narrative researchers produced techniques and methods of triangulation that can enrich and inform findings in order to construct case histories and their typologies with respect to lived experiences and narrated life. Biographical construction is not restricted to sociological understanding of persons

but it is also aimed at understanding society in its historical and social structures. As a result the approach can be used for a wide variety of research questions.

The interview method, a lightly structured depth interview uses a single question initial narrative (SQUIN) for example, 'Tell me the story of your leadership journey. Take as much time as you want. I am not going to interrupt you, but I will be taking notes. When you are finished we take a break for some minutes. When we resume I will be asking you a few more detailed questions based upon my notes of what you have told me' to elicit and provoke an extensive, uninterrupted narration. In order to maintain the participant's gestalt, a minimal passive interview technique is maintained by a method of non-interruption. Gestalt which is central to the theoretical principles of this method is defined as "a whole which is more than the sum of its parts, an order or hidden agenda informing each person's life" (Holloway & Jefferson, 2000, p. 34). This shift allows the researcher to cede control of the interview process to the participant and assume the position of active listener. These techniques, not to probe, guide, or ask the participant questions maintain the gestalt of the narrative and have the potential to reveal everyday subjective reality. Additionally, an inter subjective activity engages the interviewer and interviewee. This activity, comprising of "both asymmetrical and symmetric elements" Barr-On, (2006, p. 12) establishes a balance of power.

### **3.6.3 Indigenising Methodologies**

In this investigation, the researcher positioned as a black African woman who, like most colonised peoples of the world, has been and continues to be subjected to prejudice, stereotyping, and structural marginalisation. It is a challenging struggle with de-colonising principles within a dominant western academic discourse such as research. Such challenges involved the location as an "outsider" (not white) and "insider" (an academic with structures constructed for academics through "white eyes", and an "insider-outsider" (being black African and not Australian Indigenous). These layers of identity including gender are an advantage in bringing a worldview that is unique to this research. By no means is it proposed to replace western principles with Indigenous ones. What is advocated is a cross-fertilisation (integration) of the different worldviews that will bring emancipation and

self-determination to the cohort in this study and additionally contribute to educational leadership and research scholarship. Given this background it is with the greatest caution that Indigenous people's identities will be respected throughout.

In recent years, Australian Indigenous writers and academics have become increasingly concerned about research epistemologies and practices that continue to disempower them. Some Indigenous scholars (Arbon, 2007; Martin, 2003; Rigney, 1997; Smith, 1999; and White, 2007) have argued that they are the most researched people in the world and that research methodologies and protocols in knowledge construction in Australia are based on colonial constructions by non-Indigenous people thereby still perpetuating a racialised discourse in the industry (Rigney, 1997). Research fraternities, they argue, while gathering accolades for themselves academically through research on Indigenous issues, have done little to position themselves as supporters in the liberation struggle for Indigenous people by attempting to de-colonise the dominant epistemologies in Australia that are oblivious of Indigenous culture and continue to appropriate Indigenous knowledge systems (Arbon, 2007; Rigney, 1997; White, 2007).

As a result, Indigenous scholars have started to reflect and collaborate to liberate themselves of "racialised research structures" (Rigney, 2001) that have perpetuated in the exploitative academic discourse over the years. In order to position themselves and bring the debate to the fore they have argued for an "Indigenous research paradigm which is inclusive of Indigenous worldviews and cultural practices" (White, 2007, p. 87). It is therefore by no mistake that in recent research discourse new concepts such as "indigenist research", "Indigenous methodology", "Indigenous research", and "decolonizing methodologies" have emerged as a central focus.

The broad agreement among Indigenous scholars is the inclusion of Indigenous research paradigms that answer questions of ontology, epistemology, and methodology from their perspective. In this view an agency has to exist that accepts the legitimisation of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and relating to the world. One cannot therefore impose one's own realities on other human beings. There has to be a place in the research forum to accept multiple realities

and see the world from other people's realities without the imposition of one on the other. As such, research for and on Indigenous people must recruit them to be engaged collaborators and not the objects they have been in the past.

This investigation is an attempt to give a voice to female Indigenous principals in NT remote community schools. A methodological framework that is inclusive of this cohort is essential given the exploitation of this cohort in the past through research activities. An "Indigenist research" paradigm is essentially central to this framework that "focuses on the lived, historical experiences, ideas, traditions, dreams, interests, aspirations and struggles of Indigenous Australian" (Rigney, 1997).

Drawing on their argument, the epistemological and theoretical perspectives are well placed and supported in this study. In the study, social constructionism as an epistemological stance is most appropriate. From this viewpoint, meaning will be constructed from an historical and social context that is congruent with their worldviews. Accordingly, research protocols such as ethics are closely aligned to Indigenous ways of research that will ultimately privilege their voices. The study will employ narratives and locate these within case studies to find answers to the research question.

#### **3.6.4 The Campfire Metaphor**

The study employs the metaphor of storytelling around the campfire, an age-old practice by many Indigenous cultures around the world to pass on knowledge, values, and norms to the younger generation. The choice of using the 'campfire' metaphor as a method to describe the processes and practices of such a distinctive culture is both symbolic and significant in a number of ways. The campfire has always had a significant place in most aspects of cultural activities. Traditionally in most indigenous cultures, storytelling holds both a public and sacred significance. The elders of a nation might appoint a particularly skilful and knowledgeable storyteller as 'custodian' of the stories of that people.

In doing so, knowledge about Indigenous ways of life and interpretation of the world is acquired. As an African, with a similar tradition, storytelling is about educating the African child about African structures that later equip them to interact with the wider world. The practice of sitting around the campfire is significant in Australian Indigenous culture. Ah Kit (2002) articulates the practice so vividly when he recalls:

Sitting around the campfire yarning with the old people and watching the faces of kids in the fire light reminded me of my own childhood and of how the lives of Aboriginal people are inextricably linked with each other through family and community. In an important sense, these links are forged by the social interaction that is symbolised by the way us mob, Aboriginal people, gather together around the campfire (n.p.)

Clearly, it is important to consider a research design that is “culturally congruent” (Shield, 2003) with the Indigenous worldview and one that is symbolically located in the Dreaming which is a spiritual connection in all aspects of Indigenous people’s daily life (White, 2007).

### **3.7 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE METHODOLOGY**

In the process of writing a proposal for the study, an awareness of the nature of storytelling in Indigenous cultures was a consideration. Sitting around the campfire and telling stories is a common practice for Indigenous Australians and other Indigenous cultures internationally. During the early stages of this study, a primary concern was that of identifying an appropriate methodological framework compatible with the concept of the campfire setting.

The discovery of the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method was the result of a week’s training program the researcher attended in Sydney, organised by Prue Chamberlayne and Tom Wengraf from the Department of Social Research Methods Middlesex University in Britain. Further readings about the technique provided the researcher additional knowledge about the relevance of the method for the study with a potential for the campfire setting. It also had an impending justification to answer the central research and theoretical questions for a number

of reasons.

Firstly, given the study investigates Indigenous female principals, situating the context of their worldview was paramount in deliberating on a research design. In order to understand the meaning of their leadership practice particularly in the negotiation of school and community partnerships, it was necessary to locate the study within their social, political and cultural context. Bornat and Walmsley (2004, p. 42) observe that the “value of using a biographical approach lies in the opportunity it provides to take both the whole life and wider socio-economic and historical contexts into account in the analysis of data”. In analysing their lives within this complex context, the recruitment of panel teams during the analysis process of contextualising the part to whole mode of analysis is a key aim of BNIM in an attempt to structure the gestalt of their narratives. Given the ten years relationship of the researcher with the participants, this analysis process of recruiting panel teams was helpful in allowing ‘fresh eyes’ into aspects of the analysis of the data instead of relying on subjective views.

Secondly, the methodology lends itself to some amount of flexibility for specific research purposes which could be modified in the research process (Chamberlayne & Ruskin, 1999; Holloway & Jefferson, 2000; 1997). In other studies conducted elsewhere, aspects of such modification have included participant observation, use of background archives, and psychodynamic form of reflexivity during data analysis. In this study, the flexibility of the methodology made possible the incorporation of informal conversations with system level personnel, use of demographic data, and incorporation of audio recording of the Indigenous panel team at their request.

Thirdly, Chamberlayne and Ruskin (1999, p. 20) suggest, “in order to comprehend the significance of broad social phenomena ...it is imperative firstly to have an appreciation of their meaning in the context of individual lives”. Given that the interest of the researcher was investigating negotiation processes of female Indigenous principals in school community partnerships it was significant to locate this leadership practice within their lived texture of their individual lives. Notably, when the individual lived life is situated within a broader context an understanding and meaning of the whole context can be arrived at. This is a claim that is located

within hermeneutics and firmly located in biographic narratives. Lastly, the interview procedure that commences with a 'single question aimed at inducing narrative' (SQUIN) focuses on eliciting narratives on part or whole of an individual's life story or around a particular issue under investigation.

The advantage of the SQUIN, unlike other traditional qualitative interviews, lies in the democratising process that allows the researcher to relinquish power and "come into light as a willing participant in a dialogical process" (Jones, 2003, p. 60) with "the teller and listener sharing the goal of participating in an experience that reveals shared 'sameness'" (Denzin as cited in Jones, 2003, p. 60). This kind of free flowing in and out of the storytelling that gives power to the interviewee was particularly relevant to this research purpose bearing in mind that Indigenous people have constantly noted the ways in which research conducted in Australia has often exploited and interpreted their lives (Arbon, 2007; Martin, 2003; White, 2007).

As justified by the above reasons, the methodological approach located within case studies offered enormous opportunities to build individual cases and attempt to theorise female Indigenous leadership practices in remote communities. This methodological approach captured the multiple realities of their lives as individuals, as well as a group within social, political and cultural contexts.

### **3.8 RESEARCHER SITUATEDNESS**

This research involves Indigenous female educational leaders in remote Indigenous communities in the Top End of the Northern Territory. In justifying the researcher's involvement, firstly, required the positioning as an African and secondly as a researcher. In this position, she is neither speaking on behalf of Indigenous Australians nor interpreting their worldviews specifically from her perspective though they may share similar experiences through a colonisation history. Hence she locates herself as part of the struggles of black people and bring the 'black perspective' that is central to her identity (Ladner, 1987, p. 74).



This research is partly a continuation of a journey the researcher started in Australia eighteen years ago though dual experiences include both western and Indigenous cultures growing up in a British colony in Sierra Leone West Africa. Essentially, there is some identification with the group of Indigenous Australian participants who collaborated in this study because of “a [similar] shared history of colonisation, oppression, and marginalisation, producing a ‘shared language of colonisation, a shared knowledge about [our] colonisers”, and, as Indigenous women relate to similar struggles of ‘decolonisation’ (Smith, 1999, p. 45). While being [black] does not translate into better representation, [black] researchers tend to be more aware and respectful of cultural matters and protocols (White, 2007) and an additional advantage of easy acceptance in the field.

Storytelling as a method of sharing values, beliefs, and concerns commenced eleven years ago with this group of educational leaders in an engaged dialogue that endeavoured to deconstruct and shape Western and Indigenous paradigms of educational leadership with the hope of finding a common ground and level playing field that allows for cross-fertilisation (integration) of both worldviews. Having established a good relationship prior to commencing the study provided a vantage position that created an instant rapport with the participants. Notably, the researcher acknowledges a subjective view while adhering at the same time to research protocols struggling between three conflicting worlds –being black as part of a “white” research academy that demands a certain level of objectivity and rigid protocols, but also being a member of a marginalised group that shares similar circumstances and, being African and not Indigenous Australian. The researcher shares a “triple bind” (Fitzgerald, 2006, p. 201) with the Indigenous research participants. This positionality provides the researcher a vantage point in the research process.

### **3.9 PARTICIPANTS**

The Northern Territory has been the success story of Aboriginalising educational leadership positions in remote community schools compared to their counterparts in other Australian states and territories. This initiative during the early 1990s was an opportunity for a few aspiring Indigenous senior staff in remote community

schools to take up educational leadership positions. The researcher was initially drawn to the research topic because it was an 'instance' of some concern (Creswell, 1998, p. 28) for a long time in both personal and professional interactions in remote community schools. This time in a research approach there was an interest to explore deeper into their experiences and shed light on their perceptions as principals as an "in depth exploration of a bounded system" (Creswell, 1998, cited in Creswell, 2005, p. 438). In this situation, it was the perceptions of Indigenous female principals and their negotiation of school community partnerships in their respective communities.

As a methodological approach, a biographical narrative approach located within case studies is most suitable for the study. The campfire as a conceptual framework and metaphor derives from Indigenous people's natural ability to use the campfire as a recreational facility where they gather around to dance, tell stories of past events and personal experiences while educating the young into cultural traditions. Researchers such as Briskman (2007) and Czarniawska, (2000), have conveyed the importance of narrative inquiry through stories. One of the basic assumptions of narratives Schram (2003, p. 105) claims is "people's ability to frame events in larger structures or stories that provide a context for interpreting the meaning of these parts". In telling stories around the campfire in collaboration with the Indigenous female principals employing biographic narratives, there was an attempt to "capture the particularity and lived texture of the [women's] lives, [and] at the same time as defining aspects [of them] which can be seen as typical within a particular social context and history" (Chamberlayne & Rustin, 1999, p. 75).

The decision to apply case study as a research tradition filters down to the nature of case studies as an 'analytic focus' on a specific phenomenon. One of the distinguishing characteristics of case studies is "the ability to adapt to a wide range of disciplinary associations such as a biographical" [narrative] (Schram, 2003, p. 106) which is the methodology that guided this study. The investigation located the "cases within their larger context of geographical, political, and social settings" (Creswell, 2005, p. 440). The particular phenomenon under investigation was topical from both a systems perspective and a community perspective. A case study approach was adopted to guide the research process as a way of

investigating an individual, group, or phenomena (Sturman, 1997) and as “a unit around which there are boundaries” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27).

### **3.10 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS**

A primary concern nationally in Indigenous education, over many years, has been complex factors affecting Indigenous people such as health, housing, and education to name a few. To venture into finding a solution on any of these matters would be a mammoth task. Indigenous education particularly in remote communities has deteriorated considerably over the years even with strenuous efforts from federal and state/territory governments to improve Indigenous education outcomes particularly in NT remote community schools. As a way of committing to this concern, research into Indigenous educational issues has been given priority lately. This research was part of an Australian Research Council (the peak Australian research body) grant to investigate Indigenous educational leadership issues in remote Indigenous NT community schools. This research was located within this parent project and the topic of investigation narrowed to educational leadership issues.

Initially, quite a few topics came to mind because of the ten years relationship working with Indigenous principals and interacting with community members. The topic was chosen and participants narrowed to Indigenous female principals for a number of reasons. During the ten years of professional interaction either in workshops at Batchelor Institute or in supporting roles in communities and at the system level, issues about collaborative work involving partnerships have always emerged especially among the Indigenous female principals. At the community level, issues relating to school matters always resurfaced at an informal level with community members during community visits. The Indigenous female principals in this study constantly appeared to be struggling with educational issues that related to a variety of factors within the communities and at the system level.

The reason for choosing this cohort as a “unit of analysis” (Creswell, 2005. p. 145) was an attempt to have a diversity of views and “perceive holistically” (Schram, 2003, p. 96) through individual and group experiences (Hollingsworth, 1999) of

marginalised black women whose contribution to Indigenous education in the Northern Territory is unparalleled. All of the Indigenous female principals have had established involvement with their schools for more than fifteen years and therefore have a considerable amount of knowledge on issues that relate to school and community.

Significantly the choice of cohort was very narrow as at the time of embarking on the study there were only six Indigenous female principals in Indigenous Community schools in the Top End of the NT. To select the participants, a “purposive sampling” (Silverman, 2005, p. 129) was used which demands that we think “critically about the parameters of the population we are studying and choose our sample case carefully on this basis” (Silverman, 2005, p. 129). The study was bounded to include only Top End remote schools that would provide appropriate data reasonably, readily, and quickly. Central Australia was excluded because of difficulties of accessibility that would stall the research process. Originally, the plan was to use only current principals since it was felt their perceptions were most essential to the situation at hand.

During a supervision meeting, there were discussions around the limited number of participants and the diversity of views the study was trying to capture. Following this meeting, a careful deliberation led to the inclusion of retired Indigenous principals with the hope of having a richer and diverse data. Recruiting all participants was unproblematic mainly because of established relationships with the majority of Indigenous educational community school leaders in the NT prior to the study. The participants regarded the study as being significant with an eagerness on their part to share their ‘voices’ as Indigenous women on educational leadership issues in Indigenous remote communities. The study involved three current Indigenous female principals and two retired principals all residing in various Indigenous communities in the Top End of the NT. The nature of biographic narratives and case studies require the selection of small sample sizes. The five principals selected it was hoped will provide the rich data that would answer the research questions.

### 3.11 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Educational leadership issues in Indigenous schools are no different from other matters concerning Indigenous Australians. After almost thirty-five years of training in the NT, very few Indigenous people have aspired to educational leadership positions in remote schools. So far the majority of the very few successful ones are female. Those who have aspired to these positions have been in remote schools for over a decade and have dedicated their entire career to improving themselves and the education of Indigenous children. Despite the multitude of responsibilities that community life demands, their commitment and perseverance has never wavered. The women selected for this study were born in the NT, grew up in their communities, have all trained through Batchelor Institute in the Northern Territory and elsewhere in Australia, and have worked in their schools for over a decade.

The table below illustrates information about the participants.

**Table 3.2 Participants**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>
Leah	Mid 40s	Nguiu	Adv Dip. Teaching Grad Cert Ed. A	Principal, Murrupurtiyanuwu
Esther	Mid 40s	Gunbalanya	B.Ed.; Grad. Dip. Ed.Admin	Principal, Gunbalanya, CEC
Miriam - Rose	Early 50s	Daly River	B.Ed.; M.Ed. Hon. doctorate	Retired principal, Xavier CEC, Daly River
Kilipayuwu	Mid 50s	Nguiu	Adv. Dip. Teach; Grad. Dip. Ed.Ad	Retired principal, Murrupurtiyanuwu
Dhaykamalu	Late 50s	Galiwin'ku	Adv. Dip. Teach. Grad. Dip. Ed. Ad	Retired principal, Shepherdson College

### 3.12 THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method is a technique that allows flexibility in a number of ways and incorporates an interview procedure that requires the

interviewee at the initial stage to tell a story. There are three stages of the interview. This first stage may normally last for a minimum of 15 minutes and a maximum of one hour. Subsequent sessions follow this initial interview depending on a series of circumstances. Initially, the participants are contacted to decide on a day, time, and place of their own choosing. The interviews are audiotaped with prior consent obtained from each participant. The first interview referred to as sub-session one is the main interview designed to elicit a full narrative by employing a single carefully designed question. This session gives the interviewee the freedom to narrate her story as she chooses with minimal interruption from the researcher. Normally, this session lasts for a maximum of one hour depending on the interviewee. At the end of this session, a second interview immediately follows to extract more stories from the interviewee's initial narrative. While the initial story is being told the researcher takes notes that will assist in following up on subsequent sessions. The second session focuses on topics that emerge from the initial interview. This session would ask questions of clarification on topics as they appear in sequence from the initial interviews. These questions formulated by the researcher seek to generate further narratives. The third interview is variable and gives the interviewer the flexibility to structure questions that may need further clarification from subsequent interviews or issues that relate to the research question that are not addressed in the two former sessions. Wengraf (2001) suggests a time lapse of at least one week between the two sub-sessions and the final sub-session. In some cases, a final sub-session may not be required depending on the amount of information already gathered in subsequent interviews.

### **3.13 THE SINGLE NARRATIVE SEEKING QUESTION**

The interview procedure commences in the first interview with what Wengraf (2001, p. 119) calls "single question aimed at inducing narrative" (SQUIN). This single narrative question focuses on eliciting narratives on part or all of an individual's life story or around a particular issue under investigation. The study investigated how Indigenous female principals negotiate school community partnerships with their communities. The SQUIN is a "democratising minimalist interviewer intervention" (Wengraf, 2001, p. 112) and "refuses to take up powers of

partial control” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 113) hence making it an ideal framework in Indigenous contexts . Essentially, the researcher assumes a ‘facilitative’ role and “interventions are effectively limited to facilitative voices and non-verbal support” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 113) such as ‘yeah, ah, humm’ which indicate that you are listening. Holloway and Jefferson (1997, p. 5) note “that the art of the skill of the exercise is to assist narrators to say more about their lives without offering at the same time, interpretations, judgments, or otherwise imposing the interviewer’s own relevancies”. This strategy of relinquishing power is quite unlike the gold standard semi-structured probes often used in social science interviews where the researcher comes prepared with predetermined assumptions that are already built into research questions. This shift Jones (2001, p. 1) claims turns the researcher from “knowledge-privileged investigator” to a reflective audience in the process. Wengraf (2001, p. 113) notes, “the philosophy behind this is to maintain the gestalt principle [that is central to the methodology] in allowing the spontaneous pattern of the storyteller to complete itself without the interviewer’s intervention”.

The focus of the first session and the wording of the single question inducing narrative would depend on particular research purposes. In this study the construction of the narrative seeking question focused on the research purpose with “minimal refinement, carefully designed, written out in full, and delivered without modification” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 112). In framing the SQUIN for this study I used what Wengraf (2001, p. 112) refers to as the “classic SQUIN” and to assist the reader this appears in italics and so do all quotes in the text from participants.

*As you know I’m researching the experiences of Indigenous female principals in NT remote community schools in negotiating partnerships between their schools and the communities...*

*So, can you please tell me your story as principal of .....  
how it all started and how it all developed.  
All those experiences that were important for you, personally, and  
have had an impact on the way you have worked with the  
communities while you were principal.*

*Please begin wherever you like. Take the time you need. We’ve  
got about one hour. I’ll listen first, I won’t interrupt, I’ll just take  
some notes in case I have any questions for after you’ve finished  
telling me your story.*

For researchers unfamiliar with this way of framing interview questions not only will it sound awkward and cumbersome but also very difficult if they are used to participating at interviews. Wengraf (2001) notes there are reasons for this complex formulation. Essentially, there are two parts; a core which is the actual question, and a carefully weak first part. The researcher creates the environment where the interviewee focuses on things that are personally important to them. There is an important reason for asking about both relatively objective “events” and relatively subjective “experiences”. In building up the lived life and the told story, the researcher is interested in both the objective and subjective. It is important to allow the interviewee to create their own ‘spontaneous gestalt’ that is central to the method. The *begin wherever you like* removes the compulsive conformity that is normally associated with other forms of interviewing and thereby creates a “free associative” situation (Wengraf, 2007, p. 125) that limits the demi-God powers of the interviewer and invites the interviewee to start with their “system of relevance”. The promise *not to interrupt* assures the interviewee that the researcher is actively listening and that non-intervention is not translated into persecution or disapproval’. This technique of interviewing is proved to have some impact on both the interviewer and interviewee depending on personalities and possibly the relationship between the two people involved. For the interviewee, there is this impossible task of telling all events on one hand and experiences on the other which eventually emerge as a unified account. For the interviewer, (Wengraf, 2007) draws attention to the difficult quadruple task during the story telling.

1. Bearing your central research question and theory questions in mind which is your system of relevance,
2. making enough notes on key phrases and cue words in preparation for the next session soon after,
3. supporting interviewee through non intrusive participative active listening, and
4. needing to be equally attentive to anything and everything (p. 45).

During the interviews it was necessary to minimise prior researcher knowledge of Indigenous school leadership matters and approach the study with ‘fresh eyes’ in order to limit researcher subjectivity and allow the participants’ system of



relevance to emerge in the meandering discourse. The next section is a discussion of the process of all the three sub-session interviews.

### **3.14 THE FIRST INTERVIEW**

Wengraf (2001, p.112) notes that “learning this extreme form is a difficult but powerful method for learning how to not-intervene and how to listen – a very difficult task for those ‘naturally’ framed to intervene in interviews because they love to participate in conversations”. The first interview was the most challenging of all three interviews. Initially there was an attempt to distribute the initial question in advance. Wengraf and Chamberlayne (2007) advise that:

This is in general a bad idea because it leads [participants] to getting very anxious and doing a lot of preparation and you lose the improvised quality of narration. It becomes a polished prepared narrative instead of an expressive one (personal email communication).

In addition they pointed out the advantage Indigenous cultures had over westerners at improvised storytelling a view supported by other writers such as Wyatt (cited in Sarbin 1986, p. 200 as cited in Jones 2003, p. 61) who notes that “expectant listening seems to be an Indigenous part of all stories or narratives”.

The interviews took place in the participants’ community and in Darwin with all principals exceptionally responsive and cooperative in the process. All but one participant responded superbly to the SQUIN. The spontaneous response from four participants provided distinctive individual stories that would never have emerged from a “polished prepared narrative” (Wengraf, 2007). The participant who had difficulty initially responding to the SQUIN expected a probing technique that was the norm in previous research interviews and reverted to silence. Wengraf (2001, p. 126) suggests that the interviewer “resists this unconscious or conscious pressure to actively direct questioning role”. In dealing with this silence, there was an attempt to “relaunch” the SQUIN (Wengraf, 2001, p. 122) by repeating it fractionally and slowly. Wengraf’s (2001, p. 128) suggestion of not “rushing to rescue” as an active listening skill and a technique of the methodology

eventually brought success. Once she started the narrative, the most remarkable story unfolded.

The researcher supports Chamberlayne and King's (as cited in Meares, 2007, p. 84) views that "the significance of a single event or part of a life can only be understood in relation to the whole, and the whole in relation to parts". Quietly listening, yet actively involved provided the opportunity to experience intensely the gestalt of their personal and professional lives. The richness of their stories would have been compromised had "the researcher's` system of relevance" (Wengraf, 2001, p. 49) taken precedence. The SQUIN as a powerful tool empowers marginalised groups in allowing their suppressed voices to emerge.

### **3.15 THE SECOND INTERVIEW**

In the first session, the researcher asks only one question inviting a story. In the second session the researcher is also asking narrative questions but of a different sort referred to as topic questions aimed at inducing narratives (TQUINS) Wengraf (2001). The procedure for this session is strictly prescribed and its success generally depends on how well the researcher has recorded important topics during the first session. It is significant that the researcher adheres to some key points in this session. The questions must be asked in the sequence that the interviewee narrated the story starting from the first topic in session one and finishing with the last topic of session one. In this second interview only topics that are of significance or interest to the researcher that may need some elaboration should be asked. In keeping with the method, the researcher bears in mind the central research question and may need to further clarify such issues that have been discussed. The idea here is to ask for more narratives about "particular happenings, incidents, occasions, and examples" (Wengraf, 2001, p. 141).

In session one, the interviewee may have discussed twelve topics and only seven are significant for the researcher's purpose. The questions will be asked in the order in which they appeared in the interview without combining topics or repeating earlier ones. The questioning technique is significant in that it enables the researcher to get more narratives which Wengraf (2001, p. 141) refers to as

Particular Incident Narratives (PINS). A rule of thumb is to ask questions using the exact words of the interviewee. For example, the interviewee may have referred to “jamakule” (meaning child in Yolngu Matha) in sub-session one, the researcher uses the same word instead of substituting it in formulating her question. There is a skill to formulating questions in order to generate narratives. If the interviewee has referred to non-narrative material in the first session, the skill is to ask narrative seeking questions for example, “Can you give me any more examples of similar incidents”? In this session you are trying to get the interviewee to the “bottom of the sea” (Wengraf, 2007, personal communication) and dig out more stories that would give data for the central research question.

In spite of a successful first interview where the researcher simply listened to the participants tell their stories, this session proved to be challenging primarily because of my unfamiliarity with asking narrative-seeking questions. In order to prepare for this second interview a thirty minutes break was necessary to allow time for interaction with the data and formulate questions for the second interview. Wengraf (2001) suggests 15 -20 minutes break depending on the situation.

The second session commenced soon after the break and was recorded on audiotape in a similar fashion. Interestingly, this session lasted a minimum of 45 minutes for each of the participants because they were great storytellers. At the end of this session they were asked whether there was anything else they would like to add to complement the information already given. Surprisingly, they all had more contributions to make to an already exhaustive interview.

### **3.16 THE THIRD INTERVIEW**

There is a significant difference between this session and the previous sessions. This session, Wengraf (2001) suggests, is conducted at least a week or two after the first two sessions. This is to allow time for a preliminary analysis of previous interviews and strategically to prepare for the session. Where sessions one and two were restricted to narratives and the participants’ ‘relevancies’, this is an open session that is non-BNIM narrative structure related. The researcher may or may not conduct this session based on information already acquired. This session

could be used as an opportunity to further questions on the researcher's 'system of relevance', which is, the overall research question and theory questions if these have not been fully articulated in previous sessions, or need further clarification.

In planning and conducting this session there were factors that required the researcher to include some flexibility. Because of time constraints on both the researcher and participants the interviews with each principal took place in some cases a day after the first two sessions. This required a preliminary analysis soon after the interviews to prepare the following day for the third session. This was quite tasking as interview materials were lengthy and learning BNIM techniques and skills was a new venture. A set of standard questions was developed for all five participants directly related to the central research question. Where some topic had been fully addressed by a participant such a question was omitted or in some cases modified.

### **3.17 THE ANALYSIS**

The analysis is an intensive process that requires careful planning since the involvement of other people is required as part of a triangulation procedure. Additionally interaction with data is extensive. The process requires the development of lived life and told story from the initial stage of transcription.

#### **3.17.1 The Transcription Process**

The transcription process commenced soon after each interview. The data was transcribed manually for a very good reason. (Jovchelovitch and Bauer as cited in Meares, 2007, p. 90) believe that "researcher participation in the transcription process is useful for a degree of intimacy with interview data". All the transcripts were transcribed verbatim "as complete and unedited as possible" (Wengraf, 2001, p. 213) with page and reference numbers in preparation for further analysis. This manual transcription provided some considerable insight into the data in addition to memos. Notably, Glaser (as cited in Wengraf, 2001, p. 210) points out the importance of memoing:

Memos are the theorising write-up of ideas about codes and their relationship as they strike the analyst while coding. Memoing is a constant process that begins when first coding data, and continues through reading memos or literature, sorting and writing papers or monograph to the end. Memo-writing constantly captures the frontier of the analyst's thinking as he goes through his data, codes, sorts, or writes (p. 83).

Similarly, Chamberlayne and Ruskin (1999, p. 24) in their project indicated “the transcribed narrative and the interviewer’s supplementary memories of the interview then became the source of data on which interpretation and analyses were based”. This continuous memoing proved to be one of the most valuable activities in the process. There was an incredible amount of intimacy with the transcripts to the point that during interaction with data there were vivid memories of the interview experience, of each participant with all the non-linguistic narratives captured in the data. These theoretical memos are useful in assisting the researcher to arrive at answers to research questions. Essentially, as part of the analysis process memoing is an attempt to link parts to wholes and wholes to parts. The memos become the researcher’s foundation on which to build later in the analysis process. Wengraf (2001, p. 209) notes, “it is better to have no transcript and all the theoretical memos, than the other way round”.

Preparation required the development of a matrix template kept on the computer with inserted side columns that allowed insertion of annotations and commentaries or for any other purpose as deemed appropriate. The figure below is an example of a matrix for a participant. The symbols that were used with the transcript were adapted from Silverman’s simplified transcription symbol (Wengraf (2001, p. 217).

**Figure 3.1: Example excerpt from transcript (interview 4)**

Line No	Transcript Subsession 1 (First interview –SQUIN)	Notes
1/1	....., as you know I’m researching the experiences of Indigenous female principals in NT remote community schools in negotiating partnerships between their schools and the communities...	This interview took place in Darwin at BIITE Parap annex on a Saturday. It was very quiet with no staff around. I made her comfortable with a cup of tea she requested and I briefly explained the procedure.
2	So, can you please tell me your story as retired principal of ..... how it all started and how it all developed	
3	All those experiences that were important for you, personally, and have had an impact on the way you have worked with the communities while you were principal.	After launching the SQUIN she was quiet for five minutes and seemed to be quite confused from her facial expression. I repeated the SQUIN and still got no response. I was baffled by this reaction and waited. As I attempted to write theoretical memos she stared at the note book hoping to
4	Please begin wherever you like. Take the time you need. We’ve got about one hour. I’ll listen first, I won’t interrupt, I’ll just take some notes in case I have any questions for after you’ve finished telling me your story	
5	[pause 5minutes]	
6	<i>Well Martha [4] I’ll start at the beginning of my career when I started working at the school because in 1968 when I started working at Shepherdson College as it was called</i>	
7	<i>Galiwin’ku school, Elcho Island school during the time. [.]I started schooling first there</i>	

<p>16 17 18 19 20 21 22 23 24</p>	<p><i>and then as years went past [3] I'm just first sharing about my experience going to school there. [7]It took me from 1969 till 1998 working as assistant teacher, right up to band one teacher. I was working as assistant teacher first with a European teacher working as assistant teacher. Gradually as I was working there I was learning at the same time seeing how Balanda as a whiteman when they are preparing lesson programming for Aboriginal children. It was a time of learning and finding out how I would work as a trained teacher how I would work with my own people my Aboriginal children. It took me a long time [.] to really learn the structure of the white man system in working in the school as a teacher like what balanda teachers do, white man.</i></p>	<p>expect ready made questions to follow. I stopped the interview, asked her to take a break and come back after a few minutes. She initiated the interview after seven minutes. I switched on the audio tape and I repeated the SQUIN. This time it was instantaneous and she just launched into her story. I felt so relieved!</p>
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### **3.17.2 Generating Biographic Data Chronology (BDC) and Text Structure Sequentialisation (TSS)**

After transcribing the raw data verbatim, the BNIM analysis comprises sequentialisation of lived life and told story which generates two separate documents – the Biographical Data Chronology (BDC) and the Text Structure Sequentialisation (TSS). Wengraf (2001, p. 236) explains that “the lived life is composed of the uncontroversial hard biographical data that [is] abstracted from the interview material” and other demographic sources such as photos, reports and articles. This is the objective data about the person’s life that is extracted from all three phases of the interview and other sources which are later constructed into a chronology as the interview material may not reflect this chronological sequence. Where clarification was needed on biographical data that related to the central research question, each participant was asked after the interview and during the course of the study for further information. This provided some rich data that significantly contributed to developing the lived life component of the analysis.

### **3.17.3 The Text Structure Sequentialisation**

The Text Structure Sequentialisation (TSS) stage describes the delivery of interview of the biographical account and responses to the interview. The TSS explains the sequentialisation of structural changes in the biographical account of the interview. Wengraf (2001) explains that:

When we come to analyse a person’s told story we address not so much the events and actions, the happenings, that occurred in a person’s life (the BDC), but rather the way in which those events and actions were experienced and are now understood from the perspective of the person giving the interview.(p. 239).

Unlike the BDC the TSS involves a great deal of work that requires an understanding of the structure of the text that is created freely by the interviewee generating a “unique gestalt” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 239). This is created by the single question aimed at inducing narratives (SQUIN), which gives the interview a free reign in creating a story. Depending on the length of the interview generating



a TSS can take a substantial amount of time. Generating a TSS requires three significant features, two of which are reasonably easy to identify, with the last one involving some high technicality. The three features involve a change from interviewer to interviewee or vice versa; the second feature involves a change in the topic being spoken about, and the third and highly technical one is a change in the way a topic is spoken about which is referred to as a textsort change. The procedures and categorisation used in this study is adopted from *Quatext*, defined by Berlin 1992 (cited in Wengraf, 2001, p.241). It distinguishes five different types of text as distinguished in BNIM typology of textsorts. The five textsorts derived from literary theory and are the results of instrumentation theory underlying the BNIM –DARNE school of interpretation which holds that a “change in the way that somebody talks about an old or new topic is held to be significant” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 243). Similarly, Rosenthal (1998, p.4-5 in Wengraf, 2001, p.243) further notes:

I assume that it is by no means coincidental and insignificant when biographers argue about one phase of their lives, but narrate another at great length, and then give only a brief report of yet another part of their lives or describe the circumstances of their lives in detail.

In literacy instrumentation theory there are five distinctive classifications Wengraf refers to as a DARNE analysis. Figure 3.2 below briefly explains the five textsorts.

**Figure 3.2: The DARNE textsorts**

<b>Description:</b> The assertion that particular entities exhibit certain qualities or characteristics
<b>Argumentation:</b> The development of an argument or the justification for taking a particular position
<b>Report:</b> The recounting of a sequence of events, actions or experiences from some distance, with little detail
<b>Narrative:</b> The recounting of a sequence of events, actions or experiences in full detail
<b>Evaluation:</b> The interviewee’s opinion of a particular aspect of their story

This pattern was typical of all interview texts transcribed which eventually assisted in analysing the case histories of the Indigenous female principals. An interesting yet sometimes frustrating experience with sequentialising evolved as participants moved very quickly from one text sort to the other within episodes. The technique in sequentialising is to use a “broad brush” (Wengraf, 2001, p. 244), and not pay too much attention to very minute details. Initially, pages of sequentialised material were produced that proved complicated to handle. Eventually, a “broad brush” was used to arrive at less voluminous sequentialised material.

This stage of analysis in the generation of both the BDC and TSS is critical in the process as it can lead the researcher to deeper meanings of the transcript. These new intermediate documents are then at the next stage of analysis where panel teams are recruited to assist further in interpreting the texts in order to generate a Biographic Data Analysis (BDA) and a Thematic Field analysis (TFA). Chunks of data were chosen and presented to each panel team for analysis.

#### **3.17.4 Panel Teams**

The use of panel teams or reflecting teams is a way of “facilitating the introduction of multiple voices” (Jones, 2001, p. 67). The new intermediate documents derived from the verbatim transcript and other materials (Biographic Data Chronology) and a text-sequentialisation of speech-acts events, text-events, changing segmental structure (Text structure sequentialisation) will involve panel teams to interpret quite separately. Two principles developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) and referred to as grounded theory underlie this interpretation. Wengraf (2001, p. 256) refers to it as “emergent theorizing”. The principles involve, as Wengraf (2001) notes:

1. datum-by-datum analysis by which predictive hypotheses are multiplied before being refuted or supported by a later datum or by later data.
2. the multiplication of counter-hypotheses and tangential hypotheses in relation to the first hypotheses you think of (p. 255).

Wengraf (2001, p. 259) also notes that to “ensure non-contamination” of data separate panel teams work either the lived life analysis or the told story analysis and at no time should panels meet and exchange results.

The principle is to engage at least two people for this task although the more on a panel the better. It is also an advantage to have a diversity of panel members as Wengraf (2001, p. 258) suggests “the more different they are from each other, the more ‘objective’ your results are likely to be since the best interpretations come out of groups unlike yourself and both like and unlike informants”. In setting up panel teams, a maximum of three per team with a demographic diversity were recruited. It was essential to recruit an Indigenous panel team as part of this exercise that proved to be quite an advantage. Both the lived life and told story were analysed in separate sessions over a period of meetings lasting over three hours each. Prior to organising panel teams, a letter of invitation was sent to all panel members. Almost all with the exception of three were colleagues who are reflective, experienced professionals from Batchelor Institute and Charles Darwin University. Prior to commencing each meeting, the process was fully explained with particular attention to the ethical considerations of the research process. It was more convenient to convene panel meetings on weekends when people had time to participate.

At each session, segments of data were selected from the sequentialised material and presented on PowerPoint. Team members were then asked to consider the datum and then attempt individually to develop hypotheses. The researcher becomes a facilitator at this exercise and offers no clues of previous knowledge of any material to panel members. The technique here is to generate as many hypotheses as possible. It proved to be quite a laborious activity but one which panel members found productive. They brought a wealth of knowledge and experience from historical sources that were very useful in data interpretation. Interestingly, panel members were keen to immerse themselves into texts in an attempt to discover the sequence of individual stories, which unfortunately was not possible since different panels worked on different texts. Another experience was that panel members brought their personalities to the exercise which made it quite interesting in that their individual prejudices were a part of their interpretation which when later refuted became a turning point for personal reflection.

After the datum by datum interpretations the next stage of microanalysis was the last part of the group analysis where small segments of the verbatim texts were selected from the Biographic Data Analysis (BDA) and Thematic Field Analysis (TFA). For this exercise several pieces of text were chosen from each interview. The reason for choosing them was their ability to shed light on some aspect of cultural or organisational interpretation that might enhance or confirm initial hypotheses. The justification for such attempts 'is to use the "smallest things" to illuminate the "largest issues" Wengraf (2001, p. 293). For example, a small text such as "co-business" was chosen and panel members endeavour to interpret this segment. It was interesting to note how much hypotheses were generated from such a small segment. This activity provided an opportunity to reflect for deeper meaning of each participant's data. This exercise proved to be profoundly useful in building the structure of the case. On finalization of panel team meetings work generated at each meeting was transferred and final themes generated from the exercise.

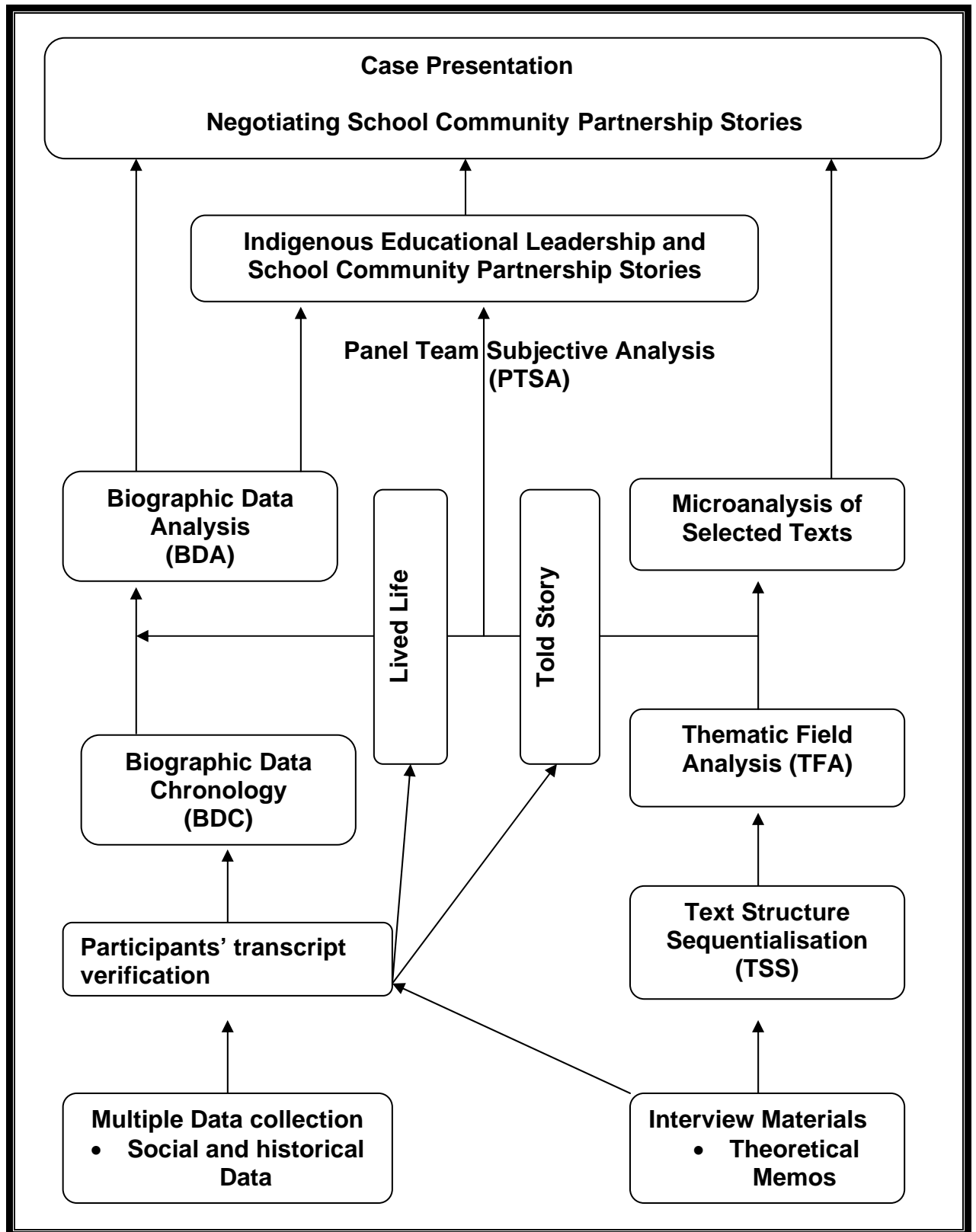
### **3.17.5 The Final Stage of Analysis**

The final stage was to form a structure of the case history (Wengraf, 2001, p. 284) that comprises a description of the evolving relationship between the lived life and the told story. This stage of analysis involved the construction of a diagram of the structured phases of the lived life alongside the structure of the initial narrative. At this stage of analysis the researcher has the flexibility to selectively use or modify the presentation according to the particular requirements of the research. Wengraf and Chamberlayne (2006, p.55) refer to this stage as moving from "craft" to "art" where a shift in thinking away from previous formalised tasks is required to a more holistic conceptualization of the whole case. The researcher at this stage draws on theoretical memos, inconsistencies between the lived life and told story, silences, omissions, hesitations and so on. Chamberlayne (2005) notes in order to think of the whole we need to understand the working of its parts. The researcher decided that focusing on the relationship between the lived life and the told story was the best way of furthering sociological and historical understanding of negotiating school community partnerships in an Indigenous remote community context. The study uncovers the relationship between the lived life of the participants and the

told story, which is the narrative as a case construction. Focus was on fulfilling three main objectives: Firstly, to describe the issues involved in negotiating school community partnerships in Indigenous remote community schools; secondly, to describe the social and historical context of the participants' lives and the context of the interview; and finally, to account for the impact and influence of culture in negotiating partnerships and the way the participants themselves exert influence over their own lives. These characteristics have made the biographic narrative interpretive method most suitable for this study, and the presentation of research outcomes.

Below is a scheme of the BNIM process that illustrates the various stages of constructing a case history.

**Figure 3.3: Stages of BNIM (An adaptation from Wengraf, 2007, p. 237).**



During the research process, significant documents such as departmental policies, and other related archival publications were collected and examined. These sources were thoroughly explored by the researcher with the intention of not only extracting information, but also to compare claims, arguments, and recommendations relating to remote school leadership and negotiating school and community partnerships.

### **3.18 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS**

The importance of ethics in research cannot be overemphasised, particularly that involving Australian Indigenous people. In the past these participants have often raised serious concerns about the 'exploration and exploitation' (personal conversation, 1997) of Indigenous people through research. The researcher was therefore aware of and sensitive to this issue at every step of this study. In addition, a research methodology that expressed and addressed power relationships and positioning of participants in more equal ways was critically important.

The importance of ethics in research is not limited to Indigenous people since ethical issues are the hallmark of any good research. As part of the research planning process particular attention was paid to potential ethical implications (Brewerton & Millward, 2001) that pervade all of qualitative research. Prior to data collection, all participants received an informed consent form in plain English. They were given time to think about their involvement before responding. Each individual signed the consent form with all participants agreeing on being identified. Creswell (2005) outlines elements that must be included such as purpose of the study, procedures of the study, voluntary participation, and the right to ask questions. It is a requirement for professional bodies to develop principles that outline a number of potential unethical practices involving research participants. Participants were given the option of being identified, which they all answered in the affirmative.

Embarking on any research requires some general and specific ethical imperatives (Marshall & Rossman, 1995). In essence, specific protocols for each site and as a

group of Indigenous people were a serious consideration. The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) (2001) has developed guidelines that contribute key ethical considerations from an Indigenous worldview-based approach to engaging in research with Indigenous people and communities. Part of this process was securing clearance from the Australian Catholic University through which the study is undertaken and, additionally clearance from the employing bodies namely Department of Employment, Education, and Training NT and the Catholic Education Office NT. The research was based on the following broad principles established by AIATSIS. In summary, they are consultation, negotiation, mutual understanding, respect, recognition, and involvement benefits, outcomes, and agreement. In this study, the researcher applied these principles as well as guidelines of the Australian Catholic University and the University's Indigenous Research Advisory Group.

### **3.19 LIMITATIONS AND DELIMITATIONS**

This study investigated only a small sample, (five) Indigenous female principals, from four remote communities in the NT. This was a conscious choice by the researcher to focus on women as educational leaders in order to generate literature in this much-needed field of study. Because of the limited number of Indigenous women in this position in the NT, a larger sample was not possible. Additionally, the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method involves quite an intensive process and an exhaustive analytical procedure that tolerates small sample frames. As the focus is on remote communities in the Top End of the Northern Territory, the results cannot be generalised beyond them, as each Indigenous community is unique in its history, demography, and composition. The data, however, will provide ample diversity for enhancing our understanding of Indigenous women's educational leadership in general and negotiating school community partnerships in particular in remote contexts. Despite its limited sites the study will make a significant contribution to Indigenous education in the Northern Territory.

The researcher's positioning as an African could be a limiting factor in this study. There is also an awareness of shared colonial and oppressive histories as



'Indigenous' women that provides a base for some amount of subjectivity. Being cautious of these ethical issues, there was an awareness of the necessary research protocols to be observed and upheld to maintain research and professional integrity, as well as the moral, spiritual and academic reputation of the institution through which this study is undertaken.

### **3.20 VERIFICATION**

It is imperative in the process of data collection and analysis to ensure that findings and interpretations are accurate (Merriam, 1998). In order to ensure this, validity and reliability involves checks such as triangulation, and member checks as a process of qualitative cross-validation are necessary. Denzin (1989, p. 308) points out this "can take many forms" such as comparison of data that has been obtained from individual interviews, theoretical memos, recruitment of panel teams involving an exhaustive data analysis process, and member checking interpreted data with participants.

Additionally, Creswell and Miller (2000); Neuman, (2006); and, Wolcott, (1990) note the merits of research situated largely in its degree of validity. This makes it imperative for qualitative research in particular, to possess not only theoretical validity but also the use of reliable practical method for data collection and instruments to assess data sources effectively and efficiently.

Data verification in qualitative research is a primary concern, especially where participants are pre-selected for the study, as is the case in this study. It is noted that information has to be given 'honestly' or 'sincerely' by participants or they would render the study inconsequential. In this study, participants have been chosen because the researcher believes they are people of very high integrity, and command a high level of respect and responsibility in their respective communities. Additionally, pre existing relationships create a context where honest exchange and exploration of sensitive issues can occur. Besides, the research methodology requires participants to own partial responsibility for the study.

Notably, the utilisation of panel teams in the analysis process was a major contribution in data verification. While the process of hypothesising and counter-hypothesising could have generated themes with the researcher's one-person panel, Wengraf, (2001, p. 258) cautions "working from [researcher's] "case-limitations" and sociological imagination will be weak and partial". The panel for this study comprised a diverse group unlike the researcher and both unlike and like the participants. This diversity provided richness to the analysis and findings.

### **3.21 SUMMARY**

The extensive data was used to generate the different phases of analysis to make a sociological sense of biographical meaning for all five Indigenous principals who participated in this study. In keeping with BNIM's dual focus on lived life and told story, each case is presented in two parts. The first part called the lived life comprises an analysis of each participant's biographical events examined against the social and historical context of their lives as traditional Indigenous Australian women. The incorporation of socio-historical material is intrinsic to developing comprehension of each told story and is a distinguishing characteristic of the sociobiographical approach to BNIM.

Chapter 4 presents the women's stories which comprise the lived life and told story of each participant that focus on the main themes in each narrative. In presenting the individual cases, there is a brief discussion about the relationship between the lived life and the told story. Additionally, in introducing each participant's story a signature quote is presented that typifies in some fundamental way the meaning of the central research question or related questions.

## CHAPTER 4 THE WOMEN'S STORIES

### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

The value of narrative is that, at its core, there is a living individual, not a commodity or capital. Narratives are rich in detail and situated in a history of human relationships that extend far beyond the teller's life span. It is this form of biographical narrative voice that reveals memories reflecting the strengths, weaknesses, and potential of the human soul, the complexities and contingencies of life decisions and actions, and the collective wisdom and naïveté of individuals (Ah Nee- Beeham & Cooper, 1998, p. 149).

The above quote captures the nature of rich captivating stories presented in this chapter. The chapter presents individual stories of all five female Indigenous principals who participated in this study. Considering the very small number of Indigenous female principals in remote community schools, it was critical that the presentation included all five narratives of Indigenous women regarded as pioneers of educational leadership in Indigenous education. The stories arise directly from the biographic narrative approach utilising all three stages of the interview process thus generating a plethora of sustained rich stories that brings to this research a unique, remarkable, and valuable piece of work.

As outlined in the BNIM stages of analytical processes, each story is divided into LIVED LIFE and TOLD STORY. The lived life is composed of the biographical data, which is the "chronology of objective facts extracted from the interview and any other relevant sources" (Wengraf, 2007, p. 111), locating the research material within its social and historical context as an aim of the BNIM analysis (Meares, 2007). This contextualising is relevant in this study as it establishes how "specific fragments, elements, or moments of a social [or historical] process can be made sense of by location within their relevant context" (Chamberlayne & Ruskin, 1999, p. 27). In this case, the context of negotiating school community partnerships in Indigenous remote community schools. The second part discusses the told story that underscores the "thematic ordering" (Jones, 2001, p. 56) of the narration. This process involved the reconstruction and interpretation of the participants' stories taking into account every detail such as pauses, hesitancy, repetition, and "theoretical memos" (Wengraf, 2001) that became a source of data

on which interpretation and analysis were based. Through a process of hypothesising using panel teams how the lived life informed the told story, a case was constructed. Nonetheless, both lived life and told story are presented. There is however, clarity of understanding of how the lived life informs the told story.

Each presentation commences with an initial signature quote that underscores a compelling theme that emerged from each told story. At the end of each story a summary of themes that emerged is presented in table form.

## **4.2 STORY 1: KILIPAYUWU PURUNTATAMERI**

### **4.2.1 Kilipayuwu's Lived Life**

*I've always had this feeling that the school will be a community school for Nguiu community.*

Kilipayuwu was born on Bathurst Island and belongs to the Takaringuwu clan, one of the four clan groups on the Island. At the time of the interview she was retired as principal of Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School and was working at the Women's Centre. At the age of eight she commenced schooling at St Therese School on the Island.

By the time Kilipayuwu was born Tiwi people had embraced Catholicism and matrimonial ceremonies in the Catholic Church. Education too had become an important investment in their lives with religion as the foundation. At St Therese school the presence of Aboriginal teacher assistants was part of the school structure since the older girls were needed to look after the younger ones as was the practice in their tradition. However this was not a formal structure within the school. Later on it became necessary to provide them the opportunity to gain formal teacher training. Some of the girls had an opportunity after finishing school on the island to further their education interstate with the permission of their parents.

After finishing school on the Island, Kilipayuwu started her career as an Assistant Teacher which was a childhood dream. School was her life and she had dreams of becoming principal some day and helping her own people. In 1986, she decided to formally train as a teacher, left the island and went to Batchelor Institute. By the time she went to Batchelor Institute St Therese has already gained accreditation as a bilingual school, a most important achievement and a “national first.” The pioneers of this movement were Sister Anne Gardiner, then principal, and Sister Teresa Ward who was the teacher linguist. The Tiwi were willing to embrace western education but they also wanted Tiwi culture to be the foundation for any education taught in school. They therefore advocated that Tiwi language and culture form part of the curriculum as a way of strengthening identity and introducing a “both ways” philosophy in educating Aboriginal children.

In 1987, after completing her first year at Batchelor Institute she went back to Nguui and continued teaching at the school. She found this quite rewarding after gaining some formal education and training at Batchelor that complemented the teaching at the school. To build on this foundation, in 1988, she resumed studies at Batchelor Institute but this time continued to work as a teacher, supervised by qualified European teachers at the school.

In 1992 Kilipayuwu completed an advanced diploma in teaching in Aboriginal schools and for the first time was given a classroom of her own with seventeen students. She was excited by this career development and worked diligently with interest, enthusiasm, and determination to continue to promote bilingual education. Through the bilingual program the community could also be actively involved in school matters and contribute to the aspirations of the community. Consequently, during her student days at Batchelor Institute, there were moves towards localisation of leadership in Aboriginal schools in the NT and varying responses were already felt in other remote community schools.

At Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School on Bathurst Island, the move towards Aboriginalisation was already underway with the identification of Kilipayuwu as the first Indigenous executive senior teacher to be mentored by Sister Anne Gardiner who had served the community as teacher and principal for over forty years and gained the loyalty and respect of the Tiwi people.

In 1995, Kilipayuwu applied for the position of principal-in-training through the Catholic Education Office and won the position. Even though self management required communities to be involved in the direction of their schools there was no community consultation in the appointment of the first Indigenous principal-in-training. The Catholic Education Office established a training structure they considered appropriate to the school context. Apparently, she struggled with the training mainly because she felt isolated from the involvement of her people and the western hierarchical structure limited her in operating effectively. In Aboriginal culture relationships are an important source of support and nourishment and as such essential for well-being. She was mentored for two years and in term three of 1997, Sister Anne retired and Kilipayuwu was appointed by the Catholic Education Office as principal of Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School. There was no involvement of the community either in making the appointment or in formally informing the community. In Aboriginal communities, schools are the largest piece of real estate and as such have a central position. In order to operate effectively it is imperative that schools and communities work together in partnership and develop a sense of ownership. There was no ceremony in the community about appointing the first Indigenous principal on the island. Nonetheless this oversight of cultural protocol did not deter her from taking a decisive action on transforming the western structure.

Her experience of the mentoring program led her to request from Catholic Education a leadership structure that would reflect the Tiwi traditional pattern of leadership where shared decision making, and group leadership was the norm. Subsequently, a culturally appropriate leadership structure with the Milimika Circle as the centrepiece was developed made up of herself as principal and four female senior Tiwi teachers from the four clan groups on the Island – Matimapila, Takaringuwi, Miyartuwi, and, Warntarringuwi. Their appointment did not follow the western academic performance criteria. Each of the women had skills of their own either culturally or academically. She was aiming at a cross fertilisation of both western and Tiwi culture in this new leadership. In Tiwi culture people perform different dances in the Milimika ring. They do so sometimes in pairs or in a group and through this they dialogue and support each other. This was her idea of school leadership. From her perspective, school is like the Milimika ceremonial ring where they work together as a group, each having their

own say, listening to each other, and making group decisions. In her school ceremonial ring each of the five women had a role to play and as a group made decisions on school matters such as the curriculum, appointment of staff, disciplinary actions and other school related matters.

This arrangement proved to be convenient for management operations. The four senior Aboriginal teachers representing the four clan groups worked closely together and managed the school from both a western and Tiwi cultural understanding strongly supported by the Catholic Education Office especially in terms of providing on-going professional development. However she had enormous difficulty working with her own people in gaining acceptance and credibility but through Milimika she reached out to the community and encouraged them to have greater involvement in school matters especially through the bilingual program.

After serving as principal for five years, and a professional career at the school spanning over twenty years, Kilipayuwu retired as principal of the school in 2002. She decided to stay with her family on the island and is currently assisting women at the Women's Centre. Not long after her retirement the Catholic Education Office appointed Leah Kerinaua on the Milimika team acting principal and later confirmed principal of the school. In the opinion of many, one of Kilipayuwu's major legacies as school principal was her initiation of the Milimika leadership team.

#### **4.2.2 Kilipayuwu's Told Story**

Kilipayuwu was initially chosen as a participant for the pilot study to test the methodology. It was later decided to include her as one of the study participants for a number of reasons. Firstly, the number of Indigenous female principals in the Northern Territory are few and far between; secondly, she is among the pioneering female principals; and thirdly, she gave such a rich story that it was considered the story would add a richness to the data analysis. As her normal schedule revolved around frequent travel to Darwin, it was agreed to start the interview in Darwin on an agreed date. The interview was conducted at two different venues. The initial

interview took place in a Darwin East Point foreshore park. This first interview lasted just over an hour. Subsequent meetings took place at Batchelor Institute, Parap annex and that lasted another two hours. She was very interested in the interview and used mainly reports and descriptions and some evaluations to reconstruct her biography. It seemed her motivation for participating in the research was a genuine opportunity to share her experiences as the first Aboriginal Tiwi principal.

Essentially, she told stories of success such as efforts in transforming the school structure from the western status quo to a more community value driven one, and stories of hurts and disappointments in trying to convince her own people about her vision for Tiwi education, struggles working with bureaucracy as a Tiwi woman, and, finally gave an evaluation that takes into consideration the opportunities for improvement in building a cohesive partnership with the community. Quite impressively, she delivered a distinctive enriching discourse. Initially, the intention was to have Kilipayuwu as a pilot participant but later decided on the advice of the supervisors to include her as one of the participants in the study. There were three reasons for this decision. Firstly, her narrative was rich and informative; secondly, she was a retired, pioneering Indigenous principal. The researcher was convinced that her story like those of other participants who would significantly contribute to literature in educational leadership and more importantly, would be of benefit to policy makers and other practitioners in the field, and thirdly, Indigenous female principals or any Indigenous principal for that matter are few and far between and her inclusion was going to add a richness to the stories of the small cohort.

In accordance with the structure of her initial narrative she focused on her journey to the principalship and included issues such as culture as a foundation, and the importance in school leadership and values, the benefits of working collectively, issues relating to behaviour management, working with the community and difficulties working with the Catholic Education Office. In recounting those issues it was interesting to note how she legitimised her reasons and decisions for taking a particular action. Although her narrative recounted her experiences on these issues, transforming the school from a western oriented one to a community school is the dominant theme of her story. As such all the strategic moves she



took are directed towards this goal. As a consequence of this she defined her leadership on a transformative path of creating community as she later stated in the story *I have always had this feeling that the school will be a community school, Nguiu community.*

The pattern suggested by her biographical trajectory is a fundamental feature of her told story. As a student and very early in her career she wanted to be principal of the school and diligently worked towards this goal. From her present perspective, she says school was my life and that way she was in a privileged position to study the western structure and prepare her to transform Tiwi schooling. Part of her strategy included creating a transformative path, aspiring to the leadership and changing the management structure to one that accommodates involvement of the whole community and structure western schooling to reflect an Aboriginal perspective and thus create a balance for Tiwi children.

She started her reconstruction with an account of her journey to the principalship instead of talking about school community partnerships. There is an indication here that she locates leadership as the focal point for building partnerships. She said, *I'll start my story about how I became principal.* Through this journey she evaluated the problem issues in managing the school from a western worldview in the early stages of her training:

*I found it difficult, working as a principal everything that the principal had for me to do was difficult, because the way it was set up it was like non-Aboriginal principal doing the job but as I was working through I told myself that the way the thing was set up was not working for me.*

Even though she gained her education and training through the European system headed by the missionaries, and having worked closely with them, she identified a dissonance in the school culture that constrained her leadership of the school. She was searching for an appropriate cultural premise to locate her leadership, one that is abounding in cultural values that would empower the entire community. This was her foundation for exercising leadership and ultimately building school community partnerships. From this point she continued with a report about the steps she took to correct the situation as it seemed to her an impossibility to

function as a non-Aboriginal principal. The repetition and emphasis of phrases such as *I found it difficult- was not working for me- everything the principal had for me I found difficult* reinforces her confusion and the urgency to rectify the situation. If there was a problem with *everything* there is an indication here that there is a cultural divide: Indigenous and Western. Her lived experience is an indication she struggled with the western school structure which unfortunately was meant to be good for Aboriginal people.

As a principal-in-training she took decisive action by having a meeting with the non-Aboriginal principal to explain her predicament. At the meeting she proposed a structure that she believed would work for her as a Tiwi principal and rightly legitimised her decision for the proposal:

*So she said what do you want? And I said, I'll have my own people to work with me and support me in my role. And that's when I chose the four women from the four skin groups. The four women that I chose had skills of their own....skills in Aboriginal way and because they were also strong women in the school... each talked about something they were able to do with children and with people. So that group became part of my leadership group.*

She was searching for a more profound understanding, appreciation and tolerance of education beyond western education. Her transformative path involved bringing an Aboriginal perspective into leadership that involved relationships, working as a group, sharing experiences, power with rather than power over, and practising this leadership structure in an environment where all the four skin groups on the Island were represented. This way, education is created for a purpose. That said, she gave legitimate reasons for this decision by describing the way they work in Tiwi culture:

*Because in Tiwi way [smiles] Tiwi people work in a group. We don't work alone. When women go out hunting we go as a group and we hunt and also men when they go out hunting they go in a group too.; when we're out bush or in the mangrove we call out to one another to make sure that everyone is close by and that was my idea of bringing in the community in the school because of the way we work together as a group; that's the model I used in the school.*

In steering things in a different direction she was laying the foundation for building school community partnerships. Schooling from her perspective involves the whole community and by incorporating Tiwi values, beliefs, and traditions, Tiwi children are likely to have a robust schooling experience. Next she continued with a long description of some of the disciplinary problems they encountered and provided some strategies they employed through culturally appropriate ways that involved members of the community. There is an indication here that she chooses to explain this episode at this stage as a way of legitimising her decision to restructure the school in a culturally responsive environment. As she tells it, Milimika, the group leadership comprising four women from the four skin groups, deals with student misbehaviour; and elders assist the group to deal with conflicts involving Aboriginal staff. As principal she sometimes visited different camps in the community to *sort out problems with family* and Milimika is always informed. Some of the problems they encountered were mainly social ones in the community. Here she recounted that sometimes Indigenous staff were absent and the children would be without teachers and an investigation would reveal that *sometimes the husband is drunk, too much drink* - her demeanour suggesting some sadness and concern. In order to rectify student and staff absence she called on Milimika and Tiwi staff. Finding a way to stop the problem together they agreed on some rules. She explained that spouses of any Tiwi staff were *invited to the interview to get understanding about the job*. When students were absent from school for a month *the names went up in the club and the parents would be banned from the club*.

Rather than continuing to talk about behaviour management of students she started a lengthy recount regarding the difficulties she encountered working with non-Indigenous staff and attending meetings at the Catholic Education Office. This is worthy of note as it is a problem in her entire school leadership similar to that for other participants in this study. The domain of the principalship has always been that of the Europeans and Aboriginal people were only now aspiring to the position of western educational leadership. As a consequence she lacked the confidence to deal with issues such as difficulty supervising non-Indigenous staff with this reversal of power and authority which she clearly captured to express her uncertainty; *sometimes non-Tiwi staff did not use the school based curriculum. I approach the teacher which was difficult for me; Indigenous telling non-Indigenous to follow the way, the school curriculum*. She solved the problem by contacting

CEO and a senior staff member was appointed to visit the school. Her strategy was to address the problem at a general staff meeting where the curriculum policy is reinforced without mentioning names. Such meetings ended with a staff dinner and everyone is pleased. It is inferred that her style of leadership is non confrontational and preferred a win-win in resolving conflicts at least in the professional setting. There is an indication here that she does not apply a confrontational approach to her leadership.

In recounting her experiences at meetings at CEO, she found that meetings were *more like European, non-Aboriginal style, difficult to understand; the way they speak; remote principals meeting was good; I was able to talk about school.* The presentation of these issues legitimated her reasons for choosing the transformational path to empower Tiwi people and reinforce language and culture. Leadership must be practised from a socio-cultural perspective where the support and input from her own people was of paramount importance. Her story then took a different direction when she started tracing the events that led to her appointment as principal using a mixture of narrative, descriptions and reports. This extract is worthy of note as it traces the difficulties she encountered with her community during the period of change and transition and espoused her skilful way of turning this backlash into a positive direction. The patterns suggested by the events of her lived life are fundamental aspects of her told story. During her school days, education in remote Indigenous communities was built on a solid Catholic foundation and in embracing education the Tiwi also embraced religion. As such, having a profile as a principal in the community required one to be a practising Catholic, for example, by going to church everyday, practicing monogamy and taking the vows of matrimony in the Catholic church. These principles became a strong aspect of Tiwi life. When her appointment was announced it was rejected by the community and especially the women. As with other Indigenous principals, the appointment of an Indigenous person to such a high profile position was as she says *a new thing for the community* and as such, the community was not adequately prepared for this change even though the appointment came from the Catholic Education Office. The community was never consulted or considered as having a stake in the appointment. As such they were *puzzled and they were shocked.*

The community clearly shocked, puzzled, and confused about the appointment, questioned why they needed an Aboriginal principal. They questioned, *why a Tiwi principal? Why can't we have another non-Aboriginal principal?* Even though good reasons were given for her appointment such as, *Well it's time for you to have your own Tiwi principal because the Tiwi have changed - they've been educated and now it's time for you to have a Tiwi principal....she worked hard, she had lots of training and experience*, this was not enough good reason for the community.

Describing the new Tiwi way of life (acceptance of the Catholic faith) the community questioned Kilipayuwu's commitment to the faith - *Well, sometimes she goes to church...why can't we have someone that goes to church everyday?* This gossip around the community had a galvanising effect on her initial relationship with the community. When she went out to the community and confronted especially the women. Much later in the interview in answer to a probe she launched into details of this event. It was here that she gave some justification for their concern:

*And that was the talk of the community when that announcement was made and I think they were worried about their kids; may be they were asking themselves a question; why would a Tiwi be a principal? What does she know about school? Will our kids learn? Will our kids read and write?*

In trying to evaluate the situation she said, because it's not our culture may be some people would say that. If there was an announcement made about a Tiwi nun, no question about it because religion is strong. This part of her narrative made references to failed relationships in her family. For example, her daughter, having married in the Catholic Church, later moved in with a new partner. From her perspective these were serious issues for the community and a strong reason for not accepting her appointment in a community where Catholic values were so strong. By community standards her family was not a good role model and for her personally she was not a devout practising Catholic. From her present perspective even though these allegations may have been true she evaluates that there was jealousy too in the community.

The events that led to her appointment reveal a connected theme, instability within clan groups in the community. She evaluates her reaction at that time from her present perspective: *You know that hurt me....they said lots of things which went through* (pointing to her chest). The underlying theme of empowering her people through their involvement in education became a problem and articulating this vision to her people was a struggle in her leadership. The following evaluative extract reinforces the underlying theme of transforming Indigenous education to reflect Tiwi culture and ownership. Her initiative was to become someone to be in charge of the school because school was her life and her dream was to be principal one day so that she could help her people to get some education because she has *always had this feeling that the school will be a community school for Nguiu community*, but unfortunately the community was at odds with this philosophy.

This abiding connection to her lived life reveals her visionary outlook for Tiwi education. It transpires that Kilipayuwu had a vision for the whole community; however underlying her individual vision was a struggle to project a collective vision that would transform the school structure established by missionaries. Her strength of character and determination to transform education in her community leads her to reflect on her initial anger and hurt when she realises that in the bigger picture of her vision she would need her people to work with her collaboratively. The pattern suggested by her biographical events are a feature of her told story. In Tiwi culture people work in a group and working together works well for them. She translated this in the leadership of the school realising she needed to build the critical mass as an essential facet of sustaining the collaborative efforts of everyone in the community. Having recounted the problematic aspects of her journey to the leadership a deep reflection leads her to a definitive evaluation of the conflict:

*After I was arguing with the community, when I started work as principal my anger started to change to be a good person. That's when I employed more community people in the school, started trusting my own people to work as janitors, tutors, reading to kids, teacher aides, so from an angry person, I trusted my own people to have a place in the school giving them responsibility.*

She finishes the extract with an evaluation and says, *sometimes we make mistakes but we learn and change, we work together to make a better place, better people.*

There is a thematic link to the dominant theme of transforming education to empower Tiwi people and more importantly laying the foundation for a strong Tiwi identity and culture. She tried to build a positive community based on trust, collective responsibility and teamwork. Building a sustainable school community partnership requires people to trust each other, collaborate, and feel free to be part of the partnership. Without collective responsibility the foundation of partnership would be hard to sustain. In a community where in accordance with her lived life the effects of European invasion have led to lasting socioeconomic problems, job creation and enrichment of lives encourages involvement from the community.

In her narrative she reveals the problems of interacting outside of her leadership context. Similar to other Indigenous principals the theme of transcending boundaries is also an aspect of her told story. She starts this narrative earlier in her initial narrative but she breaks it off when she starts to talk about the community's reaction to her leadership appointment. Only now does she return to fully discussing it. When she attended meetings at CEO, the *meetings were more like European non-Aboriginal style. Difficult to understand the way they speak. Remote principals' meeting was good; (smiles) I was able to talk about school issues.*

The events she recounts here are significant in many ways that are related to the practice of leadership in Indigenous remote community schools and notably any leadership context. Her concept of leadership was firmly set within the context in which she practised leadership. Like other participants in this study she endeavoured to create a leadership environment that was defined and supported agreed understandings of remote schools. As such there were values that underpin their practice. In setting general principals' meeting solely dominated by a foreign context amounts to disempowerment. Her lack of involvement revealed the cultural divide and sadly a continual marginalisation of Indigenous identity and worldviews.

In ending this session I asked her whether she had anything else to contribute. She looked away painfully and responded after a two minutes silence and stated:

*I didn't mention this but when I resigned, and left the school, want to move on, CEO should have a place for me in the school to work in a support role for Tiwi teachers. I would have liked that to happen. To support young ones that want to be teachers, to guide them, observe them in a classroom, how she relates to class and children like train the trainer; it would have lifted that young person's spirit to be involved in school. I was thinking something like that would happen (Looks away rather disappointed).*

This expectation is expressed by three of the participants in the study. As pioneers in Aboriginal education in remote communities continuing to engage them in school life for these women was a given. School, as Kilipayuwu rightly says from her present perspective *was my life*, and cutting the ties that bound her was metaphorically killing the one thing that mattered most to her. From a thematic analysis, sustaining partnerships in a context such as Nguuu required an identified role in a capacity to guide aspiring Tiwi educational leaders in a direction that would sustain continuity. Culturally, the involvement of, and reliance on elders for education and guidance is a given in most Indigenous cultures.

A third session was arranged the following day since there were earlier comments she had made regarding issues surrounding her leadership and differences in Western and Indigenous cultures that needed to be probed. It is only now that she recounts her feelings about events surrounding the day she took over as principal. She recounts this with a deep sadness and reports that when they had the takeover ceremony, *it was done in the school, it was done in the school, it was done inside the building and the community was not involved just the school staff and the Deputy Director.*

Two of the participants in this study raised concerns regarding non involvement of the community or family members. In order for them to negotiate partnership with their respective communities it was considered important to respect community protocols that would legitimise their authority as educational leaders. There is a perceived indication that in reconstructing her story this excerpt is an evaluation of



the difficult journey to her leadership. Importantly, she confirms that Aboriginal cultural protocols were marginalised at the system level.

At this point she highlights some differences in operating within western and Aboriginal school environments. Time emerged as an important issue for her. As principal she had difficulty working within bureaucratic structured timeframes. From her perspective Indigenous remote communities are *different to urban schools in Darwin* for a number of reasons. Firstly, the kids are different; secondly, the concept of time for Indigenous people is different and as such their orientation to work and completing tasks is also different; thirdly, they give priority to family commitments irrespective of any urgency regarding the administration of the school.

She also comments briefly on the difficulty she experienced in getting parents and the wider community attending school meetings. From their perspective schooling is a European concept and as such Aboriginal people need not have a commitment to school matters. For example *they will come to school meetings if they get paid* because she experienced it when she was principal. Incidentally these meetings were held to encourage the community to have an active involvement in teaching language and culture. From the community's point of view they had to be paid like any other staff at the school. Her idea of partnerships and community involvement did not always extend to paid jobs. It was about establishing community contribution and ownership in decision making.

In working out strategies for coping in the position, she recounts that she talked to different people in the community including Sister Ann Gardiner the former principal of the school or an experienced non-Indigenous teacher. From her perspective she made efforts to look at issues from a both ways perspective. In the community she would seek advice from an elder, or uncle or a group of women. She says, *that's how I did it, to help me you know in the community I sat with a group of women and we just talk about anything and then that's how I built my confidence to do my work to get strong by talking to women and also family.*

That said, she recounts other difficulties as a principal. She points to two issues. Firstly, as an Indigenous female principal she struggled with family commitments

as the hardest part of the job and secondly working with the Tiwi community council. Nonetheless to close her narrative on a positive note she comments on things that worked best. Firstly, establishing Tiwi Milimika group leadership where she could talk to a group of women; secondly, having a mentor during her training; and lastly, getting support from CEO and the staff at the school. Her final comments bring her back to a reference she made earlier regarding time. Reflecting on her leadership and given the opportunity she said she would:

*Do things differently if I was a principal now. I would I would change the structure of the school, teaching structure, like in the morning kids would learn English in the morning. Then in the afternoon, I would bring the community in to teach culture; that's what I'd like to see if I was a principal now.*

This is an indication that she still supports bilingual education but would restructure teaching times to fit into community requirements.

In summary, Kilipayuwu's narrative on negotiating school community partnerships is characterised by a key theme of her commitment to serve the community, and empower Tiwi people by transforming the educational leadership structure to reflect Tiwi culture and values. From this premise and amidst her struggles she uses various strategies to involve the community. Some of these are establishing a leadership team as a support group, employing her people in various positions at the school, involving the community in decision making, following cultural protocols of seeking advice from elders on school matters, involving community in teaching language and culture, and working closely with the CEO to give Tiwi kids a balanced both ways education. The patterns suggested by her lived life - making education culturally appropriate for Tiwi kids, and introducing a Tiwi leadership structure are significant in her told story. Her reconstruction is a demonstration of her leadership attributes of having a visionary outlook, energy, courage and integrity, determination and resilience in leading her people in a new direction in education. The table below illustrates her key themes.

**Table 4.1: Kilipayuwu's key themes and incidents**

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>INCIDENT DESCRIBED</b>
Transforming structures	Creating a culturally appropriate environment that is inviting for community
Group leadership	Establishing Milimika
Relationships	Trust, respect and acceptance from community
School as extension of community	Vision that the school will be for Nguiu community
Service to community	Commitment to empowering Tiwi people in decision making and ownership of the school

Kilipayuwu assumed the leadership position at Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School projecting a collective vision. She believed that school should involve a whole community that incorporates Tiwi values, beliefs, and traditions thereby providing an opportunity for Tiwi children to have a robust educational experience. She demonstrated that to lead a school it must be set within the context of the culture of the people it serves. She embarked on creating an environment where relationships between the school and the community can flourish without compromising educational values of both Tiwi and non-Tiwi cultures. Her decisive action to appoint a group leadership comprising four Tiwi women representing the four clan groups in the community was a fundamental step in negotiating school community partnerships. Additionally, more Tiwi people from the community gained employment at the school in various roles which created the synergy and environment for a community school. She had an open door policy where Tiwi people had power to make key decisions on the curriculum, leadership and general movement of the school. As such integration of Tiwi culture had a large impact and influence in school community partnerships as it created a direct connection between Tiwi culture and schooling that was realised through the teaching and learning and leadership of the school.

## **4.3 STORY 2: LEAH KERINAUIA**

### **4.3.1 Leah's Lived Life**

If we don't have these people around we can't run the school unless we have community input.

Leah Kerinauia, like Kilipayuwu, comes from the Tiwi Islands which consists of two Islands, Melville and Bathurst located 80kms north of Darwin and separated by the narrow Clarence and Dundas Straits. Leah was born at Nguiu one of two main communities on the South east tip of the Aspely strait in the Northern Territory. Of the four main communities of Tiwi Islands, Nguiu is the main settlement with a population of approximately 1500 residents, residents approximately 200 of whom are non-Indigenous.

She was born in 1962 the third child from a family of ten girls and one boy. She comes from the Takaringuii clan, one of four main clan groups on the Island. The Tiwi as they are generally referred to have a deep connection with their culture even though they had various western influences as early as the 1700s. Each clan group has their distinctive dance that is associated with their totem. The time of her birth and the events that followed are of biographical significance in her trajectory.

Leah started school on the island at the age of five together with her siblings who were all influenced by the teachings of the Catholic faith under the auspices of the Daughters of Our Lady of the Sacred Heart. Leah was born at a time teacher education was already established on the island as the Tiwi valued education as an asset to empowerment. This early education made no allowance for the teaching of language and culture in school. The sisters wanted to give the girls as much of a Christian western education as possible for as long as they stayed at school.

Leah's biographical life took a dramatic turn when their father died at the early age of 42. She was only ten years old and had taken a keen interest in education. Their mother, a strong, astute Tiwi woman was very determined to see all her children through education. Of the ten children Leah was the favourite child and she spent most of her time with her mother. All of the children attended school on the Island and were keen to have a career.

While still at school, significant changes started on Bathurst Island with Tiwi people advocating for control over their lives and their land. In 1978, the Tiwi advanced to self management by negotiating ownership of 4000 hectares of land that was formerly under the jurisdiction of the Catholic mission. With the formation of the Tiwi Land Council other agencies on the Island gradually worked towards self determination and self management. In regard to western education parents had ideas of self determination in spite of being Christian. As a consequence, children were encouraged to have an Aboriginal cultural education where they campaigned for language and culture to be a part of the curriculum.

This shift was significant in Leah's biographical trajectory. As a primary school student even though she valued and already had a strong western education influence she started to question the absence of language and culture in teaching, and challenged European teachers to start looking at the importance of being literate in Tiwi. This was a start in bringing change to school curriculum and culture in schools on the Tiwi Islands. Sister Tess Ward became a strong advocate for introducing the vernacular program in school where Tiwi people learnt to be literate in their own language. With the introduction of culture and literacy programs the modern seeds for social justice were planted (Gardiner, 2008, p.49). This was significant as it signalled the opportunity for Tiwi to establish a partnership in education with the Catholic system. It was also an opportunity for Tiwi to be directly involved in teaching through bilingual education and a pathway for school community partnerships.

While at school, Leah developed an interest in teaching like other women on the island. In 1979 she did a year's correspondence course equivalent to year 11 at Redfern School in Sydney in order to improve her literacy in English. This was one of the few institutions that offered correspondence courses for Indigenous

people at the time. With a determination to improve her education, on successful completion of the correspondence course, she left the island for the first time for Cairns TAFE College to do some access studies in a program specifically designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. With a plan for Indigenous education for Tiwi children she returned to the Island and with some encouragement from a European teacher who saw potential teaching qualities in her, she decided to start a teaching career.

In 1980, she started work at the school as a teacher assistant with minimal duties such as sharpening pencils and assisting European teachers in the classroom with behaviour management. These minimal duties still gave her a place and voice in curriculum matters and finally gave her an opportunity to teach Tiwi at the school. A tenaciously determined woman wanting to succeed at all costs, she left the Island to pursue a teaching qualification at Batchelor Institute. Coping with tertiary studies was quite challenging so she decided to do a bridging course at Cairns TAFE. After a year in Cairns she came back to the Territory to continue fulltime teacher training at Batchelor Institute. She completed stage three after three years and gained an Associate Diploma of teaching, a qualification limited to teaching only in Aboriginal schools. On gaining this qualification she came back to the Island and for the first time was given a class of her own at the transition level. For two years she contributed significantly in the curriculum area with a firm commitment to bilingual education. Like other Tiwi women, she became a strong advocate for the teaching of language and culture at the school. She was very instrumental in having Tiwi participate in all aspects of school life. This is strongly projected in her told story and an enduring theme throughout her narrative. Although she kept many aspects of her traditional culture she had a strong devotion to the Catholic religion which was later to become a strong pillar in times of professional and personal difficulties with a special devotion to Our Lady as is evidenced in her told story.

The 1990s was a turning point in school reform in most Indigenous remote communities with localisation of Indigenous staffing a priority. Aboriginal staff at Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School (formally St Therese; the name was changed as a step in localisation to reflect a Tiwi identity) were determined to aspire to leadership positions. In 1993, Leah took this opportunity to gain further teaching

qualifications to do a fourth year teacher training at Batchelor Institute. With a desire and capacity for knowledge, she travelled internationally for the first time to Vancouver and New Mexico in North America on a six weeks study tour. This world experience gave her a broader worldview and had a profound influence on her educational philosophy for Indigenous education. This opportunity allowed her to see the parallels between Australian Indigenous and other Indigenous cultures. She became more and more convinced that bilingual education and working in partnership with parents and community was the best form of education for Tiwi children.

Having worked in the curriculum area for four years, in 1998, she was appointed curriculum coordinator as part of her role on the Milimika leadership team, an initiative of Kilipayuwu, the first Tiwi principal on the island. The curriculum area has always been a passion where she felt she could make a contribution to transform Indigenous education where the community could be empowered to contribute to the design, development, and teaching.

However, quite dramatically, a major personal problem required her to take leave from work for a whole year. She left the community and moved to Darwin where she accepted a position with the Department of Education in the Curriculum Assessment Branch for three months. This change in work environment contributed significantly to her professional development especially in Indigenous education. In this position she travelled extensively to other Indigenous remote communities in the Northern Territory facilitating the delivery of culturally appropriate texts. At the end of three months there was an opportunity for a further contract with the Curriculum and Assessment Branch but she declined the offer and decided to go back to Nguiu where she felt her knowledge and skills were urgently needed. A brave energetic and committed Tiwi woman, she felt the need to continue contributing to the leadership team in supporting others to continue the transformation of the school into a bilingual school.

In 2000, Leah decided to pursue further studies as a part time student at Batchelor Institute to upgrade her skills in educational leadership. By the end of 2002 Kilipayuwu decided to retire after a long service at the school. Much to Leah's surprise, she was appointed acting principal in 2003. Though she had

studied at Batchelor Institute she felt inadequate to take up the top position of principal of Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School. Such a top position had always been associated with power and white authority and she realised that in order to succeed she needed to negotiate both worlds which at this time she found quite confronting and challenging. As principal “Milimika” was still a very powerful leadership team. Leah was one of the four women chosen to form the Milimika leadership team.

This experience was fundamental in her leadership that was the foresight of the previous Indigenous principal. However there was no mentoring program in place as the previous Tiwi principal had had and as such Leah found it quite challenging. Still believing in community partnership, she continued to establish language and culture programs that required a considerable involvement in decision making from the community. Such a change she believed would bring empowerment to Tiwi people and establish control over the education of Tiwi children. After a year in this position, experiencing challenges from both the community and system she decided to pursue further studies in educational leadership and improve her skills in areas that were lacking. While studying part time she was confirmed principal of the school in 2005 but in the same year quite tragically her mother passed away. Her death brought a personal grief that was quite devastating. She had been a mother’s favourite child and had lived with her since the death of their father when she was only ten years old. Consequently, she never got married nor had children of her own. This sad turning point in her life did not deter her from the courage and determination she had in working relentlessly to continue shaping education for Tiwi children. She took a few days leave to mourn her mother’s death and returned to work as she believed it was exactly what her mother would have wanted.

Currently, she has been reappointed principal for the next four years after a performance appraisal was conducted in 2006. Her dreams for the future of Tiwi children are captured in these words:

*Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School was a symbol of a boat crashing through the waves and because going to that ship going to that boat, and going through the rough seas where we have lots of obstacles; and beyond that is the calm sea where our*



*destination is; and I would like to see this boat reaching the calm sea and beyond that is what is our hope and future for our students at Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School.*

#### **4.3.2 Leah's Told Story**

Leah's story affirms the notion of schools as centres of community life where schools and communities work collaboratively to achieve a common goal. She was convinced as she says, *if we don't have these people we can't run the school unless we have community input.* Yet, she was also aware that to achieve success there needed to be a degree of mutuality where such partnership incorporated responsive dialogue, a common understanding, and shared responsibility. Also she told a story of struggles in her efforts to establish such collaboration with the community which from her perspective would give empowerment to Tiwi people in the education of Indigenous children. There is also a sense of determination in her mission to succeed despite the cultural and social barriers of the day to day operations.

Leah came across as an experienced confident interviewee. She appeared to take a more formal approach even though we had an established relationship over a period of years. For example, the researcher was aware that she is the principal and she had been involved in her training to a large extent. Why did she decide to be this formal? Was she trying to establish the formal protocol that is normally associated with the position in western terms? Or was she trying to establish the importance of the interview by this formality? She began her account by responding to the initial question very precisely but did not follow a chronological account like Miriam's account. Against this background, she provided a great deal of information and elaborated on the importance of having community involvement in school as a way of having mutual responsibility that was a necessary ingredient in the achievement of successful school outcomes.

Her initial narrative was quite a lengthy one that addressed every aspect of school life. When she commenced by introducing herself as principal of the school there was a clear indication that she positioned herself in the western bureaucratic world hence projecting a position of authority. *My name is Leah and I've been principal*

*for three years.* It is also an indication of a key theme in her narrative, a theme of struggle to transcend boundaries where community expectations and systems expectations are constantly in contestation. It is interesting that she next switches from a personal orientation to a school community focus. Expecting she would continue to narrate more about herself and her position as principal but instead she shifted the discussion to answering the narrative question on school community partnerships. Her definition of such a partnership seemed to be presented in the context of a process involving her role as principal, her responsibility to the community, her leadership role in establishing partnerships and her role in negotiating with external stakeholders such as the Catholic Education Office.

Within this initial account, her primary aim seemed to be more on collaboratively working with the community people in developing community programs within the school and especially with the strong women coming to the school and talking about what languages need to be in the culture program. She continued to report on community involvement in culture programs and asserted the need for a common understanding which she confirmed by saying *before developing the curriculum we need to speak to various people.* This is indicative of her biographical trajectory of advocating an ideological shift that would involve the community in the education of their children and one that would ultimately bring empowerment to Tiwi people. Within this narrative she located the significance of gender roles in Tiwi culture. Men work with the boys teaching them to make spears and women work on culture and language programs. It seemed from recounting that men had played a minimal role in children's learning and this seemed to be changing in a positive direction as she said – *we have found that men are now showing interest in the students' learning.*

Next she switched to the leadership of the school but only engaged in a brief discussion and never really expanded on what it is or its significance. It is interesting that she personalised her role as principal and with minimal explanation mentioned the leadership team "Milimika". The underlying reasons might be twofold; first is the facts that she situated her role within a western worldview where hierarchy and authority are central to a leadership role as in *when something comes up I deal with the problem.* Secondly, the role of Milimika is

perceived as a supporting role to the principal as she recounted- *Milimika comes in and deal with it when it is necessary* but goes further to indicate that Milimika's role extended to dealing with staff problems. This brief recount evoked a memory about a particular incident where she involved a staff member to go out to talk to parents regarding initiating a breakfast program that involved negotiating with external stakeholders to deduct money from parents' payment through Centrelink, the main agency for welfare payments. This was indicative of her inclusive approach in establishing collaborative partnerships and finding ways of consulting with the community. At this point it would seem that there were problems with school attendance and one way of dealing with this was to- *provide hot meals breakfast and provide lunches for the kids to have food because without food they won't learn.*

There is also an indication that a level of poverty or social dysfunctionality was apparent in the community. She confirmed during prompt questions that one of the most difficult things they have to deal with is *kids bringing their social problems in the school and because of things that happen the night before.* Essentially, such an environment may not be an easy one to work in and, establishing school community partnerships would be fraught with difficulties. There is a perceived notion that school community partnerships can only work where a fair amount of involvement and commitment from parents exists. At this point in her story she discussed the role of the diversionary youth group that had the responsibility of going out to the community to assist in dealing with social problems and encourage the involvement of parents in their children's education. There is also a constant negotiation of two competing worlds in which she constantly operated. This is a key theme in her narrative that is central to negotiating school community partnerships and one that remained a constant struggle in her leadership of the school. Her told story at this point is indicative of her biographical trajectory where she was socialised in both worlds and as such affirms her educational philosophy from both worldviews. Her constant negotiation of these worlds is evident in the way she located herself in the leadership of the school. *My name is Leah and I'm principal of the school and I've been working with the community people...when something comes up I deal with it...and switched on to we and them and us* which suggests a struggle to locate herself in the leadership of the school and her identity as a Tiwi who worked alongside the community. It would seem there is a

vacuum that needed to be addressed and a failure to fill this vacuum will impoverish her professionally and culturally.

She decided at this point to discuss the role played by the Catholic Education Office and yet again her use of language indicated a clear polarisation of the Indigenous and non Indigenous worlds, a “them” and “us” situation as evidenced in the narrative - *for Catholic Education, they are in the process of working towards the buildings in renovating the buildings within our school.* There is an indication of a disconnection between external stakeholders, the community, and the school. Much later in the interview she recounted more of this disconnection and gave an evaluation of the reasons for the constant struggle in partnership building such as a lack of understanding from the community of western worldviews of which the school is a part.

Curious to know how she aspired to the leadership position which she initially made little mention of, she was asked later in the interview to talk about her journey to the position. This seemed to prompt her to recount in detail the events that led to this appointment. This narrative is packed with descriptions, argumentations and evaluations that reveal central reasons in the struggle to establish lasting partnerships. From her story it is readily apparent that there was a constant struggle with establishing partnerships at the community level. Firstly, it was a shock for her to learn that she would be acting principal following the retirement of the first Indigenous principal as she said, *I was not aware that they were going to choose me as an acting principal. I did not have any choice, I was stunned, I could not say anything and a letter came out to me saying you are the acting principal but I was not ready, things were rushed and did not have any mentor to guide me along.* She later confirmed the appointment coming from the Catholic Education Office without having negotiated any support or consultation with the community and more importantly following a cultural protocol that would yield support from the community for any individual in such a position.

As suggested by the pattern of her lived life, there was a determination to be involved in decision making in the education of Tiwi children which ultimately accompanied the position of principal. Even though she lacks the understanding to do the job as she clearly states, *I did not know what to do...but I only knew very*

*little things in the office side, she accepted the appointment and devised her strategy of coping by working collaboratively with senior non-Indigenous staff who were more experienced and Sister Helen who came in you know and she was a great help too, supporting me and she really made me strong. In continuing to recount this incident there was a sense of sadness and grief. She recounts that it was really frustrating you know I was really, really down to my...there wasn't anything like ceremony or anything or passing of the keys, it was a rush, I felt nothing but I felt the sadness that I was being overwhelmed you know but I was happy too. Even as she was later confirmed principal of the school she evaluated the flaw in the process of this appointment from CEO as one that neglected community consultation which she regarded as crucial in the appointment to such a high profile job and one that was significant in negotiating school community partnerships. She said and the community wasn't aware when I was appointed principal but the school invited the Director to come over and talk to the staff and some of the community people...it was a month later when we wanted him to come and talk to the people and have an official you know to talk about the principalship to the community. From her present perspective particularly where she mentioned informing the community, it might be assumed that in referring to a ceremony she meant presenting her officially to the community to gain proper recognition as she went on to explain, I want people to recognise me as a Tiwi principal. Consequently, an announcement was made at a special Mass which pleased the retired non Indigenous principal who had a similar experience when she handed over to the first Indigenous principal, Kilipayuwu and-Sister Anne was there too, was happy too, because she had the same thoughts when she passed down the keys to Kilipayuwu, she had that you know a little sad feeling about you know CEO should come and announce it to the community, you know grassroots level.*

Within this episode she clearly revealed the central role the community plays in decision making. She believed in giving empowerment to Tiwi staff and community, a pattern suggested by her lived life. When she mentioned Sister Helen as a strong support she clearly stated *she wasn't the person who made the decisions, she was there as a listener, she had to listen what the Tiwi people need for their children's education.* By way of closing this episode she revisited her underlying theme of empowerment to the community as a strategic tool and

reaffirmed the responsibility of CEO in consulting with and involving the community as she was convinced *CEO's responsibility is to pass this message around, this is a community school we need to let the community know.*

This theme of collaboration with Tiwi people dominates part of her narrative. This is reinforced when she discussed the role of the Milimika leadership team later on in her initial narrative. She was keen to work collaboratively with all staff but *the non Indigenous people don't make the decision, only Milimika makes the decision; they are there to listen.* In recounting her partnership at the school level the phrases *Milimika makes decision and non-Tiwi listen* is repeated in the episode several times and gives the indication she acknowledged and appreciated their input but only as good as listening to Indigenous people. It is also paradoxical that she spoke about inclusivity and recognition yet returned to the dividing *them* and *us* situation that is a fundamental aspect of her lived life in the relationship with non Indigenous people. It is inferred that for a long time non-Indigenous people have made decisions for Aboriginal people and with self-determination Aboriginal people were trying to assert their decision-making power in order to take control of their lives. Similar to other Indigenous female principals, it is a reinforcement of the ideological shift in education and the struggle to transcend boundaries of two contested worlds that constantly haunted her. For a long time, Indigenous people have struggled to gain self management and self determination and in education this philosophical rhetoric must reflect school leadership.

Her narrative also revealed a struggle and tension between the school administration and CEO as well as a struggle in forging links with the community. In an attempt to forge links between the school and community, it seemed part of this struggle is revealed in the episode she recounted in establishing a school board. The formation of a school board seemed to be imposed and dictated as it was recommended by the former Director *trying to urge every school to have a school board* and she recounted the meeting they held regarding this matter where *they sat down and talked and chose some of the local people and the organisations that are interested in education.* Her choice of words and phrases *urge, chose some of the local people that are interested in education* are indicative of a community that is disconnected. Later on when prompted to discuss the school culture she canvassed a key issue that might be related to this

disconnectedness. She made a clear distinction between school culture and that of the community culture which brought challenges in building school community partnerships. The following excerpt revealed the reasons for a lack of interest:

*The culture of the school is completely different to the outside community and because the school culture is different because of the setting of the school, Tiwi kids are in the western structure the community don't realise that the culture outside is different because they don't have the rules that we offer in the school and it's very challenging for people like me to be in the setting.*

This evoked a memory of an incident involving a Tiwi staff member whom she disciplined for leaving the school without permission. It seemed that Tiwi staff tended to bring the community culture into school matters further complicating her leadership of the school. As in other episodes she relied on the Milimika leadership team to support and make decisions on disciplinary matters. It was interesting yet again that she resorted to delegating decisions to Milimika, the leadership team in matters relating to Tiwi staff discipline.

As her lived life dictates, she embarked on bringing into school leadership a Tiwi approach in an effort to operate from a both ways perspective. It also is interesting that in this same episode she revealed the theme of her disconnectedness and disempowerment in the professional world of which she is justifiably an equal partner. *...as a Tiwi principal...I have to follow the rules and have to do my job and if I don't do my job everything will collapse.* This begs the question, who has power to make decisions? There seemed to be little consultation and collaboration that she espoused in the rhetoric in parts of her story. There is an indication that policy and important decisions are made at a higher level than Milimika. She endeavoured to transcend cultural boundaries yet she is constantly caught in a web of struggle between two polarised cultures where the dominant culture prevails. Her perception of herself as a Tiwi woman with Tiwi values she projected seemed to be in dissonance with her role as an ambassador representing CEO in the leadership position that defeats the very *tall poppy syndrome* that she opposed earlier on in her story. The Tiwi leadership model based on shared decision making and interdependence that she articulated did not seem to be appropriate within the structural setting in which she operated. Again she struggled to address this vacuum that constantly impoverished her professionally and culturally. This

was evident in another disciplinary incident involving a Tiwi staff member who lost her job. It was Milimika's decision to sack her but she was quick to point out to the Tiwi staff that *the rules I have to follow you have to follow and it was not made for me. The rules that I have to follow you have to follow....I did not make this policy, CEO made this policy; this is how I am going to run the school you have to do the same.* She then finally concluded that the job was a challenge for her. This incident also revealed a shaken confidence when she was judged as being a weak leader. Dealing with this struggle and internal conflict she turned to Milimika once more to reaffirm her confidence. She *said and I went back to the office saying to myself, did I do anything wrong, I said to myself, and Milimika said no you did not do anything wrong.* It would seem that Milimika is a great comfort to her stability in the leadership position.

As well as having Milimika as a sounding board and support she had spiritual strengths that she turned to in times of difficulty. It would seem that as her lived life dictated, Christian devoutness is nested within her cultural and spiritual beliefs and she seemed to have little difficulty with both values co-existing in harmony. When she ended her initial narrative she was almost drawn to tears. Part of her argumentation was finding answers to *why people are not showing me respect as an Indigenous principal.* The pattern of her lived life is reflected in the way she ended the initial narrative – a determination to succeed at all cost, prayer as a source of strength, and a vision for teaching and learning to reflect Tiwi culture and identity alongside the bureaucratic western structure that would have an integrating experience. In closing her initial narrative she revealed the burden that accompanied her role as principal:

*Most of the time I cry inside me, people don't see me a person who has that load I have the load in my shoulder and I take it to my little room and sit and pray to God to the little Lady to give me strength, how I can go, show me the way to deal with these conflicts*

And in a fitting metaphor she concludes, *like a boat that goes into the rough sea and meets obstacles we have problems and beyond that there is the calm sea and that is where the destination will be for my career.*



As I was curious to know about partnerships at the systems level, in response to my probe she was quick in pointing out language as a barrier in communicating with the community. There is an indication that bureaucratic communication is not only a problem for the community but also for Indigenous principals. She is convinced that *the language that the non Indigenous people use is very hard for us to understand...make it a language that is simple for Indigenous people to understand*. As a Tiwi principal, she *talk[s] in language, in Tiwi language to explain [to the community] what it is all about*.

Next she recounted further challenges in her leadership. Clearly they seem to be an obstacle to her successful operations. Firstly, she was being labelled by her Tiwi people as having *a white man's thinking*; secondly, she felt uncomfortable within her community that seemed to constantly monitor her professional presentation; thirdly, she had great difficulty working *with the whole staff, the non Tiwi and Tiwi staff*, working as a bureaucratic school leader *one person to be controlling all the people in the school* seems to be in opposition with the Tiwi cultural way of team leadership. Additionally, the clash of cultures in communicating was a constant challenge in her leadership. She described that *Tiwi people have different ways of communication; we don't give answers straight away; we need time to think about what we are going to say*. This cultural behaviour seemed to be in conflict with the western institutional context where a leader may be expected to make swift decisions on various professional matters.

Finally, in reflecting on her leadership journey she advocated a both ways approach to mentoring aspiring Indigenous principals. She spoke about getting someone in the community with an educational background and cited the past principal Kilipayuwu or past teachers. She stated that she would like to see them *observe this person to see if she is the right person to take over as principal. I would like to see that person because I did not have that guidance to my principalship with the local people*.

In summary the focus of Leah's story is about empowering Tiwi people to be in control of decision making regarding education of their children. In order to bring about this empowerment, there is a central focus on language and culture teaching in the school that encourages and involves the Tiwi community to work in

partnership with the school. As a consequence, Tiwi people are actively engaged in school activities, assuming an ownership and making a major contribution to community school life. Nonetheless, it is one that she struggles to maintain in her constant efforts to strike a balance between both the Indigenous and non Indigenous worlds. Clearly, there are successes and some failures in resolving these contentious issues. Tiwi people succeeded in establishing a culturally appropriate leadership structure yet one that lacked the political power to make ultimate decisions. There was a lack of genuine community involvement even though there is a commitment on the part of the Tiwi school leadership to establish interdependency. Despite the struggles and challenges she finally ended her narrative by saying *we have lots of obstacles and beyond that is the calm sea and beyond that is our hope and future for our students at Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School.*

Emergent themes from Leah's narrative closely reiterated themes found in the narratives of the other Indigenous female principals. A commitment to serve the community, reinforcing group leadership, involving community in school activities to reflect cultural values, bilingual education, and promoting empowerment of the community through collaborative activities. As leadership is an ingredient in negotiating partnerships, her leadership is manifest in attributes such as flexibility, courage, dedication, appropriate communication, trust, and respect.

Her key themes are illustrated in the Table below.

**Table 4.2 Leah's key themes and incidents**

<b>THEME</b>	<b>INCIDENT DESCRIBED</b>
Group Leadership/ Transforming school structures	Establishing Milimika
Service to community	Commitment to kids' education
Relationships	Importance of trust and respect from community
Educational leadership context	Acceptance from community
Transcending boundaries	Operating between two contested worldviews
Mentoring	Mentoring aspiring Indigenous principals from both cultures
Empowerment to community	Community owns the school
Engaging community	Shared responsibility, interdependence and collaborating with entire community

Establishing and maintaining Tiwi culture at all levels of school life is important. As such a leadership structure that supports a Tiwi school is of paramount importance at Murrupurtiyanuwu School. This was one way of getting Tiwi people to be a part of the school culture. Additionally, the bilingual program has played a major role in getting the community to be involved in teaching and learning as well as being part of the decision making body. This also brings empowerment to the people. Establishing a school board is part of establishing a strong school community partnership that has the responsibility of liaising with the Catholic Education Office and being an advisory body for Milimika.

#### **4.4 STORY 3: ESTHER DJAYGHURRGA**

##### **4.4.1 Esther's Lived Life**

*We try and balance all the time and try to make everyone I guess happy and to understand and have that shared understanding....It's not just to the community people, my community people, it's also for me to be able to establish or build that partnership with different agencies within my community.*

Gunbalanya, one of Australia's Indigenous communities in the Top End in the Northern Territory, is located 320 kilometres east of Darwin on the eastern border of the world heritage listed Kakadu National Park at the base of the Arnhemland escarpment. Prior to 1900 there were about five main tribes living around the escarpment namely, Amurdak, Erre, Gagudju, Mengerr, and Wuningak. All these groups spoke their own language but were related to with one another through the common dialect language Kunwinjku. The people refer to themselves as Birrwinjku which means "fresh water people". Gunbalanya is a mixture of various tribal groups and not one group. This mixture of tribes brings with it difficulties in getting people to work as a community unit.

The Birrwinku people have had contact with Europeans since long before missionaries established contact. By 1900 there were sightings of European buffalo shooters who brought with them goods such as sugar, alcohol, and tobacco to trade for buffalo hides. This way they started relating to the Indigenous people who also embraced the barter trading. However such contact did not initiate any schooling facilities.

In 1976, Gunbalanya became an independent Aboriginal community with its own governing council incorporated and registered under the Associations Incorporation Ordinance. As a council they seek self management and control of decision making processes according to primary instruments of Aboriginal authority. Despite this, there remains a strong influence of European advisers as managers in almost all service areas. As a former Anglican mission many people are still involved in the practice of the Anglican Church.

Esther was born at Gunbalanya in 1964 in this environment where western and traditional culture were already in contestation and many of her people were struggling with accepting western values over Indigenous ones. She is a traditional Aboriginal from the Djalama clan group and a Kunwinjku speaker. She started formal schooling in 1975 at the age of 11.

In 1981 she finished primary school at Gunbalanya Community Education Centre. With an ambition to pursue further education and with the firm support of her family who also valued a purpose for education she left her family and community for the first time to attend secondary schooling in Darwin in 1982. She started year 8 at Kormilda College and in 1983 she moved to Darwin High school with the aim of gaining a mainstream schooling experience. Consistent with the pattern of other participants who moved to Darwin or elsewhere to gain secondary schooling, Esther dropped out of school at the end of year 11. This setback did not deter her from pursuing further education. As she had a determination and strength of character that did not allow failure to overcome her.

After dropping out of school in year 11, she went back to Gunbalanya community to seek further opportunities at the school. Fortunately, at the time, there was a vacancy at the school for an assistant teacher. She applied for the position and served as an assistant teacher for a year. Developing a passion for teaching as a result of this opportunity, after a year, with some advice and encouragement from some non-Indigenous staff she decided to pursue a career in teaching. In 1986 she enrolled at Batchelor Institute to study for a three year teacher education training course in Aboriginal schools. At the end of the three years she went back to her community at Gunbalanya and taught as a first year fully trained teacher. Esther was neither satisfied with the three year qualification to teach only in Aboriginal schools nor was she satisfied with the quality of training she had during her teacher education training. She wanted a more robust education where she could apply her skills in other institutions across Australia. In 1988 she enrolled and successfully completed the one year degree program. The D-BATE course was quite challenging but it gave her enormous opportunity to discover more about pedagogical principles for Aboriginal teacher education (McTaggart, 1988). By the end of the year's course she was not only well grounded in the both ways pedagogy but also qualified to teach anywhere in Australia.

Some graduates experienced some challenges back in their schools after completing the course and Esther happened to be one of them. Her first year of teaching after the D-BATE program was horrible. She, like other graduates, had all the pressure from the NT Department of Education to perform at an excellent level. There was the understanding and expectation that as Aboriginal teachers they had all the professional skills and capabilities to work unsupervised and as such no support was provided in Esther's case; whereas neophyte non-Indigenous teachers were given all the support they needed. As well as teaching transition, she was also in charge of year 2 and pre-school. She was quite overwhelmed by the workload and found it extremely difficult to cope with very little support. As a result of these obstacles, Esther failed her first year probation, which failure ultimately led to termination. Fortunately, it coincided with a time when schools had just formed school councils and Esther happened to have a strong school council that supported her. They argued that as a new graduate very little support had been provided by the Department of Education and as such it had to partly take the responsibility for her poor performance. The school council threatened to withdraw their support from the school and revoke the permits of all non-Indigenous teachers in the community. This led to a reinstatement of her position and a negotiation with the Department of Education for a support staff in planning and programming for the class levels she taught.

In 1992, she moved to Darwin on a two year contract to work in the Department of Education where she was involved with other Indigenous staff in preparing curriculum materials for teaching in Aboriginal schools. This move was a turning point in her career as it gave her the opportunity to gain enough knowledge and skills in the area of Indigenous pedagogy as well as develop her self esteem and confidence. While there were opportunities for her to continue working at the Department of Education she decided instead to return to Gunbalanya to give service to the community that had supported her. Her visionary outlook was more in line with working with community at grassroots level. As a consequence, she resumed teaching at Gunbalanya Community Education Centre where she felt she would make a significant contribution. After teaching for a year she decided yet again to pursue further studies and applied for fulltime study leave to study the Graduate Diploma in Educational Administration at Batchelor Institute. Esther graduated with a Graduate Diploma in Educational Administration in 1996 and

went back to Gunbalanya CEC where she was appointed ET 2 (Executive Teacher level 2) in 1997. As an executive teacher she gained sufficient experience and excelled in this position for four years.

At the end of 2001 the position of principal at the school was advertised after the transfer of the non-Indigenous principal. With encouragement from her community and the school council in particular, Esther applied for the position of principal. In 2002, she was appointed the first Aboriginal principal in her community. This was a dream that eventually materialised and an opportunity for her to initiate changes in collaboration with the community. At this time she was well aware of the enormous challenges ahead of her. Nonetheless, she was determined to serve her people and she has continued to work with courage and strength of character to transform Indigenous education for the better.

She is currently a member of the Steering community which liaises with the Education Department concerning Indigenous education in the Northern Territory. She is also involved with the Gunbalanya Partnership Heads of Agency committee as well as Demed Homeland Resource centre. Her vision is to promote Gunbalanya CEC as a better school, a better place to promote Bining children to cope in both worlds, Indigenous and non-Indigenous.

#### **4.4.2 Esther's Told Story**

At the commencement of the interview Esther presented an impression of someone who was eager to share her experiences of her leadership. At the outset she made it clear that she was privileged to be a part of the research and saw it as an opportunity to give her experiences as principal. This was a comfortable compromise since the researcher also felt privileged in getting her consent as a participant. Esther presented a remarkable interview in a narrative that was focused mainly on her commitment to building a positive school community relationship. She was determined and keen on introducing an ideological shift that ushered a new thinking about how schools should relate to Indigenous communities such as Gunbalanya. Within her story several key themes emerged that are grounded in the context of her leadership. Aspects of her lived life are also

features of her told story. Her training at Batchelor Institute grounded in a both ways philosophy became the focal point in her leadership in building school community partnerships. In expressing her views on being the first Indigenous principal in her community she positioned herself as a community principal who would bring a kind of leadership different to that of previous non-Indigenous principals, a leadership where relationships are significant, a leadership that is inclusive, a leadership that charts alternatives to the status quo, and, one that uses power in innovative ways that diverge from mainstream institutionalised contexts.

In this new leadership she endeavoured to bring a balance between the two knowledge systems, with pedagogical and management approaches that are equal in emphasis on the two world views. She is confronted by two polarised cultures that are laden with values entrenched in the beliefs and traditions that they are founded on. She recounted her experiences with profound anxiety, hope, and sometimes sadness with expectations of being able to synthesise these differences and bring them to a centering point where shared responsibility, interdependence, and respect for each other symbolise the essence of a community spirit. In spite of these ambitions she is aware of and quick to point out that developing an ideological shift was a hard battle in a community where people have been disenfranchised since the arrival of Europeans in Australia. She is constantly challenged with the arduous task of walking between two contested worlds as she strives to bring the entire school community together in a shared responsibility. In her opening narrative she foregrounded this so succinctly. *Well, I can start off by saying since I became principal at my respective community, it's been a hard battle it's been very long and no easy task in a community like this because principals like me bring a different type of leadership that will try and make sense.*

The pattern suggested by the events in Esther's lived life, the importance of relationships in interpersonal interactions, respect for cultural beliefs and values and spirituality are fundamental features of her told story. It is implied that an Indigenous principal manages differently to the non-Indigenous principal who has less pressure because she can only look at school matters through a sole cultural lens. Within the context of this new leadership she is *trying to bring the community*



*closer to the school or taking the school closer to the community, a task that is not so easy. Throughout her narrative the repetition of phrases such as no easy task, it's been a hard battle, it's so difficult, there's no easy choice are indications of the multiple pressures that challenge the authority of an Indigenous principal. Essentially, one would expect that an Indigenous principal was in an enviable position to establish productive relations between the school and community with a high level of involvement from parents and wider community. Nonetheless her narrative counters such a supposition. In her opening remarks she recounted that it's been a hard battle it's been very long and no easy task... trying to take the wishes from the community there's no easy choice... and it hasn't been an easy task particularly when you're trying to build a relationship with the community.*

When she spoke about building this relationship she quickly recounted an incident and her style of engaging with the community. She believed in going out to the people to have that real discussion and real dialogue and explaining to the community the wishes of the department and also trying to carry the wishes from the community. The theme of transcending contested boundaries became a major theme that engulfed her story pattern and one that challenged her efforts in bringing the school and community in partnership. One reason she gave for this challenge related to her identity as an Indigenous principal, a challenge linked to a larger extent with having to balance two polarised worlds –Indigenous and non-Indigenous. She said, *being in that position we try and balance all the time and try and make everyone happy...* She further explained the issues involved in the balancing. She wanted to have a shared understanding that values both cultures to work in a collaborative relationship and:

*to have that shared understanding and I think that's also what's missing and valuing others what they bring and not only looking at it from balanda side but also try and bring this balanda side how that can complement each other with Aboriginal culture which eh here I call Binig culture and how those two cultures can work together.*

Rather than continuing the western bureaucratic model of control with its rigid authority, red tape, and a very structured western curriculum she spoke about bringing people and cultures together in mutual respect. Such mutuality will give Aboriginal children a strong foundation in education and identity and ultimately

empower the entire community. In her entire initial narrative the struggle to balance both worlds and establish a relationship with both cultures was at the heart of her management.

She next discussed a multitude of reasons for the difficulty in establishing school community partnerships. Firstly, she realised that in order to work in collaboration with the community required gaining respect and trust of her people. She aimed *to continue to make them aware of balanda culture having balanda ways....I chose that I want to become principal and I chose for the whole purpose we should try and dismantle a lot of those what I disagree and try and make that into the other culture, Aboriginal culture but it's too hard for me to do that to help them understand.* Secondly, she talked about engaging all parties in the community, the different agencies that are managed mostly by non-Indigenous people and citing a difficulty in establishing school community partnerships. She says:

*Also within those agencies have different agendas and different attitudes....It is all the white parties trying to run our own affairs our own lives in a local community like this so it was also a different layer for me to stand up there and discuss what I actually wanted to put a message across to all this kind of balanda people to understand what a whole community means and what they really want....its not easy to have people who are domineering all the time and to see from a different perspective. Thirdly, it is also how much Aboriginal people value education....because some of them think it is a situation where one contradicts the other.*

And lastly, she also needed to bring mutual understanding of the community's values against systemic values that are laden with bureaucratic western values. Nonetheless she is determined and tenacious in having *a new way of looking for both the community and department* to work in partnership. Against the backdrop of the multitude of reasons she discussed, lies the theme of the need to strive for balance and understanding of cultures; Aboriginal, western, and the culture of schools. The contestation of western, Aboriginal, and school cultures is a difficulty in her leadership and one that she is constantly confronted with. At this point in her narrative she clearly articulated leadership from an Indigenous perspective – leadership involves working with community groups towards a common goal and establishing and nurturing interdependence. Next she went on to recount a lengthy narrative about a particular time she went out to discuss a departmental

partnership initiative with the community and also trying to do things from her perspective as an Indigenous principal in dealing with attendance problems. She was relentless in her efforts and situated herself as an engaging principal; a transformational agent who realised that to improve education of *Binig* children required the involvement of everyone. As a consequence, she went out into the community on a school day to meet her own people targeting especially chronic non-attenders. In this episode she went out into the community to talk to individual parents but she admitted *it's very, very hard because when I did the interviews once with parents targeting chronic non-attenders and well it took me about four hours talking to individual parents.*

Clearly, her problems to get parents involved are compounded by socio-economic problems in a dysfunctional environment fraught with the seeds planted in colonial days as revealed in her lived life. She narrated this episode with lots of argumentations and evaluations and her frustration is visible in the way she narrates it as she says *I think now we need action, we need something to be done. We have continued to talk talk talk talk and well I am getting sick and tired.* Her repetition and emphasis of *talk* is a clear indication of her frustration with her own people but also indicated that leading and building partnership takes time. Her passion to build a community of learners within the context of a very challenging environment disenfranchised by socioeconomic problems led her to be strategic in her approach to get parents to take responsibility. Within the context of engaging community members she endeavoured for a real dialogue. Engaging in dialogue involves more than mere talk. It is about having the understanding that the other has something to say and contribute and such a process involves finding common ground. Recounting a meeting she convened at the school after the *four hour run of different camps* she challenged parents about the values that all children need in order to succeed in life. This next excerpt recounts her relentless efforts in asking for the unyielding support in partnering with the school for the education of their children:

*I said, how are we going to value an individual child if they don't come to school? If you want us to value your child and how we can deliver the quality education that you want what is stopping the kid from attending school? Teasing, it could be one issue, having no clothes could be the other, but what are you doing at home*

*encouraging your child regardless of what gonna happen; what you should be doing is preparing your child into the future.*

Her determination to demonstrate school as integral to the community as one that complements and enhances learning continued to suffer major setbacks. These were challenges that have been perpetuated during the colonial era partly because community involvement has often amounted to little more than tokenism and the community seemed to struggle with accepting a democratic form of involvement in decision making that was free from manipulation and control within the institutionalised structure. Experiences of her lived life continue to be a pattern of her told story as she evaluated the reasons for dysfunctionality in families and ultimately Aboriginal communities. There is an indication she was making reference to the welfare system introduced in Indigenous communities during the colonial era. Clearly she was saddened by the continued welfare mentality of her own people and partly blamed the government for this predicament:

*Parents are not disciplining their kids at home we start to have part of that as dysfunctional families and its not easy and part of that dysfunctional families it could be the government be part of that making us to be dysfunctional when they gave us too much choice to play around with now we don't know how much we've got to stop for ourselves and do things for ourselves. Cause we're always going to put our hand out wanting, wanting, wanting that's the metaphor.*

Notably, her vision for developing partnership included partnerships between non Indigenous teachers and their assistant teachers. This involved a pedagogical change that addressed the educational needs and aspirations of Indigenous students. This mutual exchange can bring about negotiating curriculum themes and developing pedagogies that speak to the reality of culture rather than imposing externally developed ones.

Envisaging school as integral to the community she believed that a community school should complement and enhance learning. She is convinced that the learning of many students is compromised by health and social problems.

In her commitment to advancing partnership between various groups in the community and the school she identified groups she believed would play an

integral role in various school matters. In dealing with behaviour management she spoke about advocating the involvement of Indigenous males from the community *to talk to these hard core young adolescent men* who lack discipline. Part of the school program involved taking *those hard core students* and assisting them in developing a better self esteem. Another partner in the process is the school council whose support is critical to the partnership. In establishing partnerships with the council she had to explain *about their roles and how they should be giving support to the school...it's not easy but we try to educate them*. Devolution in schools in the late eighties required schools to establish school councils carrying out management responsibility in schools. In Indigenous communities where the luxury of parents with the necessary skills is non existent, it meant that school councils would struggle with their responsibilities because of very little understanding of their duties. In spite of the difficulties in getting council members to attend meetings and get the full commitment of all members she acknowledged *the school council started to do a few things as a community school council to participate in any community events which is really good; some of those are small successes even though it could be better*.

In drawing her opening narrative to a close she revealed that partnership starts in the classroom. She is convinced that school community partnerships are built on collaboration, shared responsibility, and team work. This collaboration and teamwork begins in the classroom between teachers and Assistant Teachers working side by side where students begin to learn about collaboration and teamwork. She noted:

*Balanda people should also have that shared understanding with their assistant teachers in their classroom; they need to build that relationship as well so that all the other kids can see that they are also working together in team and in collaboration in teaching and planning. Some staff are doing that some are not so we continue to focus these areas as well as looking at team teaching situation balanda and Aboriginal teacher we also try to make them to build that partnership with those two. Let us practise our partnership in the classroom before we can tell others to build that partnership with us.*

From her perspective partnerships start with the relationships between and among staff of the school. The remaining narratives are in response to my questions and I

first asked her about the difficulties she encountered as an Indigenous principal when she constantly referred to a *hard battle*, and *it's no easy task* in her initial narrative. She is quick to recount an incident involving non Indigenous staff *actually fighting, fighting...arguing over petty things, just small petty things*. This incident was particularly new to her in dealing with conflict involving especially male staff. Nonetheless, she took them through the process and dealt with the matter in a professional way but at the same time looking at it from a both ways perspective.

She is overwhelmed that her role as principal extends beyond the normal duties she was meant to perform. This is reinforced when she recounted another incident that involved a non Indigenous couple and a non Indigenous male. As a result of these incidents she considered delegating such matters to some of her senior staff. Examining her use of language *just small petty things* indicated her frustration with having to deal with small problems involving staff who should be concentrating on teaching students and creating a positive teaching and learning environment. There is an indication that she felt disappointed that staff members were not a good example to students.

The interview then moved to discussing her efforts in building partnerships with various groups in the community. She recounted a scenario where she convened a meeting with the various heads of agencies who apparently are mostly non Indigenous and since for a long time the pattern had been and still is *all the white parties trying to run our own affairs and our own lives in a local community like this*. Her intention to change this is *not an easy task* because she always finds *different types of balanda people those who resist almost anything and within those agencies [people] have different agendas and different attitudes*. At this meeting of all agencies in the community, she had to *stand up there and put the message across to all this kind of balanda people*. From her perspective it was an onerous task to confront non-Indigenous people and suggest a new way of working with the entire community in this new partnership where they would all have a shared understanding in participating in Departmental initiatives as well as community ones. Recounting this scenario where she engaged in a real discussion and a real dialogue, she reported:

*When we were looking at developing this partnership, firstly I had to go out and send memos in the community that we were starting to build this partnership within the community so call it agency, heads of agency meeting at that time we pull all the heads of agency together...*

Even though she demonstrated her determination to get everyone involved she acknowledged that setting up the meeting of the heads of agencies was a *battle* because it involved *changing some mind set of how individuals were thinking*. Articulating a new vision for the school in such a climate proved to be demanding on all fronts.

Demonstrating her tenacity as an engaging principal and reaching out to the community she explored processes that are appropriate within the socio-cultural context that she leads. Respecting and valuing the wisdom of elders is integral to cultural tradition and hence an important process in the partnership. In this way elders are empowered in decision making. Essentially, elders were invited to this meeting.

*There's one group that I'm going to invite that will be part of this discussion because remember any community meetings they don't get told of what the agendas is all about and what the community really wants. These are the elders I said, and elders will consist of traditional owners and all the people that would like to contribute to part of the big discussion. And the communication would go back and forewords and for me to get all of these people I had to go out in a community and talk to them why we are establishing why we are establishing this committee, and. it was very hard to try and break it down to what I wanted to achieve and come down to their level and I said to them the purpose of having this meeting is I want you to be part of the school's decision as well, to be part of your child's development because remember you may be a great, great grandparent down the track so even though that you've grown up kids and they've got kids and you may not want to have nothing to do with it; long time ago, people still continue to look out for kids and help that child to be part and they were contributing their efforts with the kids. So today don't forget that I want to use that into this western context and that they can come and consult you so rather than you feel that you haven't been consulted in any way this is a time and opportunity for you to have your say.*

It seems that Esther's commitment to creating meaningful change involved weaving the sociocultural fabric into school culture and working towards a common goal. This theme of creating a balance in both cultures pervades her entire narrative. Inviting elders to be part of the decision making is establishing a both ways approach to school leadership that confirmed her earlier assertion about bringing in a different kind of leadership. Her told story suggests that it is not only an important aspect of building interdependence but also building the identity of Indigenous children in teaching and learning. In the following extract from the interview when she recounted the involvement of elders in contributing to the curriculum her hopes and commitment in creating a balance in both cultures are clearly visible:

*If so called Department wanted to build that partnership with the community, try and use the cultural context bringing their culture to be reinforced at the school and try and build this partnership to try and close that gap between the school and community so therefore we use this cultural program to bring elders in to teach the kids and at the same time be able to learn the right culture while at the same time they had a purpose to write a particular story; you know because of different literacy levels because they say well these kids finally have something to talk about but change that into western culture to write that in English.*

Making the curriculum appropriate is about contextualising programs that are meaningful and as well encourages the participation of parents and community in forging sustainable partnerships.

As I was curious about an earlier mention in regards to the *four hour run* in the community, I probed her to expand on this particular story. In response, she launched into a lengthy narrative. She recalled writing down a set of questions to ask parents that she targeted, mainly parents of kids who are chronic non-attenders. She jumped into the school car and drove round the community and visited each family she had listed. Many of the issues relating to student absenteeism were socioeconomic. When she asked the question why students were absent from school, the parents gave various answers such as:

*They don't like being teased. My child had dirty clothes. We don't have money. My child is hungry. My child is not coming because we have drunken families in the house. They come and they make*



*such a huge noise and my kids don't go to sleep. They don't have a really good night's sleep so that they can get up early in the morning.*

Despite the difficulties in dealing with such sensitive issues, she outlined strategies such as working out a family budget, preparing meals for over-crowded homes, and, confronting drunken relatives. She also drew attention to the hunger excuse by reminding them about the breakfast program, a school initiative where kids are fed prior to commencing classes. In this context the principal becomes a community developer, a skill she might not be trained for or one she may likely want to avoid because of the complex nature of family groups.

In relation to a specific question I asked about school councils, she went on to narrate their participation in school matters. *The school council is starting to talk, to voice their opinion directly to the Education Minister about uncompleted tasks, taking up occupational health, work, and safety issues, they're also trying to put their political views forward to the Department.* Their aim is to provide good facilities for children to learn just like any other school in the NT. Here she mentioned that her goal as principal is to get good quality teachers in remote communities who will maintain the same standards as in any urban school. This balancing act of walking between two contesting worlds infuses every aspect of her leadership. Similar to other principals in the study, the relentless search for balance in charting new pathways is also demonstrated in her position with DEET. Towards the end of the interview she was asked to elaborate on the difficulties she has working particularly in the western culture. In the following argumentation she revealed:

*You're looking at the perception that you're representing DEET and also as a community member. For me I was caught in between. I said I can't really do that, I'm a community member and all our life because we've been talking about we and about us in any discussion.*

This constant struggle of trying to balance both worlds is evident in her management in attempting to transcend boundaries. The emphatic use of *I* and *we* in the above statement reveals the difficulties she encountered in trying to negotiate both worlds. The pattern of divisions in Esther's biographical trajectory is

reflected in the way she tried to represent the Department and at the same time continued to portray her loyalty to her community. It seems that identity is as important to her as being principal in a bureaucratic sense. She forwards a justification in her narrative for bringing new styles of educational leadership. The issue of building and sustaining relationships is important yet at the same time difficult to negotiate and find a mutual ground.

As she recounted her final perceptions, there is a hint of emphatic sadness but also a sense of self-affirming position of strength and determination that are features of her lived life. Despite these experiences she finally ended the interview by revealing that the best part of her job has been *enjoying building good relationships and understanding departmental ways of operating in the system level, at the school's level, and the community's level, where I can move into all three. It's hard but I enjoy doing that and building and bringing people together with everyone.* The prevailing theme of constantly walking between two worlds and the passion for building collaborative relationships defines her world as a female Indigenous principal.

Specific to this study was to address how Indigenous female principals in Indigenous remote community schools in the Top End of the Northern Territory negotiate partnerships with their respective communities. The table below illustrates key themes as findings from Esther's narrative.

**Table 4.3 Esther's key themes and incidents**

<b>THEME</b>	<b>INCIDENT DESCRIBED</b>
Spirituality	All life is connected; a holistic view of relating to life
Colour bind	Colour as misperception of possible incompetency
Transcending boundaries	Operating within contested worldviews
Service to community	Leading the school for community empowerment
Creating external alliances	Involving various agencies in the community
Relationships	Respect for elders views and involvement in key decision making

Quite clearly, Esther in a similar vein had a determination to transform education of Indigenous children by negotiating changes to operational structure and firmly integrating Indigenous language and culture in the school curriculum. These fundamental changes were necessary in preparing the path for school community partnerships that would involve Indigenous parents and community to work cooperatively on a range of school matters. Essentially, traditional leadership protocols such as respecting views of elders and involving them in key decisions were important to her. She employed strategies such as appropriate communication, flexibility, patience, and trusting the good will of the community. While she succeeded in working closely with the school council that supported and strengthened her leadership, genuine commitment from parents and other agencies within the community was a struggle. Nonetheless she demonstrated her determination and strength of character through perseverance using every opportunity through group meetings and home visits to bring about a close partnership. Given that education as a cultural activity was a reproduction of the dominant European culture in remote Indigenous communities, it was necessary to transform the mainstream culture to integrate with an Indigenous focus. Having a

bicultural framework encouraged the community to participate and contribute to Indigenous culture through their involvement in teaching and learning. Accordingly, culture was a strong impact and influence in negotiating partnerships and sustaining them. Through culture, both parties, Indigenous and non-Indigenous found a meeting ground to collaborate and contribute to the education of Binig children.

#### **4.5 STORY 4: VALERIE DHAYKAMALU**

##### **4.5.1 Valerie's Lived Life**

*I wanted the community to know that school is not for the Department of Education, it's for Galiwin'ku community...it's for the kids.*

Valerie is a traditional Yolngu born in 1947 at Milingimbi in North East Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia. She is married with five children – three boys and two girls and has twenty grandchildren – twelve boys and eight girls. Arnhem Land has been home to a majority of traditional Aboriginal people with about thirty to forty different clan groups that spread from the Arafura Sea to the Gulf of Carpentaria. The Yolngu are the Aboriginal people of central to North East Arnhem Land. Her parents lived in Milingimbi but left Milingimbi together with her grandmother when she was a baby and resettled at Galiwin'ku where other clan groups had already settled. She belongs to the Gupapuynu and Golumala clan groups.

Consistent with other participants in the research she was born at a time when European mission influence was spreading in many parts of the Northern Territory. She started school at a very young age in 1953. This was a crucial time in her biography. Reflecting on her school days she wrote:

To us Yolngu children, schooling was a new concept and when I think back on those years there was hardly anything around the school environment that reminded me of my culture. It is interesting to know how very quickly we lost our names once we entered the school environment. We had to adopt European names such as Valerie, Phyllis, Joanne, Felicity and so on. Our

traditional names were considered either primitive or very difficult to pronounce. It made it easier for our teachers who were all Europeans. I was given the name Valerie and became known as Valerie Dhaykamalu. There was very little consultation with our families about names – after all getting an education was the most important thing, a big privilege for Aboriginal children. In Aboriginal culture when children are born a name is not pulled from a hat. Names are given according to clan groups. It is a key element in identifying people and relationships. The school environment had a different culture to the one I was used to. These were difficult times (Dhaykamalu, 1999, p. 67).

As a young girl, she developed strength of character and she was determined to succeed against all odds. She lived with her parents and extended family at Galiwin'ku for most of her primary schooling. Her determination for formal western education led her to continue schooling through correspondence in South Australia in 1964. At this time she was already thinking of a teaching career and on completion of her correspondence course she left Galiwin'ku in 1969 for Kormilda in Darwin. After completing studies at Kormilda College she went back to Galiwin'ku and worked at the school as an assistant teacher. With a keen interest in teaching Valerie was among diligent students who persevered to train at Batchelor Institute despite added responsibilities of community and family obligations.

Her foresight and determination paid off when she succeeded in training as a band 1 teacher and had a class of her own. By 1994, she was already thinking beyond classroom teaching with her eyes set on bigger things. Her school days coupled with her training at Batchelor Institute led her to a vision that motivated her to stay in the teaching field. For the majority of students at Batchelor Institute at the time there was much debate and discussion around pedagogical principles for Aboriginal teacher education (McTaggart, 1988) and a community centred approach to education (Hastings, 1988). Valerie continued teaching at Shepherdson College and gradually collaborated with other Yolngu teachers to keep language and culture strong.

In 1998, Valerie expressed a keen interest in studying for the Graduate Certificate in Educational Administration at Batchelor Institute. At this time Rose Guwanga who was the Indigenous principal had retired and Valerie was thinking seriously

about training for the position. Studying the Graduate course and being appointed principal-in-training this same year was a turning point in her biography. At Batchelor Institute she had an inquiring mind about leadership of Aboriginal schools. An avid learner she always initiated discussions pertaining to self determination and community ownership of Indigenous remote community schools and often raised concerns about the cultural divide that existed between the school and community. Additionally she was concerned that Yolngu Children were losing their identity as school did not reflect a strong Aboriginal culture. She wanted Yolngu children to have an education that had a strong western context but more importantly set within an Aboriginal context that strengthened their indigeneity. Though she appreciated the education she had at the time, the curriculum and general ethos of the school hardly reflected and gave them the identity that would give them a balanced life. Having the opportunity to head the school gave her further determination to transform the colonial structures that she perceived were a barrier to Indigenous self determination.

In 1999, the demands of studying part time, working fulltime as well as family commitments led her to apply for study leave in order to give her ample time to concentrate on her studies. At the end of that year she graduated with a Graduate Diploma in Educational Administration and went back to Shepherdson College, this time confirmed principal. Although there were other non-Indigenous executives at the time she found it extremely difficult working not only with staff but also the community. Additionally, family commitments gave her little time to concentrate on her job as principal. Nonetheless, she was determined to empower Galiwin'ku community by creating the school as an extension of the community. With the support of the School Council (mainly clan leaders) and Galiwin'ku Community Council she gradually won the support of the community and further built on the foundation started by the retired Indigenous principal. Community people came to the school to teach language and culture through federal funding and funding provided by the government for Community Development Education Projects (CDEP).

In 2000, Valerie was appointed Executive Principal Level 3. In Northern Territory schools this was a time when contracts were offered to principals that elevated them to higher responsibilities with attractive salary packages that brought with

them greater accountability. For Indigenous principals who accepted the contracts very little information was given regarding accountability and other implications that accompanied the ECP positions and there were no arrangements in place by the central office for external support. As a consequence meeting performance targets became an arduous task. A pragmatist and a life long learner she approached senior executives in the Department of Education and negotiated support in having to shadow two urban non-Indigenous principals and also working in collaboration with Batchelor Institute and senior staff in the Department of Education. There were some successes with the support which improved her performance immensely including the general school climate. Sadly, she finally succumbed to the demands of family life and a highly demanding job in 2002 and resigned as principal of the school. This was an extremely difficult decision for her because she felt at the time she was letting her people down. For a whole year she stayed on Elcho Island and simply spent time with the family. The following year she started doing voluntary work at the Galiwin'ku Childcare Centre where the retired Indigenous principal of the school was Director. At the end of 2003, Rose retired as Director of the Child Care Centre and Valerie applied for the position. She was appointed the new Director in 2004 but decided to go back to the school and work as a community liaison person.

#### **4.5.2 Valerie's Told Story**

Of the five participants, Valerie's interview was the most difficult to initiate as she had difficulty responding to the initial question. Initially, she expected a probing technique that was the norm in previous research interviews and reverted to silence. Wengraf (2001, p. 126) suggests that the interviewer "resists this unconscious or conscious pressure to actively direct questioning role". In dealing with this silence, I attempted to "relaunch" the SQUIN (Wengraf, 2001, p. 122) by repeating it fractionally and slowly. In an attempt to take notes on this non-linguistic episode, she waited in silence hoping to get a series of questions that would direct the interview process. Wengraf's (2001, p.128) suggestion of not "rushing to rescue" as an active listening skill and a technique of the methodology eventually brought success. Once she started the narrative, the most remarkable story unfolded.

Valerie started her reconstruction with a chronological account of her career – from teaching to being a school principal at Galiwin’ku School as it was called Galiwin’ku school or Elcho Island School at the time. From her present perspective Valerie describes her experiences as a continual struggle, endured with deep devotion and commitment to the educational development of her remote community school and entire community. While a great deal of her story revolves around her career, it also contains “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of her opinions and values of what constitutes effective leadership and sustainable school community partnerships in remote community schools. Valerie’s story as a whole is set within the context of what is generally known as Aboriginalisation of Indigenous education, whereby aspiring Aboriginal educators and gradually the entire community are encouraged and empowered to take control and lead their remote community schools. As one of the longest serving Aboriginal teachers at Shepherdson College at the time, and a highly-regarded Aboriginal woman, Valerie’s interest in becoming principal at her school was obvious. However, her true motivation for being a principal was born out of her deep commitment to hard work and a vision for her community. For instance, she said *I had to find a way to negotiate with the Department so they can help Yolngu an Aboriginal person placed as a principal in our community school.* At the heart of Valerie’s aspirations, as later revealed in her narrative, is her long held desire to play a pivotal role in negotiating grassroots partnerships (between her school and the community) that have the potential to strike a balance between her Yolngu community cultural needs and the Balanda educational needs. Although she had a personal motivation and vision in a career as principal the foundation for Aboriginalisation was already established at the time.

At the beginning of her narrative, she briefly introduced her career trajectory starting from her early school days at Shepherdson College, but abruptly refocused her attention on her prolonged career as teacher, saying, *it took me from 1969 till 1998 working as assistant teacher first with a European teacher.* Valerie is a strong proponent of active learning, probably because she believed it underpins effective leadership and school community partnership. She affirmed her belief and commitment to active learning by saying, *gradually, as I was working there I was learning at the same time seeing how Balanda as a white man are preparing lesson programming for Aboriginal children.* Although it could be



argued that neophyte teachers and leaders in remote community schools frequently learn from their more experienced counterparts, what stands powerfully in Valerie's story is her absolute commitment to life long learning, and an awareness of the need for culturally appropriate education, leadership, and school community partnership processes in remote schools, to reflect a both ways philosophy. It is therefore a responsibility for her (a Yolngu school leader) as it is for European school teachers, principals and partnership stakeholders to learn from both Indigenous and non Indigenous worldviews.

Her entire initial narrative is represented by reports, argumentations and evaluations about the process of her appointment. Valerie pointed to the prolonged tussle that transpired among members of the different clan groups that constituted the Shepherdson College School Council, charged with the responsibility of identifying and recommending a suitable candidate to replace the out-going Indigenous principal for appointment as principal to the Department of Education. Considering Valerie's academic achievements and cultural background, as well as her protracted teaching experience, it was generally perceived she would be recommended for the position. Yet, as she clearly acknowledged, it was not a forgone conclusion. There were myriad issues, problems, and even tension among members of the Council. The uncertainty needed to be resolved (and resolved quickly) but it lasted several weeks, *because the School council wanted to find someone who would be there to help to negotiate between the two parties, the Department of Education [and] the community.* The uncertainty was compounded by the fact that *most of the School Council members and the teachers in the council were mostly community families.* Thus, requiring a sense of strict caution (as it should be) on the part of the School Council to act prudently, and not subscribe to nepotism whereby stakeholders of a particular service seek self-interest.

It was after an exhaustive process of consultation and negotiations among all stakeholders of the school that the School Council recommended Valerie to the Department of Education to be appointed principal of Shepherdson College. Her preliminary focus as principal was to establish firm partnership between her *bosses* (the Department the Education) and her school, and the community at large. Valerie pointed to two criteria that were significant in her appointment as

principal, these were: firstly, her qualification in mainstream education and secondly her ability to work within the school and the community. This is not to suggest there were no other criteria considered in her appointment; there were. For example, Valerie's experience was a critical factor in her appointment, because both the Council and the Department required a principal with significant corporate knowledge to ensure continuity and to promptly interact with all stakeholders in and outside the boundaries of the school. Without doubt however, all criteria for the job surrounded the notion of selecting an Indigenous person who was capable of *standing between the Yolngu and the Balanda* and could demonstrate a diverse approach to work.

She revealed this commitment by saying, *I had to work for the sake of my Yolngu children's future, [so] I had a challenge to talk to them [meaning Western hierarchy] to share with them ...and talk to them about working together as a team.* This statement, in part, expressed Valerie's devotion to the values of community stewardship. Her desire to work collaboratively with the Department of Education and other stakeholders also reflected her deep commitment to team work and school community partnership which she saw as critical to achieving meaningful outcomes in remote community schools. Recounting the major challenges that confronted her as principal, Valerie pointed to three main ordeals: *It was hard, because I was learning from both sides; Being a Yolngu principal ... it was hard working with my people; I needed to abide by the rules of the Department, and some staff were not supportive of me, both the Yolngu and non Aboriginal.*

When these challenges began to unravel, Valerie was deeply troubled, but soon realised she had to implement strategic measures if she was to confront these challenges. A key strategy she employed was on-going consultation with senior executives in the Department of Education and trusted colleagues; *I need some people to work with me as my critical friends, so I had to choose three people to work with me.*

Valerie's experience would suggest that she was in good stead to understand the major challenges that were involved in her job, prior to her appointment. But a close analysis of her total story seems to suggest she was not fully aware of the

magnitude and complexity of those challenges. For example she said, *it took me a long time to really learn the structure of the white man system*. In a more revealing recount, she says:

*It was challenging time when they announced that I was going to be the principal. I was a bit frightened because it was a big job. I needed to look at myself where I stand, who I was. I was going to work with Balanda. It was a time for me to think and to look where I stand as a Yolngu person.*

In this regard it is fair to suggest that Valerie's appointment as principal literally placed her between two opposing worldviews: the Indigenous worldview (which has shaped her identity) and the western worldview (which has shaped her academic life). And since her major responsibility was to consolidate these arguably contested worldviews (to the satisfaction of both her community and the Department of Education), Valerie found her job very challenging and frightening. Her fears seemed justified. In more specific terms however, her greatest fear was alienation. She was unsure of her acceptance as Yolngu school leader by the bureaucratic system and by the bureaucrats of the Department of Education. As well, she was unsure of gaining the opportunity to continue projecting her cultural vision in the school even though the former Indigenous principal had already laid a firm foundation. She reflected on the hurdles she might experience on her path, the inevitable conflicts that might arise in her effort to build sustainable partnerships between the school, the community, and the Department of Education.

Valerie's fears noted above became realised when she finally became principal. What stood out as most worrying in her entire narrative is her relationship with the Department of Education Executives, which she described as master/subordinate relationship. Reflecting on this concern she said, *I had to work under the structure of the Education Department, so whatever decision that came out I had to fit my people and my staff at Shepherdson College*. It is obvious in Valerie's story that she had a vision to transform her remote community school into a place of learning that is culturally appropriate to the socio-cultural and academic needs of her school and community. Yet, she found herself constrained by her school's continuous reliance on the Department of Education for resources and funds

allocations, thus subjecting her to the whims and caprices of the bureaucratic system. The recount below provides ample evidence of the enormous power and control and subjugation Valerie had to contend with as a principal. She said regretfully with her demeanour exposing this fear:

*I had to work under the mainstream system. I am under a strict law or rules with the Department; I had to go with what they expected me to do, to negotiate [with] people who were my boss; I had to work under the mainstream system and it was hard [to achieve] whatever changes [were] needed in the school. I had to go with what they expect me to do. I had to follow what they expect me to fulfil in my position. I was like in a cage working under the system.*

Although Valerie appeared emotionally calm during the entire interview, it is clear she was deeply concerned if not disturbed, in explaining this aspect of her story. She appeared mortified, disappointed, and even hurt she has had to deal with the bureaucratic status quo with its regimental rules and regulations. Her remorse is clearly evident in the repetitive use of demeaning phrases such as *working under*, *I was under the system*, *I had to work under the mainstream system*, and so forth. Alternatively the use of these condescending phrases is also an expression of the powerlessness Valerie felt as an Indigenous principal working under a Western bureaucratic system with all its complexities. By the same token, these phrases also unveil the inequities inherent in bureaucratic structures, and the grave limitations they impose on Indigenous organisational leaders, such as Valerie, to be creative and work effectively to articulate their cultural leadership as well as excel in western leadership paradigms. Put differently, Valerie had the arduous task to promote her identity as an Indigenous principal, use her cultural beliefs and values to influence the curriculum and leadership practices of her school.

On the other hand, these expressions could be interpreted as a reflection of Valerie's personal appeal to transform bureaucratic structures, ensure a shift in the management models that were espoused by current bureaucrats in the Department of Education and elsewhere- from prescriptive models of operation to more inclusive and empowerment models. Bureaucrats in the Department of Education are encouraged to be mindful of these observations, since they are currently playing and will continue to play a significant role in the management of remote schools and their principals. But more importantly, as a means of closing

the gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous ideologies and ways of leading and learning, the persistent use of linear authority in Indigenous organisations is completely inappropriate, and counterproductive to the aspirations of Indigenous people. It also runs counter to their self-determination and self-management policies.

Valerie was also concerned about certain anomalies that occurred during her appointment as principal. She was concerned that certain sensitive cultural protocols were either ignored or overlooked by the Department of Education. Although the School Council was involved in her appointment, Valerie was concerned that neither her immediate family nor the entire community were fully involved or informed about her appointment. She was convinced the appointment of a Yolngu principal should always involve the full participation of the principal's immediate and extended families, as well as the entire community - as a way of legitimising their appointment. Such a gesture is also an opportunity to increase the community's awareness of the principal's new role, status, and responsibilities both within the school and in the community. Given that these protocols were not observed before or during Valerie's appointment, Valerie decided to convene a semi-public meeting involving her immediate and extended families and the School Council, as a way of culturally legitimising her new role and status. She says, *I had to bring my husband; my children [and other family members] to meet with School Council, and the School Council told them what my responsibilities and my roles were.* The meeting was crucial for Valerie because she needed family and community recognition and support, which meant her family and community needed to be fully informed, and aware of her new duties and responsibilities. Equally, she wanted to dispel negative rumours and inferences that were already spreading either directly or indirectly among members of her family and the community at large. The glitch was her association with other staff members, particularly the non-indigenous male executive staff member who was appointed to mentor her, in carrying out her duties at the school. She described the situation thus:

*I was getting a lot of people coming in and talking, especially my husband coming, and saying] yoh (yes) because I was working with a male assistant principal. My mind was not like that - my mind was on the job. Yoh, but from outside there was a different*

*picture....with my kids and my husband meeting with the Council. I was able to talk to them straight about my duties and roles as a principal.*

For Valerie, her Indigenous cultural background meant that respect for her family, community and culture is a given. It is the component of her culture that shapes her lived life. Therefore, for her to function effectively as a school leader, she required her family and community support - without which, her overall leadership and role as principal will be unattainable. It was on those grounds that Valerie unilaterally summoned the meeting between the Council and her relatives, and together they were able to resolve the impasse, which gave Valerie the support, respectability and recognition she wanted from her people and community. This reconciliation did not only increase her confidence at work, it also served as a strong foundation of empowerment and influence among the Yolngu people and the school environment.

In her job, Valerie was characteristically interested in initiating good working relationships between the school and the community. Her initial approach in negotiating partnership with the community was to deploy the assistance of the School Council and an Indigenous liaison officer, to directly dialogue with the community, thereby capturing their interest as well as the interest of staff and school children:

*It was the school council that decided to talk to [the community people] about coming to the school, working with the Yolngu children because we were finding it hard working with those Yolngu kids in teaching. There was a decision that we need the community to come into the school as a partnership, working with Yolngu children so they know they can support each other, the staff, people from the community and the principal. And with this..[it is] not just teaching them our language but coming in as community teacher ... taking part in different activities, like cultural activities where kids learn how to dance, how to paint themselves so they know they are Yolngu children.*

There were additional problems in capturing the interest of the community to be involved in school matters and she had to find a solution. The problem was Yolngu didn't come, the community didn't come to the school because some of them want to be there to work to be paid and that's how the school council organized and

formed a committee, the ASSPA committee where they sat down and got the money and now the school is using that money to get more and more people from the community to come in and work in literacy and numeracy and also teaching them culture.

After sharing her remarkable story about establishing a good working relationship between her school and the community, Valerie explained how her approach was both holistic and gender neutral:

*Not just for the men but both men and women. There is a time when they can come in and tell stories or they can do dancing, or painting themselves in the traditional way, because we not have got Yolngu children not all [of them are] the same, they are in different clan groups. They speak different languages. Children in our school they have different culture[s] they have different dancing, and they are grouped in two different moieties: Dhuwa and Yirritja.... So it was good that we were working as a group.*

Valerie's leadership perspective was grounded on group work and collaboration. As mentioned above, her group work strategy was not only limited to involving men, but women as well. Her use of the School Council and Indigenous liaison officer to bring the community into the school could be described as an impressive strategy that yields immense success. At the same time, her administrative interest was not simply to bring the community to be involved in school work; she took the responsibility to demonstrate her instructional leadership role by ensuring there was "micro-partnership" between the teachers and the children, and the pedagogical aspects taking into account their diverse cultural and linguistic differences. As a routine, she encouraged teachers, community elders, and parents to teach and facilitate cultural activities such as dancing, singing and painting incorporating a both ways approach. This approach, in brief, is designed to allow for diverse learning styles and expression of individual and group differences. The aim was to incorporate Western and Indigenous forms of learning and knowing. Another significant value of this approach is that it can be used as a vehicle through which Indigenous children, teachers, and community people could gain a sense of identity and empowerment, ingredients that are necessary for self determination and self-management. Additionally, she incorporated into the

administrative duties scheduled visits to the community in trying to resolve issues that were linked with the school such as:

*problems out in the community that needed to be solved before sending the kids home so I had to go out and sit and talk with the parents and find out what issues are affecting the kids or clan from coming to school and also I needed support from Galiwin'ku council where we spent time and talking to them where if there is any support if they can help us and it did happen that CDEP organized some sort of a funding system to employ some parents to come in and work there at the school because didn't have enough money to pay so the council, both the CDEP and Galiwin'ku council had some money set aside so that some parents can come in and work for half the day, three or four days so the school and council were working as joint organisations in working and supporting the learning of Yolngu children.*

In closing her initial narrative she outlined the small successes they have accomplished as a school community such as commitment of parents, lots of community people working at the school, and both young and old assisting children in their development.

The interview then turned to some probes on some issues she had highlighted which I wanted her to clarify. These issues related to her leadership of the school, involvement of the school council in her appointment, the difficulty of working within the bureaucracy and her perception of the school as a community school. Although Valerie's leadership style was centred on partnerships between the school, the community, the Department of Education, and other stakeholders, her major emphasis was on community ownership of the school. Essentially, her aim was to assist the community to perceive the school as theirs; a micro-element of the community, rather than an extension of the Department of Education:

*Even though it was run under [the Education] system, it was still a Yolngu community school and that is why I wanted my family to see it was not their school, it was our school. I wanted the community to know that school is not for the Department of Education, it is for Galiwinku community. It is for the kids. They are only coming in to help us, to teach our children. [They tell the children] Go to school because Balanda is going to get mad, instead of saying you go because it is our school, you go [and] make it better.*



From another perspective, Valerie is nothing if not persistent and a problem solver. As she had mentioned earlier about the difficulty of working with the Department of Education and her people, I probed further for some explanation or incidents. Here she recounted:

*Yoh, (yes) it was exciting it was hard, because I was learning from both side. I know what Yolngu side is. Sometimes when I get stuck I used to go and talk to some other people who've been in that school as a head person like mama Rose, or even talk to my uncle Djinini, or even talk to some other people who had qualification that fit into the mainstream system yapalany (like this) people I talk to.*

There were also difficulties in dealing with non-Indigenous staff. She narrated a particular incident with non-Indigenous staff who weren't responding to what she expected them to do. For example in programming, there was a due date to hand in their program and she would sit with her Assistant principal who was non-Indigenous to make sure teachers did not work contrary to the requirements of the curriculum. Those staff members were reprimanded but some non-Indigenous and Indigenous staff persisted in doing the wrong thing. Her strategy was to call on the council to talk to them. After a few such sessions she had to take disciplinary action with the support of the school council by calling on senior executives in the Department of Education. The main issue here for Valerie was some staff had no regard for her as an Indigenous principal and from her perspective:

*Those people were playing jokes at me, playing jokes, like teasing or trying to annoy me cause I could feel it. So I went and told them I want you and you and you, I want you in my office. When I was talking to them instead of responding what I was saying, the mind was far away it wasn't there listening; their ears were closed, their minds were closed.*

As a leader she is resolute and a strict disciplinarian, with orthodox or traditional approach to leadership. She also led by example and was quite willing to ardently confront problems which have the potential to undermine her integrity, or erode the educational quality of her school. She narrated the story of two Balanda and two Yolngu teachers who attempted to work contrary to the requirements of the curricula even after a few warnings. Despite her firm stands on quality management and academic standards, Valerie always tried to keep in mind that the success of the school, and, indeed, the general education of Indigenous

children, was somehow linked and dependent on genuine negotiations of partnerships between the school and its community. This in turn, she believed, will encourage parents, community leaders, teachers and other school stakeholder to take ownership of their school and endeavour to work together (as a joint entity) to bring about improvements, and achieve meaningful outcomes in remote schools.

Valerie is a pragmatist. In her story, she recounted problems working as a principal within the requirements of the Department. She made clear distinctions between her position as Principal and as Executive Contract Principal. She argued that the latter was more stressful and less flexible than the former. Requirements of the latter were also far more conventional and restrictive than the requirements of the former. As well there were more unnecessary rules of compliance in the latter than the former. As a consequence, she declared that she was far more comfortable as a general principal than as contract principal. Notably she recounted:

*Yoh, yoh (yes) Contract principal was based on a big book like this! like this! [Pointing to the NT White and Yellow Pages] And I am not used to it. I had to go through it; one of the bosses came out, we looked through, we read through, there were things that were not fit to the community lifestyle, things that were in that book was fit for people in the hierarchy in the mainstream Department [only]. It was hard for me to follow; there was no one there [to help me].*

As a pragmatist, Valerie had the will to learn and the motivation to succeed in her job. Although from her story her job was “intolerably” hard and hard for her to gain access to key authorities that would help her succeed, she never stopped enquiring and seeking help – she kept probing, and working diligently to find answers to her issues and queries. In reporting a particular incident she spoke directly to some of the authorities in the Department of Education and other school principals. She was animated and spoke passionately:

*I went to one of the principals’ meeting in Nhulunbuy, cluster principal meeting, and Mary Fox who was our Director I called her and Peter Moore, who was the cluster principal for Numbulwa, so I talked to Mary, and I said ‘Mary ‘I’ll like to share with you what I’m finding very hard. You have handed me a book of law, of Department law and there was no one there to sit with me to go*

*through. Whatever you seeing me what I'm doing at Shepherdson College at the moment I think is not pleasing you as a CEO or the Department of Education. I can feel how you come in and talk to me. If you want me to stay in that position, you help me. Come out, take one week, two weeks and be with me. Explain to me what my roles and responsibilities are. What are the things I must not do unless I get permission from you? Because I can't do that with my staff cause my staff is there running around like a goat or a sheep without a leader. I want you to talk to me straight. Don't talk behind my back to some other principal. I told them to talk to me in a big meeting with all the principals. I want you to talk to me straight. I am a Yolngu person, I'm finding it hard and all I've been given is a book, A BIG BO-O-K! with all the words, how can I understand those words? I need to look three or four days in the dictionary to learn that? I don't want you to laugh. Look at it from your heart not from your head what I'm talking about. Yoh (yes).*

Valerie's straight talk and pragmatism paid off when she received assistance from the Department continually to resolve her job problems. Eventually, Valerie became very strong, and the life long learner that she is, continued to work diligently with an inquiring mind.

As an Indigenous female educational leader the researcher was keen to know whether her gender had any impact on her job. She revealed that having the support of both the school Council and Community Government Council (Galiwin'ku Council) made things easier for her. But more importantly, she commanded the respect and trust of the community and as such working collaboratively was easier in a sense. She said:

*Challenges being a Miyalk (woman) principal at the school were different. I was strong. That's why with the community they could see who I was, how I was working and how strong I was because they had trust in me. The community had trust in me, the council had trust in me, some had trust in me, half I could feel they didn't have trust in me; I'm talking about the community itself but I knew I had a strong support.*

Surprisingly she resigned and finally retired from teaching. Nonetheless, she revealed that the best part of the job for her was learning about the system and further it *has given me a knowledge and understanding about both ways education. It has given me more to help me with my study, negotiating, talking to people not just with the department, not just at Galiwin'ku, not just Northern Territory, but across Australia.*

Prior to ending the interview, I was keen to know her views on any other Indigenous executive staff aspiring to the principalship. She was quick to point out that it required a mentor program to be in place. However such a program should involve both Yolngu and Balanda to give it a both ways perspective. It could be with the elders in the community or different clan group. She emphasised that:

*She won't have only a balanda person, a white person; she needs to have that balance of the western learning and the cultural learning so that she knows when she is in that position as a leader she knows how to negotiate with both parties about whom to consult about things that could happen to the community or with the staff, Yolngu staff especially.*

In closing she revealed that as a retired principal she would like to see more Indigenous women or men to be trained to work as principals. She is concerned that there are hardly any Indigenous principals in remote community schools. Additionally, she would like to see an improvement on the training where there would be a more collaborative approach involving Batchelor Institute, mentors, experienced principals and the system.

In summary, Valerie's account is about giving empowerment to the community in the leadership of the school and also making sure that the curriculum reflects cultural values that reinforce the identity of Yolngu children. As a community steward she was determined to work for the common good of Galiwin'ku community but also make sure that she articulates her personal vision into one that is collaborative and reflective of community cultural values. These she achieved by involving the community in teaching language and culture, establishing good working relationships with the Community Government Council and School Council and working collaboratively at the system level. Her determination, steel of character, openness and integrity are attributes that embody her leadership. Below is table of themes and incidents that emerged from her story.

**Table 4.4: Valerie's key themes and incidents**

<b>THEMES</b>	<b>INCIDENT DESCRIBED</b>
Transcending boundaries	Constant struggle between Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews
Service to community	Engaging and employing community members in language and culture  Involving community in decision making – school council
Relationships	Trust, respect and acceptance from community
Identity	Reinforcing Indigenous students' identity through teaching
Colour bind	Non Indigenous staff being disrespectful
Mentoring	Indigenous principals to be mentored from both cultures

There was a high value placed on culture at Shepherdson CEC that influenced the leadership teaching and learning, and ways that people related to each other. Consistent with other participants in the study, Dhaykamalu succeeded in contributing to the transforming of the school into an environment that created extensive opportunities for the transmission of Indigenous knowledge and community ownership.

Her contribution to both ways education established an interactive school environment where Indigenous and non-Indigenous teachers worked collaboratively to negotiate a curriculum that established a strong foundation in both cultures for Indigenous children. Since schooling is a cultural activity she had foresight in recognising the incongruity in educating Indigenous children from a colonial monoculture perspective and the damage such an education would create later in life. As a life long learner and a believer in strong cultural foundation, the involvement of the community was critical to the transformative path. Mala leaders of the community became key decision makers in the appointment of the position of principal and powerbrokers in other areas. Through the leadership of the Mala leaders as school council members, she negotiated funding with the local

community council in order to employ Indigenous people in the school to teach language and culture. As such the school became an environment for transmission of culture and celebrating ceremonies that enhanced not only the identity of Indigenous children but the Yolngu teachers as well. Essentially non-Indigenous teachers and Indigenous teachers in collaboration negotiated the curriculum on the advice of mala leaders. Since leadership as a social process is culture bound negotiating school community partnerships in Indigenous communities such as Galiwin'ku was set within this context. Essentially, culture impacted and influenced all aspects of school life such as the leadership, relationships, teaching and learning.

#### **4.6 STORY 5 MIRIAM-ROSE UNGUMMERR BAUMANN**

##### **4.6.1 Miriam-Rose's Lived Life**

*We were breaking new grounds.*

Miriam-Rose was born in 1950 under a tree in Daly River and is a traditional Aboriginal woman from the Ngangiwummir language group. She is married with a son. At the time of the interview, she was only two months away from retiring as principal of Saint Francis Xavier in Naiyu Nambiyu, a school she attended as one of the first students, and one she has worked at for several years. In her early childhood days, she lived with her aunt and uncle at police stations in Adelaide River, Pine Creek, and Mataranka where she attended the local government school. At the age of fourteen, she returned to Daly River where she continued her schooling at the mission school established by the Jesuits in 1954 (Thomson, 1988).

Her biographical presentation includes an acceptance of the Roman Catholic faith and a western education. As a young girl, she approached education seriously and saw it as hugely important for future advancement not only for her own benefit but also for Aboriginal people.

Her return to Daly River and continuing schooling as a mission girl would be of biographical significance. She never had the opportunity to attend high school as other Australian children would but this lack of opportunity did not however deter her pursuit of a teaching career. She started her career as an Assistant Teacher in 1968 when she left home to study for a course at Kormilda College in Darwin. Though this was a basic, it was a significant fact in her involvement in education. Gaining a qualification as a teacher's aide, she returned to Daly River to work at the school and serve her community. It was during this time that she recognised a missing link between the mission education she gained and her own cultural knowledge which was unrecognised as part of the western education system. As she continued to reflect on this situation, with determination, she strategically developed a political orientation that would bring reform in Indigenous education for the benefit of Indigenous children and a way of improving the lives of her people.

Consequently, she returned to Kormilda College in 1971 to pursue further education. At this point she developed a keen interest in Art, a skill which traditionally was a man's domain as she reported in the interview. Through art and painting, she encouraged Aboriginal children to use Art, particularly Aboriginal art, as a way of expressing cultural identity. From her present perspective, Indigenous illustrations were needed at the school as teaching aids as a way of teaching Indigenous culture and bringing a balance to education. By all indications, her self-perception as a young girl was to gain a good western education and improve the future of Aboriginal people. Despite the incredible respect she had for western education, in retrospect, she had a strong belief that a balanced education is only possible when both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways are represented in school teaching and learning. Ultimately, she succeeded in gaining an education that would eventually lead to educational reforms particularly in Indigenous remote communities. This strength of character in her was partly due to her upbringing and partly to the mission education (personal communication, 2008).

In 1974, sponsored by the Commonwealth Government, she moved to Melbourne, Victoria, on secondment to work with Art teachers in mainstream schools. This was a valuable point of entry into bringing both worldviews, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to create a link in teaching and learning. This external experience

served as a catalyst to strategise plans for a transformational ideology in Indigenous education.

The pattern of her lived life takes a turn when she accepts a position as an Art consultant in 1975 with the Northern Territory Department of Education in schools around the Northern Territory. This move was by no means a neglect of her community but a vision to stand up proudly for her people and not be afraid to present their needs and their culture. She wanted to demonstrate that Aboriginal people had very much to give to the rest of the world. In schools at this time, Aboriginal history was never taught and the little that was known of Aboriginal people was anthropologically distorted. Her employment at the Department of Education for four years and later a year of teaching at St John's College in Darwin were fundamental to her aspirations for community involvement in education. Notwithstanding illustrious career prospects in Darwin, her priority of giving service to her community people and a determination to improve education for Indigenous children led her to an ultimate decision to go back to Daly River to continue her teaching career.

In 1982, she went back to her community with a determination to continue her reform agenda in the education system. She realised that creating this possibility would require more qualified Aboriginal teachers in schools and a road map to empower them to manage their own schools. It is precisely this dream that her biographical trajectory dictates. This biographical trajectory consists of two interconnected patterns – a transformational ideology for Indigenous education in remote community schools, and a commitment and determination to give service to the community. In 1984, she seems to have had a strong sense of direction and vision in creating a road map for community involvement in school matters. With a natural ability to lead she commenced with leading a group of women working bees to be involved in teaching craftwork and traditional ways at the Majellan House, a Women's Centre established by the mission (Thomson, 1988). This foresight was a consciously subtle approach in trying to develop community involvement, ownership, and control in education as a fundamental in Indigenous education, a partnership that is crucial for formal education in Indigenous remote communities. This unrelenting focus of involving her community people in education and advocating a both ways education was a motivation to further her



education in teaching that would lead to a rewarding career development in educational leadership. She was passionately committed to this substance of reform. As a teacher, she was inspirational in making the curriculum relevant to teaching and learning for Aboriginal kids by encouraging other Indigenous women to be involved in the school. While successful in getting this to happen, the majority of the women saw the European schooling environment as a bit intimidating and preferred to stay away. Embarking on another strategy to get them involved she was inspirational in the establishment of a women's Centre in the community and she was keen on developing a 'Demi Nayin' curriculum based on continuous community input. The name 'Demi Nayin' means 'our hands' that refers to putting decision making in the hands of Aboriginal people. She started by developing an Arts programme where the women would teach the children about their culture and community. (Baumann,1991). The preference for the Women's Centre instead of the school was largely because it was a more convenient environment where her community people felt comfortable. Her philosophy at the time was getting her people to work together to regain their lost culture and take control of their lives.

The process of empowerment she mapped out began with education and a revival of authentic culture of the people being educated. She was largely influenced by Paolo Freire's conscientisation, a process whereby "people not as recipients but as knowing subjects achieving a deepening awareness both of the socio cultural reality that shapes their lives and of the capacity to transform that reality" (Freire, 1985, p. 93 as cited in Baumann, 1991, p. 56 ). In order to embark on this project she involved community elders, Batchelor Institute RATE programme students, and interested women from Majellan House and later formed an Action Group with the responsibility of changing education for Nauiyu, a both ways education and not a curriculum based exclusively on western concepts (Bunbury, Hastings, Henry, & McTaggart, 1991).

In 1988, she decided to leave home to study for a Bachelor of Arts at Batchelor Institute through the D-BATE program designed by Deakin University and Batchelor Institute. Making such an important decision was not without the difficulties associated with it. She had to take leave without pay and leave her family. However, she realised the benefits that would accompany such a move

that was strongly supported by her family and community who already saw the leadership potential for a future leadership of the school and a role model for other women and the entire community.

While studying at College other students from other communities in the Northern Territory also had plans for transforming their community schools through the Aboriginalisation policy. In the transformation process, they worked towards a both ways curriculum something that Miriam had advocated back in 1984 at Majellan House, the Women's Centre at Nauiyu. She had this passionate desire to lead her community in a direction that would bring back respectability and empowerment while still embracing western education (Baumann, 1991).

In order to bring empowerment through western education, she had to encourage the community to work in partnership with the school and establish a stronger Aboriginal voice in decision-making on school matters. Having finalised the idea of the Action Group she recruited elders, women, and RATE students. She realised that such a vision would have difficulties with not only the "Kardiya" (white people) but also the Aboriginal people for whom this would be a new idea since school matters they believed should be a European business. As a true leader she gave them strategies that would assist them in dealing with these difficult times ahead. Even though she had a strong Catholic upbringing and was influential in spreading the faith, she believed it was time for Aboriginal leadership. The years of oppression and devastation for her people greatly affected her and she believed that spirituality alone was not the ultimate answer. In quoting St James 2:15 at the time, she says, "what good is there to say to them God bless you, keep warm and eat well! – if you don't give them the necessities of life" (Baumann, 1991, p. 63). With this, she embarked on Paulo Friere's philosophy of emancipation. The only route to this emancipation was having the oppressed liberating the oppressed. Hence, local communities must be involved in school matters and Aboriginal education as a process of change for the entire community. Very early in her biography she demonstrates this leadership and later in life it is not by coincidence that she is appointed the first Indigenous female principal in the Northern Territory. She believed that Aboriginal leadership at the school was critical for her dreams to be fulfilled.

In 1990, she began training as a principal with Sr Faith Ann who was then principal at Xavier as her mentor. This was the period of implementation of the Aboginalisation draft policy where Aboriginal senior teachers were identified and encouraged to aspire to school leadership positions in remote Indigenous schools (Stewart, 1994). After three years training she was appointed full principal of St Francis Xavier School at Daly River. In that same year, she was awarded a Bachelor of Education degree by Deakin University.

In 1998, in recognition for her service to Aboriginal education and art, and her long-standing service to her community and as a member of the local community council she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia. In 1999, she gained a Master of Education degree through Deakin University. Her master's degree focused on the integration of traditional and western education for Aboriginal children and adults.

In 2003, she was awarded an honorary doctorate from the Northern Territory University (NTU) in recognition for her outstanding service to Indigenous education, her leadership in Aboriginal education and the visual arts, and her contribution to the entire community.

In 2004, she was appointed member to the National Indigenous Council, the Federal Government's replacement of ATSIC. At the end of 2007 Miriam–Rose retired as a school principal and continues to live in her community undertaking various projects in Aboriginal affairs. The pattern of this remarkable lived life of a resolute Indigenous female school principal contextualises the told story that follows.

#### **4.6.2 Miriam-Rose's Told Story**

The patterns suggested by the events of Miriam's lived life is a fundamental aspect of her told story. Sitting across the table, she was relaxed, confident, with strength of character and a relaxed demeanour that portrayed a sense of fulfilment though not entirely satisfactory but one that was of a strong Aboriginal female leader, who

against all odds succeeded in contributing to and transforming Indigenous education in her community.

Miriam's narrative focused on a determination and vision to gain a formal education that would transform education for her community people but also very early in her career recognised the need to pursue an education that would eventually lead to aspiring to the school leadership at St Francis Xavier School at Daly River. She narrated her involvement in education from as early as the late sixties. However, very quickly in this narrative she acknowledged the sacrifice that she had to make in order for her to accomplish her dream. She recounted that *it was hard coming to study because leaving my family behind was another thing but I had to give up everything*. But it is also apparent that she was seeking knowledge for reasons beyond her own goals by saying, *I wanted to be principal no matter what it took of the school that I attended; a school in my own community and to give back to the community that supported me in my studies and encouraged me especially my family that stuck by me and my husband*. In her entire narrative the welfare of the community in education is a prominent theme which she viewed as a collective effort as she proceeded to evaluate; *it was the whole purpose of me going away and studying and coming back so I can help my people go up a notch and I'm not doing it for myself to feather my own pocket. I want to take people with me*. Her vision was to give a service to the community. Essentially, she realised very early that if schooling was to succeed in Aboriginal communities, schools and communities would need to develop effective partnerships and move beyond European structured forms of education to include Indigenous knowledges.

The opportunity to lead her school as principal came in the 1990s. It was an exciting time for her to use her leadership as a vehicle to realise her dream and transform structures that would be representative of Aboriginal traditional values. However it was not without the realisation of the huge challenges that accompanied this move as she recounted that *it was in the 90s that they started talking seriously about me going to the position of principal-in-training and that really scared me [laughs] it really frightened me because I wasn't sure whether I could do it on my own*. Additionally, there were greater challenges at the community level and system level. She narrated these challenges in quite some detail from a present perspective:

*I knew it was going to be a real challenge to take up the role of principal-in-training for the next three years and at the end of that three years I was going to be out there on my own and my husband always said it wasn't going to be an easy thing to accept because of the pressure that I'll get from day-to-day from families, the government people, system that I worked for, the Catholic Education, the students, and my people.*

At the community level, accepting an Indigenous person as principal was a new phenomenon since the position of school principal had always been the sacred realm of non Indigenous people. She articulated this so clearly when she said *my people had to accept the fact that we were breaking new grounds...it's the first time for Indigenous people in communities taking up those positions as principals and leaders in their communities.*

But the challenges of being an Indigenous female principal extended far beyond the difficulties of being accepted by Indigenous men as *it wasn't just the men in my community, it was also the non-Indigenous men that I had to face.* In transcending cultural boundaries she described the internal conflicts of working in a European world:

*Being in that position it was hard going to meetings with other principals, you had to meet other principals; I was the only Indigenous person there for a while and I was thinking I'm I going to be accepted as one of them? [laughs] All these things were going through my head am I going to be accepted in the circle? Am I going to be looked upon as being at par with them?*

But then, she immediately gave some credit to her mentor Sister Faith Ann who assisted during those difficult times, *it's good the sister helped me* but then quickly switched to a more internal conflict about minor requirements such as dressing formal and she laughed out loudly in this argumentation, *and it was pretty scary for me [laughs] and for Indigenous people to do that even now; it was really hard because it meant that what are my people going to think of me now? Am I going to be an outcast because of the way I dress or because of the way I'm working now?* She was perceptive in realising that transforming education requires working collectively with the entire community. This was a way of challenging the system

but also recognising and acknowledging the existing western structures which in her view were not the only answer to having a robust education.

Realising the importance of working collaboratively with the community, she introduced a new kind of leadership that would nurture interdependence and a partnership that would bring the community into the school. She strongly believed that involvement of the community is critical to educational advancement and success. This theme is central in her narrative. In her story she clearly stated that *getting families involved in coming together with the school and going through the education process together as in partnership is very important.*

In order to negotiate school community partnerships she is quick to point out that she cannot operate as a non Indigenous principal if she wanted the support of the community as she said It wasn't an easy thing especially getting people to come to part of being included in the education process of their children.

There were challenges at another level in building school community partnerships. She made a serious point about earning the trust of the community as a school principal and ultimately getting them to work through collective effort to bring about needed changes. On the matter of trust, in her opinion, *you also have to work on the trust of those people that their kids are in good care...you just didn't get trust on a platter you have to work for it.* She repeatedly revisited this theme of trust, which gives an indication that it is central to developing relationships. She was keenly aware of the right communication protocols in partnership building in Indigenous schools and compares this to working in urban schools when she emphatically stated:

*Principals in urban schools can't do the things with the families of the students they have at the school. They do it in a local parents and friends gathering where as in the community we are educators and we have meetings whenever; you know we can just go and talk to the parents whenever we like.*

When probed about inviting parents to school this question provoked a description of cultural preference considered more appropriate, less intimidating, and more comfortable over a western traditional model:

*You can go and sit down around the campfire with the parents... that's the best time, you know after work you can go around and talk to the families...when they're sitting around the campfire at night... as well as asking them to come to the school and talk to me in the office but I feel it's more suitable for me to go to them and talk than sitting around the room the four walls, table and chair setting, sometimes for some people that might be a bit uncomfortable.*

Cleverly using strategies to suit the occasion is a demonstration of her ability to transcend cultural boundaries that are a constant struggle and strain on her leadership. Part of her vision for education in Indigenous schools was to get the community involved in education and empower them through this involvement. In order to achieve this and get the community involved, her strategy included contextualising the curriculum within a pedagogy that involved Aboriginal parents, elders and the entire community in schooling. The impact of history is particularly vivid and relevant when she said:

*It is important for the children to be taught issues about the cultural aspects of our society, in the Arts and Crafts, the stories, what language they belong to, what dreaming stories to tell them, the histories about their families....it is important for them because they have to feel comfortable about who they are and be proud of it; they've got to learn about their ways and not just the western ways.*

Accordingly, this could only be achieved through active involvement of the community who possessed the cultural knowledge that was needed in schools. Her biographical trajectory significantly contributed to speeding up this process when she became involved in school matters at a senior level. As a result, parents and community started to play a significant role in schools which she recognised as an:

*Exciting thing for the students to see mainly because it makes the students feel that they are not going on that journey alone and it's important it's always been a cultural thing for us that when it comes to teaching children about hunting and painting, music and dance, stories, it is always a family thing and that should be concentrated on more, after all if it is a school in the community, it's only a fitting thing for families to be there- it's their school and they should be*

*taking part and encouraged to continue to come and support their children.*

Parents are key partners in school community partnerships. These were all challenges in her position as principal but as she rightly pointed out, *you have to encourage people and work on it* by organising activities that would involve them for example she explained that every year they have a cultural week, *the men and women come in and get involved and help run workshops with the kids; the women come in and work with all different age groups.*

Encouraging people to participate in school activities is vital but also giving the partnership process time and flexibility is equally important. When she commented on failed attempts to negotiate school community partnerships, she mentioned the importance of doing things in the proper manner. When asked what the proper manner is that she referred to, she described the community way of getting things done. She explained that *to make things happen in communities you have to spend a lot of time talking to the people, the families in the community, and getting their ideas, sharing things, the system sharing as well as giving them options, what part to take opportunities.* This was the point in her narrative that she evaluated the relationship between the school, community and the system:

*If people, the Director or the Bishop is talking about wanting to make changes and working more closely with the community now we have to do it properly in the sense that we negotiate with the people in the community. The people have got to be involved and they have got to own the decisions that they make... they have to do it properly, it won't happen overnight; they've got to go as often as possible to have meetings with families.*

Sharing responsibility in school community partnerships is not limited to just families. She saw this shared responsibility as one that involved a collective welfare of other agents in the community such as *various government service providers as in welfare, the police, and the community government council should be working in partnerships to support each other; you can't do it on your own and that's sometimes difficult.*

When asked about school community relationships with the Catholic Education system, she was quick in pointing out that she visualises *another era in the sense*



*that those things are now being spoken about and recorded in what sort of things that should happen in communities with the system. The appointment of a new Bishop and a new Director brings some hope and making it better for the school and the community and the system; leaving the door wide open for ideas, for suggestions and directions. This had been spoken about before but has not actually happened.* At this point in her narrative, there is a clear indication of her apprehension about the hopes she had and then said, *I don't really want to talk about it – I don't know what's going to happen* but then very suddenly she was optimistic about the future and recounted that, *there is good energy coming from the Bishop. He is interested in making these things happen..... and also got a new Director who is energetic and who wants to achieve this; .....There have been several attempts made but it just did not come to anything, but I believe its going to come...* and she looked away in the distance as she pondered on a few days left before retiring as principal of Xavier school. In ending her narrative, she reflected and evaluated her standpoint on Indigenous education in remote schools, emphasising the importance of encouraging community involvement in schooling:

*The system should still use and employ those people to work....the elders in our community, myself, and others should be used to do those things teaching the language, the culture, the Arts, the dances you know... and they should be recognized... our people are qualified in the sense of being the educators in their own right, providers as in teaching children...and they should be recognized and acknowledged and paid for doing it at school....it's time now that something is not given for nothing sort of thing...I suppose having a carrot also encourages people to come more and interact with the school community.*

Once more, she relaxed, smiled, contemplatively with eyes fixed on an Aboriginal artwork until the researcher's interactive remark "right" ended the interview. Below is a table that summarises her key themes and incidents.

**Table 4.5 Miriam-Rose's key themes and incidents**

<b>THEME</b>	<b>INCIDENT DESCRIBED</b>
Breaking new grounds	First time an Indigenous female assumed leadership in a community school. Firstly, it has always been the domain of non-Indigenous Europeans, and secondly, leadership in communities is a male domain
Service to community	Commitment to education and empowering Aboriginal people
Relationships	Importance of gaining trust and respect among members of the community
Transforming structures	Changing classroom structure and involving the community in active participation
Colour blind	Aspects of racism from various external stakeholders
Transcending boundaries	Powerbroker between community and school

Miriam's story presented her as a catalyst who through resilience and astuteness transformed education to reflect cultural needs of Aboriginal children in her community. Her role as principal was crucial in the transformation process. In order to achieve this she involved her people in decision making, gaining their trust and respect, incorporating teaching of language and culture, respecting cultural communication protocols, and working on empowering strategies such as advocating paid employment of the community for continued active involvement at the school. Culture has had an impact and influence on school community partnerships to a considerable extent at St Francis Xavier. The inclusion of Indigenous language and culture in teaching gave empowerment to elders to be involved and demonstrate traditional leadership in imparting traditional knowledge. Other community members with expertise in culture have also played a major role in establishing a community school. As a community steward she nurtured these values, constructively contested western dominant paradigms and succeeded as

one of the greatest Aboriginal female educational leaders in the Northern Territory and beyond.

#### **4.7 SUMMARY**

In this chapter I have presented the stories of all five female Indigenous principals who have made a major contribution to and have been pioneers in transforming Indigenous education in the Top End of Northern Territory Indigenous remote community schools. It reflected their views and experiences as educational leaders in negotiating school community partnerships. While all five women have narrated unique stories they demonstrated a united front on the role of contexts in school partnership negotiations. Realising a dissonance between school culture and community culture, they all embarked on a transformative path that would bring some amount of cultural consistency where the organisation culture aligns with the local culture. The complexity in achieving this vision involved negotiations not only with their community people but also the central offices with tight bureaucratic protocols. Nonetheless, they succeeded in integrating Aboriginal perspectives in teaching and leadership that involved the active participation of the majority of the community. Projecting this collective vision empowered Indigenous people to have a place in the school environment which for a long time reflected that of the dominant European culture.

Through personal attributes such as determination, strength of character, flexibility, appropriate communication and above all service to community they redefined a school culture and climate infused with some collective sense of identity. As Indigenous women who were “breaking new grounds” in educational leadership they demonstrated that school and community can work together when we create a web of understanding such as shared norms and values that school communities can relate to.

Chapter 5 discusses the analysis and findings of the study of all five cases with particular reference to research questions.

## CHAPTER 5 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

*The campfire is like handing down the skills and knowledge to young people so when the family sits at the campfire in Tiwi way it's passing on knowledge and skills (Kilipayuwu, 2008)*

### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings of the research in the context of the literature developed and organised in relation to the literature review. The data was analysed using constructs of the conceptual framework, pioneered by Astin and Leland (1991) and similar studies such as that investigated by Johnson (1997) which contained the following constructs:

1. **The Social Construction of Reality:** Astin and Leland contended that complex social phenomena such as leadership are strongly influenced by social, cultural, and historical contexts. Therefore new conceptual models that incorporate diverse experiences and perspectives must be formulated
2. **Interdependence:** People are not isolated entities, but their life experiences are closely intertwined with those of others. By acknowledging this interdependence it is logical to view leadership as a process of collective effort rather than as something one person does in a vacuum
3. **Power as Energy, Not Control:** Leadership is not the exercise of power and control over others. Rather it involves leadership activities that engage and empower others in a collaborative effort to achieve desired goals (Astin & Leland, 1991, p.7-8).

Astin and Leland's design focuses analysis on key aspects that include personal characteristics of individual leaders such as values, beliefs, influences, experiences, and especially culture that helped instil these values. Significantly, elements within which leadership takes place involves the leader/leaders, the context, the processes, and outcomes (Johnson, 1997). The framework

recognises knowledge as a socially constructed meaning which enables multiple viewpoints to be expressed and recognised.

On an epistemological level, the social constructionist paradigm allows an analysis of the ways in which individuals and groups participate in their perceived reality with an inevitable historical and socio-cultural dimension to the construction of knowledge (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Constructionism creates a platform for interpretation of respective epistemological perceptions and worldviews focussing on meanings constructed from historical and socio-cultural worlds. In this study both the researcher and participants have brought Indigenous worldviews though from distinct historical and socio-cultural contexts. While it is not claimed that epistemological perspectives of the researcher and the participants are identical, yet there are some mutual understandings because of a shared history of colonisation, oppression and marginalisation, producing a “shared language of colonisation, a shared knowledge [and experience] about their colonisers as [black] Indigenous women and “share the same struggle for decolonisation” (Smith, 1999, p. 45).

As a theoretical perspective, the interpretist approach “looks for culturally derived and historically stated interpretations of the social life-world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 67) and provides the “filter of socially constructed perceptions” of the participants in this study (Neuman, 2003, p. 42). The Indigenous principals in this study have been positioned as “silenced voices” on the periphery that can challenge and strategically transform school structures imposed through invasion and colonisation and reveal ones that are culturally responsive within the given context of the educational environment.

As an overarching conceptual model, the campfire metaphor is used to symbolise the various dimensions of leadership. The campfire setting has had a significant place in the socio cultural activities of most Indigenous cultures. Sitting around the campfire holds both a public and sacred significance. Fundamentally, it symbolises a place to inform, educate, and share knowledge through storytelling and oral instruction. In this study, I gathered around the metaphorical campfire with the five principals in the companionship of panel team members to explore ways that Indigenous women deliver education that fosters closer links between

schools and their respective communities. Personally, this metaphor has significance. From an African origin perspective, storytelling around the campfire as a child involved the whole village in educating the young and giving us an identity which instils pride and enables our traditions to be passed on to the younger generation. As we gather around the campfire, the spirits of the ancestors are also present to cleanse, guide, and protect.

As pointed out by Kilipayuwu, one of the participants, in the Indigenous Australian context, the *campfire is like handing down the skills and knowledge to young people...when family sit at the campfire in Tiwi way, it's passing on knowledge and skills*. This concept is endorsed by Leah, another Tiwi principal, who described the Milimika ceremonial ritual where *clans dance in a circle and in dancing around the circle, sharing knowledge sitting in the circle with no one person as boss, everyone takes turns in going round the circle no matter what, sharing our life in the community*. Likewise Miriam Rose from Daly River used the campfire setting to forge partnerships with the community when she needed to discuss school matters with parents as a more convenient and non-threatening environment than the school.

The study attempted to understand the practice of Indigenous educational leadership utilising the campfire metaphor as the symbol of my interpretation of the women's profound and enriching narratives that revealed strength of character, determination, resilience, and commitment to serve their communities in the spirit of relatedness. In reflecting on leadership through the campfire metaphor we are afforded a deeper understanding of the practice of educational leadership from an enriching perspective marginalised by western epistemologies.

In the campfire metaphor, leadership is likened to the campfire setting and the activities surrounding it. Essentially, it is an encircling setting where everyone assumes interdependence and connectivity. Similarly, in a study conducted by Bruno (2003, cited in White, 2007, p. 221) on Canadian Aboriginal women in their doctoral program, she describes their interconnectedness using the symbol of "The Medicine Wheel". Similarly, White (1998, 2007) a female Australian Aboriginal, in her masters and doctoral study, describes the significance of the circle to Aboriginal women's spirituality.

In the model, without the special wood that sparks the fire, there would hardly be the energy that brings everyone together. In Tiwi culture, Leah pointed out that *Maliyi is a special plant that is used to give light*. As this special plant is used around the campfire to illuminate, the leader likewise gives light to energise everyone. As the practice of Indigenous cultures is the spirit of sharing and relatedness, in preparing the campfire, the leader calls the community to join in fetching this special wood in the company of elders making sure the right cues and protocols are followed.

In synthesising these stories around the campfire metaphor, the study has contributed to knowledge about the practice of leadership within an Indigenous context. The results of the study will inform policy at both local and systems levels and address a gap in knowledge on Indigenous educational leadership.

In analysing the data, an intensive BNIM process of triangulation was employed with a close attention to the relevant literature and the research questions that guided the study. Themes emerged that provided answers to each research question. The themes that have emerged were largely validated by the various panel teams that participated in the study. This analysis therefore includes the various panel teams' interpretation which assisted the researcher in validating her analysis of the stories and themes discussed. While these themes have been categorised under the separate research questions, there is an overlap and relationship across themes. In the central research question, four key themes emerged and included categories. The four themes captured *transforming structures, utilising school associated agencies, walking the tight rope and the system*. The themes that emerged from the first sub-question relating to leadership skills and strategies of the female principals in negotiating school community partnerships emphasised *communication* with the following sub categories – *non-bureaucratic, flexibility, relationships, and relatedness*. The second theme showed that the participants saw *consultation* as very important with sub categories such as *family, elders, and parents* and *wider community*. The third theme included *empowerment* with *decision making* as a sub category. First and foremost the women were committed to give a service to their community expanding their roles to others through collaboration, interdependence, respect, and trust. Hence, *service to community* emerged as a fourth theme. Three themes

emerged from the second sub-question – *the spirit of leadership, reinforcing identity and creation of new knowledge.*

The following table illustrates the themes that emerged from the research questions.

**Table 5.1: Themes from the three research questions**

<b>Research question 1</b>	<b>Research question 2</b>	<b>Research question 3</b>
How do Indigenous women principals negotiate partnerships between their schools and their respective remote communities?	What leadership skills and strategies do female principals employ in encouraging community involvement in schools?	What impact and influence does culture have in negotiating school community partnerships?
<b>Question 1 themes</b>	<b>Question 2 themes</b>	<b>Question 3 themes</b>
<b>Transforming structures</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Breaking new ground</li> <li>• Curriculum adaptation</li> </ul>	<b>Communication</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-bureaucratic</li> </ul>	<b>The spirit of leadership</b>
<b>Utilising school associated agencies</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School councils</li> <li>• Other key stakeholders</li> </ul>	<b>Relationships</b>	<b>Reinforcing identity</b>
<b>Walking the tight rope</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cultural sensitivity</li> </ul>	<b>Empowerment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decision-making</li> </ul>	<b>Creation of new knowledge</b>
<b>The System</b>	<b>Service to Community</b>	

## **5.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 1: How do Indigenous women principals negotiate partnerships between their schools and their respective remote communities?**

The central research question was a guide to inductively gain an understanding of how the Indigenous female principals negotiate partnerships between their schools and communities. The interview technique, a lightly structured in depth interview using a single question inducing narrative (SQUIN) provided the opportunity to address the central research question. The technique yielded rich diverse stories



that explored the meaning and practice of negotiating school community partnerships and leadership from an Indigenous perspective. Participants' responses give a profound understanding of building school community partnerships within their contexts that may inform current practice in schools and additionally contribute to knowledge in this field. Four compelling themes were identified which include:

1. Transforming structures
  - *Breaking new ground*
  - *Curriculum adaptation*
2. Utilising school associated agencies
  - *School councils*
  - *Other key stakeholders*
3. Walking the tight rope
  - *Cultural sensitivity*
4. The system

In discussing each theme excerpts from various participants are presented and related to the literature on leadership and school community partnerships.

## **5.2.1 TRANSFORMING STRUCTURES**

### ***BREAKING NEW GROUND***

All five women in the study were pioneers in shaping a vision for education in Northern Territory Indigenous remote community schools. A keen interest in western education and a commitment to transforming western structures in remote community schools initiated “breaking new grounds” in leadership at various levels. They were the first cohort of Indigenous principals to acquire a new status as women in leadership positions in a domain traditionally held by Aboriginal men as confirmed by Miriam Rose in the following narrative:

*my people had to accept the fact that we were breaking new ground as in having Indigenous people take up positions...the first lot of people that come out of communities to take up those*

*positions as school teachers and principals; it's never happened before.*

Similarly, Kilipayuwu in reinforcing Miriam's view recounted her experience and reaction of the community when the announcement was made about her appointment as principal:

*When the announcement was made there will be an [Aboriginal] principal, the community were puzzled you know and they were asking questions; why do we need an Aboriginal principal? Why can't we have another [non-Aboriginal] principal? Why would an Aboriginal be a principal? What does she know about school? To them it was a new thing...because it was the first thing that ever happened in an Aboriginal community.*

These events required shifts in understandings that would decolonise minds of Tiwi people of western imposed worldviews and convince them of the benefits of having an Indigenous leader in education. In an unyielding determination the women were required to create transformative paths that challenged and responded to traditional Indigenous leadership structures. Leadership is a quality that is at the core of successful school community partnerships. The research literature abounds with the benefits of partnerships between schools, parents and communities (Epstein, 2005; McInerney, 2002). These benefits include improved school outcomes, connections between people, increased leadership skills, and promotion of healthy mutuality among the entire school community (Davies & Karr-Kidwell, 2003; Epstein, 2001; Foster & Goddard, 2003; Spry & Graham, 2006). In breaking new grounds participants initiated a new educative dialogue that departed from both the traditional structures and those that reflected a white bureaucracy. Essentially, schools are integral parts of communities (Bond, 2004) and links that create interdependent relationships. In an attempt to interrogate colonial practices, they developed approaches within an education context that was in harmony with their world views. The effects of colonialism had gradually widened the gap between schools and communities resulting in experiences of "self-depreciation" as Paulo Freire (1960, cited in Trudgen, 2000, p. 64) points out:

Self-depreciation is another characteristic of the oppressed, which derives from their internalisation of the opinion the oppressors hold of them. So often do they hear that they are good for nothing, knowing nothing and are incapable of learning anything – that they

are sick, lazy, and unproductive – that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness.

Admittedly, increasing numbers of Indigenous scholars confirm that the realities of the oppressed have not been reflected in western academy and derogatory remarks have resulted in nothing more than disempowering Indigenous people (Arbon, 2008; Martin, 2003; White, 2007). Complex social phenomena such as leadership are strongly influenced by social, cultural, and historical contexts (Astin & Leland, 1991; Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Johnson, 1997) which unfortunately have been theorised through the lenses of the dominant world view in most colonised countries. With Kilipayuwu's appointment as principal of the school she realised the difficulty of practising leadership within the existing structure imposed by western ideology. Her transformation agenda required working within the existing imposed European structure to bring the appropriate Aboriginal processes in delivering education to Indigenous children. As a consequence she assertively negotiated an alternative structure that positions her leadership within her own cultural context that yielded support and direct involvement of Tiwi people. She recounted:

*I found it difficult working as a principal everything that the principal had for me to do I found that difficult, because the way it was set up it was like non-Aboriginal principal doing the job but as I was working through I told myself that the way the thing was set up was not working for me so I met with the principal, the non-Aboriginal principal and told her that the set up the training was something I found difficult. I said I'll like to have my own people to work with me and support me in my role. And that's when I chose the four women from the four skin groups. So that group became part of the leadership group. In Tiwi way, Tiwi people work in a group. We don't work alone. That's what my idea of bringing in the community in the school because the way we work together, we work together as a group and that's the model I used in the school to work together as a group.*

Her operational plan existed within a cultural position to bring Aboriginal spiritual perspectives of relatedness and wellbeing. Notably, having the representation of the four skin groups in her community initiated wider community involvement and ownership in decision making of educational programs. By transforming structures that involved Tiwi people she negotiated school matters with like-minded people that would bring collaboration and shared responsibility, values considered

necessary in fostering school community partnerships (Epstein, 2001). In establishing Milimika she regained a voice for Indigenous people in schools. Like the leader getting ready to set the campfire, a group accompanies the leader to fetch the special Maliyi wood that is used. The establishment of group leadership was the stepping stone to asserting the right Aboriginal process as a strategy to involve families and community. This was important since the kinship family system laws have a complex web of relationships that often prohibit direct communication of certain individuals across clans or within same family groups. These laws must be respected and obeyed in delivering knowledge. Notably, this structure provided a reclaiming of traditional education processes usually taught through the clan structure where the owners of the information educate the clan. For example, in resolving particular school related problems, the Milimika group would *call the people, the elders to come and then when they come to the school the elected member of the Milimika group would sit with the Tiwi staff and the two community people and then they would talk.*

Transforming structures led to an increase in employment of Aboriginal staff in all of the sites. As earlier pointed out by Kilipayuwu, negotiations with the Catholic Education Office to appoint four women from the four skin groups in a leadership team empowered Tiwi people to have a decision making power. Further to that, she *employed more community people in the school, as janitors, tutors, reading to the kids, teacher aides; I trusted my own people to have a place in the school giving them responsibility.*

To return to the campfire metaphor, around the campfire, the leader calls on everyone in the community as was the practice in the olden days, to tell stories of the Dreaming in the presence of experts and educate children. The stones round the campfire represent the people with strength of character, solidarity and interpersonal dynamics with a capacity to influence, encourage, share and energise. As the stones are aesthetically arranged around the wood in a circle, likewise this context of leadership is the form of a circle involving everyone with the school leader assuming a non hierarchical position bringing “power as energy, not control” (Astin & Leland, 1991, p. 8). By transforming structures and employing

Aboriginal people leadership was shared and understood from an Indigenous world view

### ***Curriculum Adaptation***

Curriculum contains the knowledge that has to be delivered to students. In most colonised countries curricula prescribed by western ethnocentric assimilationist paradigms did not create any space for Indigenous world views to emerge. All five principals in the study demonstrated the initiative to adapt the curriculum to reflect Indigenous culture. At the core, language was significant. Establishing a culturally responsive curriculum that would encourage community contribution to and active involvement in school matters was a priority for all five principals. Leah for example involved the community through the bilingual programs that were very much a part of the school core curriculum.

*I've been working with the community people in developing community programs within the school and especially with the strong women coming to the school, and talk about what languages need to be in the culture program. And before developing the curriculum we need to speak to various people about the languages, what languages are appropriate for our students.*

In the study all schools negotiated school community partnerships based on shared understandings and derived from culturally accepted truths and knowledge. At Shepherdson CEC, through negotiating with the school council for commonwealth funding, Dhaykamalu was successful in involving the community in culture programs that were structured as part of the school's curriculum She noted that:

*School was there not just for the Yolngu children; it was for the community; the school was there for the community to help each other in both ways -Yolngu way and learning balanda way.*

Similarly, Esther at Gunbalanya said that:

*To try and close that gap between the school and community so therefore we use this cultural program to bring elders in to teach*

*the kids and at the same time be able to learn the right culture while at the same time they had a purpose to write a particular story;....let's bring any Aboriginal text and start bringing the culture in to be embedded into this program.*

By adapting curriculum programs, from “a culture connected to external forces and colonial pasts” (Arbon, 2008, p. 19) elders and the wider community were given a voice and place in school programs. At Daly River for example, Miriam Rose involved elders in teaching cultural programs as part of core curriculum. In the following narrative she recounted that:

*There are times when we bring them to teach the kids how to read all the people talk to them in local language, art, tell stories, the kid paint, make colours and things out of wood like didgeridoos and how to cook bush tucker, where to collect it that sort of thing, to read the seasons.*

The principals were unanimous in the support of teaching language and culture as part of the curriculum. These findings are consistent with research carried out by Bond (2004), Nolen (1998), Stewart (1994), and Umpleby (2007) regarding the importance of collaboration and involvement in pedagogical practices that is holistic and valuable in the context of the learners. Partnerships can be effective when all parties to the partnerships are empowered to contribute in a non threatening environment.

## **5.2.2 Utilising School Associated Agencies**

### **SCHOOL COUNCILS**

The study found that two of the principals utilised the services of their respective school councils. This was made possible because councils were already established at Shepherdson CEC and Gunbalanya CEC. The other two Catholic Schools had no school councils and as Leah stated, they were only *urged later* by the Director of CEO to form school councils. As such Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School is only now at the embryonic stages of establishing a school council.

The active consultation and participation of the school council at Gunbalanya and Galiwin'ku was significant in establishing school community partnerships and reinforced the leadership of both Esther and Dhaykamalu at their respective schools. Council members were made up of various clan groups who had the authority to mobilise and influence decisions at all levels including the central office. The women reported that the school council assisted in various partnership matters such as behaviour management, school cleaning, resolving conflict between the school and the system, and talking directly to the Minister for Education on capital works and other educational matters. Esther recounted that:

*The school council has been a great help because part of that has been talking to them, explaining about their roles and how they should be giving support to the school and the school council members have been wonderful.*

Dhaykamlau at Shepherdson CEC relied profoundly on the advice and support of the school council on most educational matters. In her role as a female principal she needed to be strategic in negotiating with the community on educational issues. She pointed out that it was the school council that decided to talk to people about coming to the school, working with Yolngu children because they were finding it hard working with those Yolngu kids in teaching.

Additionally, the school council negotiated with her immediate family for understanding and support in her leadership role. So I had to talk with them; I asked the school council to talk to them. If they are going to support me okay I'll stay; if they're not going to support me then I might as well go out from here. In formal western school leadership private family matters are dealt with outside the school domain. As the campfire model symbolises, the elders around the campfire are custodians of knowledge, respected, and have authority making sure they keep a positive energy around the campfire which sometimes can be contentious with sparks that may lead to destruction. This issue will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Esther, Dhaykamalu and the other three participants have drawn upon culture to situate the school as an integral part of the community. Trudgen, (2000) notes that:

The correct way for information to enter the Yolngu culture is with the approval of their respected political leaders (dalkarra/djirrikay) or elders; ... they hold the knowledge about life and how to live; therefore the education process must be approved and controlled by these leaders (p. 204).

All five principals indicated that they were supportive of this process. This finding is significant in that it will assist education policy makers and practitioners in rethinking the composition of support structures to build productive partnerships between schools and communities in Indigenous remote schools. Moreover, it is unique in that the compositions of school councils in Indigenous remote community schools are a critical consideration if partnerships are to be sustained.

Other studies involving Indigenous women, such as that carried out by Johnson (1997), Nolen (1998), White (2007), and Arbon (2008), reported the important role that elders play in knowledge acquisition. As such, school councils play a significant role in negotiating partnerships between Indigenous remote community schools and their communities.

### ***OTHER KEY STAKEHOLDERS***

Apart from school councils the women mentioned other stakeholders considered important in the school community partnership process. As I mentioned earlier, telling stories around the campfire in African and Australian Indigenous cultures is a traditional cultural affair. It creates a bonding, an interdependence that brings energy to the exchange of knowledge. Leah captures the campfire metaphor succinctly in her narrative by recounting the activities of the Milimika dance:

*Milimika is a very symbolic model in our Tiwi culture, because we can't work for long unless we have support in helping each other dancing around the circle because everyone takes responsibility and not one person is boss, everyone takes in turns in going round the circle and I feel that in that circle I play a special role, dancing around the circle, sharing our knowledge to other staff in the school.*



In Indigenous remote communities, the support of other stakeholders, such as local government councils, school liaison officers, and diversionary groups, plays a pivotal role in supporting the activities of schools. Government councils were established to replace missionary and colonial controlled structures to manage and control community resources. Some of the community government councils have been very effective in both having an interpretation from their perspective, as well as having a short term and long term vision of self determination for their communities.

In the study two of the principals reported that they worked in partnership with the councils on various school matters ranging from assisting the school financially to being involved in school activities. At Shepherdson College, Dhaykamalu recounted that she was able to secure funding from the Galiwin'ku Government Council to employ community people:

*Some parents come in and work there at the school because the school didn't have enough money to pay so the council, both the CDEP and Galiwin'ku council had some money set aside so that some parents can come in and work for half the day, three or four days so the school and council were working as joint organisation in working and supporting the learning of Yolngu children.*

After Leah's appointment as principal of the school, the Catholic Education Office *urged every school to establish a school board*. This finding is significant especially for Catholic Schools that are only now establishing school councils in remote community schools. The complex composition of small communities with Indigenous women in leadership positions makes it imperative for Indigenous community schools to have the support and involvement of everyone, as Leah clearly reported:

*And also we have established a school board. The school board is made up of different people within the community - the local government; youth development; teachers; parish priest, and a principal of each school, other members from the Tiwi Education Board; with the Tiwi College; and some local parents. We talk more about student attendance and about the leadership.*

In contrast, Miriam Rose at Daly River, St Francis Xavier School did not have a school board and provided strong reasons for substituting this with the services of

the government council of which she was a member. *Sometimes we feel that because it's a small place it's always the same people that attend all the different committees and it's just tiring for the same old people and the best thing is the council for the community.*

Indigenous communities are diverse in their histories, composition, and population. As such, each community is unique in the way it operates. As earlier stated, work, family and community commitments can have an adverse effect on people in leadership positions. It is normal in some small communities to have the same people involved in almost all committees which sometimes create difficulty to operate effectively.

Two sites reported the involvement of Indigenous school liaison officers to work in partnership with communities. The appointment of a school liaison officer is an additional support role that school councils and other parties may play in school community partnerships. In Indigenous remote communities it is significant for the appointment of an Indigenous person in a paid position to liaise between the school and community. At Gunbalanya Community School, Esther reported the involvement of a Home Liaison Officer regarding a behaviour management problem with a male student; *eventually we sent a Home Liaison Officer (HLO) over there to settle him down which he finally did.* Notably, the role of the Home Liaison Officer in all four schools involves communicating with parents on various school matters. At Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School Leah reported that the school had problems getting parents involved in school and have identified a Home Liaison Officer position for the following year to assist the school with the problem:

*This is really very hard to push parents. Next year we are in the process of applying for a grant from DEET for 2 years to get someone in the school to be employed as a Liaison Officer and we work out the purpose of this Liaison Officer role is to get parents more involved in the school and be in the school when they are needed and we want their input in the school so the liaison officer is there to support parents who come in and look at how they can improve their children's education.*

Dhaykamalu at Shepherdson College recounted her experiences. The liaison officer is a significant figure in negotiating between the school and the community:

*It is his responsibility to go out to the council to speak to the community on the loud speaker if he wants to so everybody can hear that we need more kids to come to school attendance is getting low yoh wangai (that one) and he can talk to individual parents or clan; it is his responsibility, and if the clan is not coming to school it is his responsibility to go and talk to the clan, bring each clan to the school and talk there so he and other teachers can talk or the principal and him can talk together; another thing is he is a Yolngu person and he knows who to go and talk to if the school sends him; he knows he has to go he knows how to negotiate with different clan group because if it is a balanda (European) liaison officer he will be just floating around and then back.*

This finding is unique in that it confirms the importance of adhering to cultural protocols in the appointment of certain staff considered to be key liaison people that work in partnership with schools in communities. In Indigenous cultures, relationships are important. Similar findings have been reported in studies carried out involving schools in remote communities in the Northern Territory. Nolen (1998), Stewart (1994) and Wicks (1999) in their studies reported the importance of relationships among Indigenous people. Such relationships are built on trust and respect.

Three sites involved the support of diversionary groups that performed similar roles. Dysfunctional elements “of the colonial past such as the imposition of western worldviews and the destructive colonial processes which attempted to transform individual identity through school” (Arbon, 2008, p.19) are evident in almost all Indigenous communities, and can sometimes create enormous problems in convincing parents to have an active involvement and may require other groups of people in the community to intervene. At Murrupurtiyanuwu for example, Leah recounted that:

*A diversionary program plays a special role in the school, they are programs that link with the police program and they are the ones that come into the school and support the children or those absent from school and talking to parents that come in and do cultural programs and they do after hours programs with the kids. So mainly they are here just to support the school.*

Miriam Rose at Daly River involved the services of different agencies such as the police, welfare officers, and particularly the Aboriginal Community Police Officer:

*One of those things for not turning up for classes the reason for the intervention you know children not to come to school everyday and also to work with the community so that we can as in partnerships with the school to encourage families because various government service providers as in welfare, the police, the community government council, should be working in partnerships to support each other; you can't do it on your own. You try every option that you can first and if that doesn't work, try the council, the families and other stakeholders in the community, and other service providers and if that doesn't work, and probably the last stop is probably the police who at times are very supportive.*

On the other hand, at Gunbalanya Esther did not have a diversionary group. Nonetheless, the community formed a group of older men to deal with behaviour management problems involving young males:

*We'd get some Indigenous male from the community to talk to those hard core young adolescent men so we talk to that group; I think they were called Volatile Substance Group that was set by the community. We used to talk to that mob and they used to come in and take those hard core students out and part of that program was participating in some self esteem reassuring just to get some sort of way for them to settle into the classroom.*

The study reveals the critical importance of wider community collaboration in school community partnerships. In remote Indigenous communities such as these in the study, working together as a community to achieve goals is significant. Such collaborative activities foster partnerships and enhance a sense of shared responsibility.

### **5.2.3 Walking The Tight Rope**

The past decade has witnessed significant changes in the roles and functions of school principals. While such changes have been perceived differently in different countries these developments have led to a reconceptualisation of educational administration. School principals have had to extend their roles far beyond the school gates to involve communities in school governance. In the schools involved

in this study facilitating between schools and communities sometimes required “walking a tight-rope” between system initiatives and community requirements.

In most Indigenous remote communities, where education was introduced by missionaries as an evangelisation mission (Beresford-Maning, 2008; Nolen, 1998) parent and community acceptance of responsibility for formal educational services has been mixed among parents and the entire community. All five women reported that they found it extremely difficult to work in an environment where they were sandwiched between their people and the central office. Walking the tight-rope required them to be culturally sensitive on both sides.

### **CULTURAL SENSITIVITY**

The school culture in Indigenous communities is different to the community culture in the sense that schools are established on Western bureaucratic principles. Indigenous communities on the other hand respond to a holistic culture that has characteristics that are in contestation with western paradigms. All the women in the study reported that they found themselves in positions where they had to be culturally sensitive in their dealings with cultures that were polarised. In order to negotiate with communities they had to constantly seek ways that would encourage the entire community to work collaboratively with the school to support the values that underpin school activities. Negotiating required involvement of the community and demonstrating cultural sensitivity that is agreeable, empowering, and enriching. Leah at Murrupurtiyanuwu recounted in the interview:

*But the community does not seem to understand the life of the school....The culture of the school is completely different to the outside community and because the school culture is different because of the setting of the school Tiwi kids are in the Western structure buildings which the community don't realise that the culture outside is different to what we are in now because they don't have the kind of rules that we offer in the school.*

As a result of this polarisation in cultures, and the difficulty of communicating bureaucratic rules, her approach was to *talk in language, in Tiwi language to explain what it is all about, what the non Tiwi people are talking about.* To negotiate partnerships required a shared understanding of the school's activities

and such activities required interactive skills. By going out to meet the community and translating Departmental or Catholic Education Office initiatives in language that is understandable and acceptable to community, they were taking a step in the positive direction in school community partnerships. All principals communicated through the local Indigenous language to the community which proved more effective.

Another area of sensitivity has been the gender issue. Indigenous communities interact within an understanding of strict cultural protocols. As such protocols such as 'women's business and men's business' where men are normally involved in the education of boys and women that of the girls was important in all the schools. At Gunbalanya CEC Esther involved Indigenous males and females in tackling behaviour management problems with boys in this recount:

*So they used to take them, one Aboriginal male, and one Aboriginal female, and a balanda person working side by side just going through the process of how they would see themselves in future; where can they be and what they would like to do and how they are going to achieve these subjects in the school.*

At Shepherdson CEC Dhaykamalu was sensitive about engaging various clan groups in school activities:

*Yoh (yes) there were different clan groups coming in and there was a session at times run by community people. Yoh, teaching them all the Yirritja, Gwamariyyi tribe, Gurma tribe, Gupapugu, different, there's 28 different clans but like if warramirri goes he takes warramirri and wangurii because they are similar, similarity in culture, dancing, story, and everything; or Gupapugu to Gupapugu.*

Similarly, at Daly River, Miriam always involved both men and women in culture activities and was sensitive about class arrangements that reflected family groups. In talking about how she negotiated partnerships with the community, she was very clear about the significance of the inclusion of culture into school activities. Indigenous cultural values enrich curriculum activities and empower people to take part in decisions and feel confident in school planning:

*The families of the children that attend our school are very supportive; for example every year we have a cultural week, the*

*men and women come in and get involved and help with the kids, it has always been a cultural thing for us that when it comes to teaching children about hunting and painting, music and dance, stories, it is always a family thing.*

The study revealed that all five women created permeable boundaries for partnership activities that supported the enhancement of relationships. The issue of cultural sensitivity in communication is significant in that applying wrong protocols, even with well intended reasons, can stall partnership activities. This finding has provided significant information for key stakeholders such as central office executives in the cultural training provided to neophyte teachers and other stakeholders that teach or visit Indigenous communities.

#### **5.2.4 The System**

Indigenous principals who work with educational bureaucracies work under an enormous amount of pressure. Fundamentally policies of self determination and self management as perceived by Aboriginal people were meant to give them genuine control over the education of their children. Often bureaucrats' interpretation of such policies resulted in the imposition of western ideologies thus reinforcing assimilationist antiquated practices of the past. Although schools were given some amount of latitude to write school-based policies, these were constrained by departmental guidelines shaped by western worldviews. Despite this conciliatory relationship, bureaucrats held a tight rein on management and government practices.

Negotiating partnerships with Indigenous school communities required principals to extend such negotiation to departmental bureaucrats who while promoting a "flat" managerial structure still adhered to pyramidal structural practices. In most cases taking the wishes of the community to the department or taking departmental wishes to the community was always the unenviable task for all the principals in this study.

All five participants recounted their experiences in the negotiation process. Dhaykamalu reported:

*I had a challenge to talk to them, not to feel frightened for whatever I needed for the school or for the learning of my Yolngu children. Being a Yolngu principal, a Yolngu, it was hard, working with my own people, but I need to abide by the rules of the Department; to talk with them, and also to share with them and also to show that, show the Department that we are working to improve the learning of our Yolngu Children's outcomes.*

Her choice of words such as *it was hard; I had a challenge would* imply that the rhetoric of self determination and self management was differently understood by both parties Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Indigenous people had little freedom in making their own decisions. Similarly, Leah at Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School had to rigidly follow bureaucratic rules:

*And I said to her we can't do this, the rules that I have to follow you have to follow, and it was not made for me I did not make this policy, CEO made this policy this is how I am going to run the school. You have to do the same.*

Partnership as defined by the Australian Council of State School Organisations (2004, p. 4-5) involves:

A sharing of power, responsibility and ownership, with each party having different roles, a degree of mutuality, that begins with the process of listening to each other and which incorporates responsive dialogue and 'give and take' on both sides. It also involves shared aims and goals based on a common understanding of the educational needs of children and a commitment to joint action in which parents, students and teachers work together.

Using the above definition it would seem that at all four schools partnership formation and negotiation amounted to a transactional management (Burns, 1978) approach which seeks compliance and acceptance of authority, instead of one that focuses on people, creating synergy, and building trust (Bass, 1990). This made the roles of the principals immensely complex as educational leaders.

At Gunbalanya CEC, Esther recounted her experiences in negotiating such partnerships in pedagogy. She was skilful and strategic in moving among all three – the system, the community and the school:



*This is what I was trying to say; this is what DEET wants, this is what you want the community, but this is what the school needs to address. You're both right in a way but this is how we can best utilise your wishes, balance your wishes to make it more of what the school needs.*

At Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School, both Kilipayuwu and Leah reported working in partnership with the Catholic Education Office on a series of school related issues. Leah cited meetings in Darwin involving leadership and other school matters. This was a way of ensuring that the school was functioning properly ranging from administrative tasks to curriculum development and implementation.

*We had leadership meetings at CEO. In that meeting we talked about different roles about the leadership, their place in the school and we have to talk about our roles in the school as a leadership team and we had to work out what are the ways we can improve our skills in the remote schools and one of the things that came out was the administration and the curriculum in the schools...*

Kilipayuwu always made sure she asked the advice of CEO in school matters *because it's a two culture that I work with and to strengthen that I get the two sides of people.* As a retired principal her advice to an aspiring Indigenous principal *would be to get advice from CEO, to talk to CEO on how to get the school and community working together and also to build on that advice the way she might work out ways to build the school and community.*

In sharing these experiences, it is inferred that negotiating partnerships at the system level involves a lot of tact, strategic thinking and an understanding from both the community and system in creating a balance in their priorities. Notably, bureaucratic systems hold the reins of power as funding bodies in all aspects of schooling. Additionally, it is a "historical fact that Australian policies and education institutions have been marinated in cultural and racial social engineering theories [that] continue to influence current policy, research, government debates and social perceptions in relation to Indigenous Australians" (Langton, 1993 cited in Rigney, 1997, P.111). Indigenous people and communities are only just beginning to understand the level and type of involvement required in such a relationship. In spite of having Indigenous principals in community schools, the task of involving

communities in school matters is still very much contested. There needs to be more assistance provided to Indigenous principals in this area as the multiple roles they play require lobbying, diplomacy and a better understanding of bureaucratic communication and western work protocols. In my view failures of Indigenous principals I have worked with have sadly been attributed to personal failings of the people involved embedded in clichés like “not good enough” when, beyond doubt, the necessary resources have either not been provided or were inadequate. As Miriam rightly pointed out in her narrative, the paper trail was a nightmare and even though she had been mentored she still needed somebody there because I wasn’t sure what I had to do; three years weren’t enough. More importantly, she noted that:

*White people have had hundreds of years to become teachers and manage their classrooms and principals so generations after generations they took up that role in the wider community and became teachers themselves and looked at their father or mother or other members of their families who became teachers and principals and they’ve used those people as role models for the past hundred years or more. Aboriginal people have only just started now, just recently; my community is fifty years old and we’re the first ones to do that.*

Miriam’s insights reinforce the need for a deeper understanding of and more appropriate training of Indigenous principals in community schools.

The four themes discussed in this section presented the women as catalysts who in school leadership positions for the first time dedicated themselves to transforming Indigenous education in remote schools to reflect one that included Indigenous worldviews. They transformed leadership structures to involve the wider community, adapted the curriculum to a more culturally responsive one, practised leadership with the involvement of key stakeholders such as school councils, elders, the local government council, and other agencies in the communities. While they demonstrated determination and resilience, they walked a tight-rope between system initiatives and community requirements. In negotiating school community partnerships they found themselves constantly caught between two contested worldviews that brought difficulties to their leadership roles.

Although there were commonalities in their practices the circumstances of their individual communities required them to operate in ways that were unique to their leadership practice. The table below illustrates the four sites and the key stakeholders that were crucial in school community partnership processes. Two of the participants were from School C.

**Table 5.2 School Community partnership components in all four schools**

<b>School A</b>	<b>School B</b>	<b>School C</b>	<b>School D</b>
<b>School Council</b>	School council	Group leadership	<b>Local Community Council</b>
<b>Local Community Council</b>	Traditional Elders	Parents	<b>Police Officers</b>
<b>Mala (elders) leaders</b>	School staff	Diversionary group	<b>Welfare Officers</b>
<b>Liaison Officer</b>	Parents & local community	Local community	<b>Parents</b>
<b>Parents &amp; local community</b>			<b>Health workers</b>
<b>DET</b>	<b>DET</b>	<b>CEO/DET</b>	<b>CEO/DET</b>

**5.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 2: What leadership skills and strategies do female principals employ in encouraging community involvement in schools?**

Negotiating school community partnerships requires effective leadership practices that would appeal not only to the central system but the school community which in many circumstances are diverse in their requirements. In answering the second research question the following four themes emerged from the analysis.

1. Communication
  - Non-bureaucratic
2. Consultation
  - Relationships

3. Empowerment
  - Decision-making
4. Service to community

The participants in this study employed a non-bureaucratic communication strategy by consulting with elders and the wider community on school matters, empowered community people through involvement in key decision making, and committed themselves to serve their communities despite the day to day obstacles in their leadership roles.

### **5.3.1 Communication**

#### ***NON-BUREAUCRATIC***

In his most acclaimed book *Functions of the Executive*, Chester Barnard (1968) one of the pioneers of management thought, maintained that the key to the executive function is to develop and maintain a system of communication. Communication structure has an effect on the type of leadership that develops in organisations. Though a fundamental tool, communication remains, by its very nature, an extremely complex process. Traditional forms of western management evoke complex communication structures where most communication flows from the top. Primarily, such communication tends to be inflexible and leaves little room for creativity and grassroots level communication feedback.

In the last twenty years new definitions of organisational culture have emerged creating an increased emphasis on pluralism and diversity (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Quong & Walker, 1998). As the world becomes more globalised, issues of race, ethnicity, and gender are becoming thematically bound together with workplace productivity. These changes require leaders who can walk away from hierarchical top down communication and create a workplace where people feel a sense of belonging and security.

This study reveals the mismatch between leadership and management features in most Indigenous cultures and those in western bureaucracies. Communication is one area where the women in the study reported to have developed Indigenous communication structures that assisted bridging the gap and creating more effective management of schools. They were the “lynchpin” between the central bureaucracy and the communities. They created a climate where Indigenous people can easily relate to the school environment by having an open door communication strategy, communicating from the grassroots upwards, and being flexible in ways they communicated matters at the community level. At Murrupurtiyanuwu for example Kilipayuwu and Leah established a leadership structure that involved representation of the four clan groups from the Island. Listening to others and valuing their capabilities is important in Indigenous cultures. For the Milimika leadership team it was important to involve the group in managing the school. Kilipayuwu recounted:

*The four women that I chose had skills of their own. I chose them because they had some skills in Aboriginal ways and because they were also strong women in the school, I chose them; each had different skills, each was experienced in her own way and each talked about something that she was able to do with children and with people. So that group became part of the leadership group. In Tiwi way, Tiwi people work in a group.*

Building such a network to establish their leadership was considered important for the women. They needed to bring Tiwi people into leadership in order establish a relationship with the wider Tiwi community. In the absence of a school council it was significant to have such a support structure that could establish links with parents and community. Each of the four women represented different clan groups and as such they were in a position to engage the whole community in any school related matters. Leah clearly pointed out that, *because I have got Milimika, Milimika will come in and sort out this problem with the community who ever comes in you know in the school.* Most community people use English as either a second or third or even fourth language and as such miscommunication may easily occur. The women spoke Tiwi on most occasions in communicating with the entire community. This was not only for understanding but also as a bonding mechanism that encouraged involvement and reciprocity.

Similarly, Dhaykamalu at Galiwinku used a different strategy to communicate with the community. Being aware of the importance of the right strategies for communication, she worked alongside a school council made up of Mala (clan) leaders whom she relied on for any school decisions that had to be made. The western bureaucratic form of a sole leader making all the decisions was not her personal or cultural style. For example she believed, *it is his [liaison Officer] responsibility to go out to the council to speak to the community on the loud speaker if he wants to so everybody can hear.* This collective effort and recognition of interdependence demonstrates the use of various communication strategies to organise community cooperation and shared responsibility. Additionally, as a respected clan leader, he would individually meet clan groups and encourage their participation in school matters. Similarly, in this episode that Miriam Rose recounted it was critical to effective communication that the proper protocol in relating to her community people was used. She was aware that getting people involved required patience and time and therefore tended to include this in her leadership strategy as she rightly pointed out; *To make things happen in communities you have to spend a lot of time talking to the people, the families in the community, and getting their ideas, sharing things, sharing the system as well as giving them options, what path to take.*

The importance of creating the right environment was important for Miriam when negotiating with either a group of parents or particular family clan groups:

*As well as asking them to come to the school and talk to me in the office but I feel that it's more suitable for me to go to them and talk than sitting around the room, the four walls, table and chair setting, some times for some people that might be a bit uncomfortable, so you could use both techniques or strategies you either have them come to the office and talk to them about their child or you can go back to their homes and sit around the campfire and talk to them.*

This informal strategy is common to many Indigenous cultures and, as Hofstede (1991) in his study of managers pointed out, while culture does not totally determine a person's behaviour in any given cultural situation, it serves as a powerful framework "in which each person comes to understand themselves and the reality in which they can act" (Vecchio et al 1996, p. 688). Correspondingly, Dimmock and Walker (2005) succinctly point out, "the practice of leadership is a

socially bounded process [that] is subject to the cultural traditions and values of the society in which it is exercised” (p. 1). Cashman (1998) is in accord with Dimmock and Walker in supporting the claim that the practice of leadership is linked to “our language, culture, education, and beliefs that have been acquired through others of our generation” (p. 108).

The importance of bottom-up communication was important for all the women. The grassroots level type of involvement was crucial in all decision making as Leah recounted in the interview; that before they make decisions about teaching language and culture the *decision has to be made by the community at the grassroots’ level, and the school consults with the community especially with the parents of the students in the school and what needs to be changed.* The “remote control” type of management where directives are given from top management and sometimes from executives in distant locations is too ineffective to be successful in most Indigenous cultures. Esther at Gunbalanya CEC relied on the school council to work as a team in supporting her leadership. She would visit individual parents and spend time talking to them to encourage their participation. Generally, Indigenous cultures prefer a face-to-face communication which is considered more effective and bonding. The study results show that this way of communicating with the community either through elders or the leaders themselves or gender groups face to face was a more culturally appropriate strategy unlike the western ways preferred ways of written communication.

Contemporary leadership practice requires leaders to be flexible and give communication a priority. All participants demonstrated their ability as facilitators, and good communicators in the context that they practised educational leadership. This involved language of communication, person communicating, communication channel and time taken to get things done.

### 5.3.2 Relationships

Relationships are important to Indigenous people. Luhabe (2002, p. 1) in her study of South African black managers in an attempt to conceptualise management from an African perspective quoted the late Steven Bantu Biko:

*We believe that in the long run the special contribution to the world by Africa will be in the field of human relationships. The great powers of the world may have done wonders in giving the world an industrial and military look, but the great gift still has to come from Africa giving the world a more human face (p. 1).*

This quote resoundingly resonates with most Indigenous cultures. For the women to establish a good foundation for their leadership they never underestimated the importance of relationships which is an important cultural value. For most Indigenous cultures, all life was governed by relationships. This is an important aspect of most Indigenous cultures – the understanding of what “relationship” means goes beyond social relationships to include relationships to the land, sea, families and with ancestors.

Fundamentally, to create and keep a state of equilibrium intact there has to be knowledge of how to relate to things around you. Thus children at a young age would sit around the campfire and gradually receive an education about their relatedness to all things around them. This could take the form of formal and informal education. By the time they get to school age they are well aware of their relationships to their families, other family groups, and the world they live in.

All five women in the study achieved their personal visions to transform their schools from a solely colonial western structure to one that was more Aboriginal-oriented. Nonetheless, they were strategic in working in and through the structures that had already been established by using tact and the right relationships in their communities. In articulating this vision all five women involved elders, family members and kinship relationships in the transformation process. At Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic school Leah and Kilipayuwu knew the importance of relationships in dealing with behaviour management involving the kids. Kilipayuwu described this in her interview by saying:



*When that happens I usually talk with Leah who is a leader in the Milimika group. We talk about it and then we call the family member. It could be an aunt or an uncle come and talk to the Tiwi staff that was causing the problem. When I say an aunt it could be someone related to this person's father an uncle could be someone that is related to her mother.*

Where elders are not consulted on matters, a member of the Milimika from the right skin group deals with the problem:

*And that's how we deal with kids who have problems we split them into their skin groups and have a Milimika person talk to them and then after that the Milimika take the kids back to the classroom. And then they came back and we sat down and talk about how the meeting with the kids went in their skin group.*

Kilipayuwu reported she prefers the idea of working in a group and recognising the joy of interdependence which is critical among them as a people. *The best part of my job was setting up the Milimika group because it works for me to talk to a group of women.* At Shepherdson College, the appointment of the Home Liaison person was dependent on relationships such an individual had with the entire community and his understanding of and tactfulness in negotiating with various clan groups. Dhaykamalu believed *he is a Yolngu person and he knows who to go and talk to if the school sends him; he knows he has to go he knows how to negotiate with different clan group.*

Relationships are built on trust. Without respect and trust, relationships stand on shaky ground. Dhaykamalu won the trust of her people to be nominated for the position as principal. Mainstream appointments would normally use academic qualifications and experience in the appointment to executive positions. It would seem that in Indigenous communities an academic qualification must be supported by the endorsement, respect and trust of the community. This is a significant finding in this study. Dhaykamalu explains:

*I was strong. That's why with the community they could see who I was, how I was working and how strong I was because they had trust in me. The community had trust in me, the council had trust in me, some had trust in me, ...Like our Yolngu system, you know Yolngu way when we in that stage, the people the family the clan*

*and the relationship clan that sees us that we are in that position that we can run that part of a play or structure, cause people are there looking at us.*

Similarly Miriam referred to trust as a key feature of her leadership:

*Then to take on the role of being recognised you come back to that thing of people trusting you. You have to work on that trust to be accepted in that role. If you have to do something to solve anything for families, for students, or whoever you have to follow through that thing too until what it is that they want you help them to solve is solved.*

Thus, the findings reveal that relationships are complex and go beyond concepts of western relationships, evolve in a cultural context and rely on trust, and as such cannot be mandated through bureaucratic structures.

### **5.3.3 Empowerment**

#### ***DECISION-MAKING***

All five women in the study believed in the power that synergy creates. Their roles as principals were grounded in the belief that a collective effort was needed from parents and the entire community in the education process. This belief is connected to the importance they give to the culture of sharing and connecting with everything else around them. In their positions as leaders, they created a school environment where elders, parents, and other community members felt a sense of belonging and a desire to contribute to teaching and learning. Creating this environment brings unity which, in Indigenous worldviews, is spiritual and very much a part of cultural expectation. It is claimed that western educational leadership structures favour the hierarchical bureaucratic structure where one person wields power over others and is likely to make sole decisions. In contrast, the participants in this study preferred a shared leadership where people are listened to and given an opportunity to share ideas. According to Leah we do not want anyone to be like a tall poppy but like a listener, and we all make decision and agree. Esther at Gunbalanya CEC employed the strategy of creating a whole community involvement and appointing the elders to make some crucial decisions

even though she was in a positional leadership role. As culture demands, the group of elders are custodians of knowledge and therefore have authority to make certain decisions.

In Indigenous worldviews elders are respected and expected to direct the younger generation. In particular four participants recounted the strategies they employed in involving others in decision making. This responsibility of shared decision making and collective leadership empowered and established some form of ownership of Indigenous schools which hitherto was absent. They transformed the school context from western-style schooling to one that reflected Indigenous cultural values. At Murrupurtiyanuwu for example, Leah and Kilipayuwu had the Milimika leadership group that had the decision making power *in the mornings we have our little meetings, but the non-Indigenous people don't make decision, only Milimika make the decision*, Miriam on the other hand did not have a leadership team but used cultural strategies such as inviting parents at the school or simply going out to the community after hours and talk about students education.

#### **5.3.4 Service To Community**

Essentially Bordas, (2007) notes that “leadership styles of communities of colour espouse the collective good of everyone and transform from an “I” to a “we” orientation. It is about collective and collaborative leadership that encourages equal access and urges the involvement of all diverse segments” (Bordas, 2007, p. 79). All five women in the study had a great commitment to a collective sense of serving their community demonstrated through energy, tenacity and resilience. The women reported that they were giving back the support they had received from families and entire community. As such it was the collective good that energised them to serve community over the self. They all had opportunities to be employed elsewhere. Esther, Miriam and Leah worked in Darwin with NT Department of Education and in other places but they chose to go back to teach in their communities for the same reason of serving the community that supported them. This “community connection” White reports (2007, p. 213) and in agreement with Bruno (2003) is customary with some Indigenous people. Similar findings have been reported in studies with Indigenous groups in Australia (Arbon, 2008;

Martin, 2003; Nolen, 1998; Wicks, 1999), Canada (Johnson, 1997; Umpleby, 2007) and New Zealand (Fitzgerald, 2006; Wicks, 1999). In this study, Miriam reported she wanted to be principal:

*no matter what it took of the school that I attended; a school in my own community and to give back to the community that supported me in my studies and encouraged me, especially my family that stuck by me and my husband. ...the whole purpose of me going away and studying and coming back so that I can help my people go up a notch and am not doing it for myself or to feather my own pockets. I want to take people with me and I'll do it for the benefit of my own people because they are the ones that have supported me when I went away to study.*

Esther spent a great deal of time with parents both during school and after hours, but the frustration of the enormity of the problem made her sometimes *feel sad because I try and continue working with the community all the time explaining any new policies from DEET*. She saw herself as the bridge between her community and the system as well as the custodian of the vision for education in her community. Kilipayuwu at Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School expressed her strong feelings about education and service to the community in this narrative; *I've always said that I wanted to become someone to be in charge of the school because school was my life and my dream was to be a principal one day so that I could help my people to get some education*. This visionary outlook and commitment to building community is a hallmark of great leaders motivated by a desire to help others (Greenleaf, 2003) and being a servant to others. Servant leadership is about "increased service to others, taking a more holistic approach to work, promoting a sense of community, within and between an organisation and the greater community, sharing of power and decision making and a group oriented approach to work in contrast to the hierarchical model" (Kelly, 1995, p. 196, cited in Nolen 1998, p. 57).

The findings of this study are similar to that of Holiday (2006) a Native American in her study of native American female leaders that servant-leadership as a leadership theory favours Indigenous characteristics such as maintaining the survival of their people, thus putting the needs of people foremost rather than the needs of leaders. Studies conducted by Arbon (2008), Fitzgerald (2006), Nolen

(1998), Martin (2003) and White (2007) in Indigenous Australian contexts also support this claim.

Indigenous leaders' belief in serving their communities gave them the determination and strength of character to overcome certain problems they encountered in their roles. All five principals were cognisant of the context in which they operated and as such employed the strategies required within an Indigenous context. Nonetheless, in spite of some successes there were constraints in many aspects that will be discussed in the next chapter.

#### **5.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 3: What impact and influence does culture have in negotiating school community partnerships?**

While a growing number of empirical studies have been generated over the years on the subjects of educational leadership (Caldwell & Spinks, 1988; Fullan, 1991; Shakeshaft, 1987) and school community partnerships, (Boyd, 1997; Epstein, 2001; McInnery, 2002) they have in most cases somehow failed to address the complex needs and realities of Indigenous and other minority cultures. Constructs of leadership have largely been prescribed by western and male oriented world views that are antithetical to minority cultures. While such theories have been debated and undergone widespread reform, much of such reform has neglected to address leadership in the context of Indigenous cultures (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Fitzgerald, 2003; Hallinger & Leithwood, 1998; Johnson, 1997; White, 2007). Notably, this parochial focus on a generic western oriented practice unfortunately has been transported to school settings irrespective of the context in which leadership is practised. Hence western school leaders find themselves trapped in the comfort of western ideologies and apparently miss many untapped learning opportunities in their school communities (Quong & Walker, 1998).

Correspondingly, Indigenous school leaders in Indigenous remote schools in the Northern Territory are no exception to this western ideological practice. Education through the establishment of schools was introduced by the colonisers. Through education and coercive measures western invaders imposed values that largely

devalued and eroded Indigenous culture (Arbon, 2008; Dodson, 1998; Martin, 2003; Pearson, 2000; Stewart, 1994; White, 2007).

With this backdrop school leadership in Indigenous remote communities has had to contend with elements of European imposed ideologies that continue to constrain responsive cultural structures. As a consequence Indigenous community schools are extremely reliant on outside experts with little trust in the capacity of communities to make decisions (Stewart, 1994). Despite this reliance, the Indigenous women leaders in this study have been creative in the practice of school leadership.

Symbolically, as my conceptual model represents, they situated leadership around the warmth of the campfire setting where culture comes alive by telling stories of Indigenous worldviews and inviting elders, kids, young men and women, and, strangers likewise to listen, collaborate, cooperate, and learn a new way of schooling. It is widely recognised that culture manifests itself throughout many dimensions in the workplace. It is also true from a definition point of view that:

Culture has the capability to influence and explain the behaviours of individuals and groups of all sizes and all complexities. It can be observed as an influence at the macro (societal culture) level, at the organisational (school culture) level, since individual behaviour is the product of the interaction between individual personality and both societal and organisational cultures (Dimmock & Walker, 2005, p. 51).

If schools have a culture that is transmitted to students in a diverse world it therefore begs the question whose culture should be taught or dominates through the curriculum. This early primary socialisation of students in schools is particularly significant in their mental programming.

The third research question was developed to grasp a deeper understanding of the impact and influence of culture in negotiating school community partnerships in remote Indigenous communities. In responding to the single question initial narrative (SQUIN) and other probes later in the interviews the women spoke at length about the significance of culture in schools. Their leadership practices relied “on community’s knowledge, expertise, and cultural practices to shape the work

that schools do and make them relevant to the lived experiences of children from Aboriginal [communities]" (Corson, 1998, p. 239). The interview transcripts provided three compelling themes that recurred throughout their stories and the themes shed light on the impact and influence of culture on school community partnerships. The themes listed below are now discussed in relation to insights from the female principals.

1. The spirit of leadership
2. Reinforcing identity
3. Creation of new knowledge

#### **5.4.1 The Spirit Of Leadership**

A central tenet in school reform is the push for school-based management and decentralisation in the pattern of decision-making, responsibility, and power shared (Duignan, 2007) more equitably among principals, parents, staff and other key stakeholders. While this is proposed, the practice of such leadership and major decisions about what is imparted and how it is imparted to students, remain a contested terrain in schools. In NT remote Indigenous community schools, most parents have supported the need for an education that gives Indigenous children a holistic development, one that is culturally responsive with a strong Indigenous foundation that is felt through the curriculum. The participants in this study inherited structures and practices and expectations from central offices that they were required to follow religiously in order to demonstrate good leadership. Notably, prior to their appointments as principals, the revolution in advocating a "both ways" education with the "fundamental aim to help Aboriginal communities to develop ways of expressing their culture within the curriculum of the school" (McTaggart, 1988, p. 9) was well under way. All five principals were graduates of Batchelor Institute where the seeds of transformation were first planted through pedagogical projects that incorporated action research methodologies. However, on appointment, all five principals found themselves "square pegs in round holes" and realised a monumental task was still ahead and looked for solutions to transform these practices if they were to continue leading their schools. Their intent was not to replace the western structures in which they were assimilated but

to demonstrate a distinct and contemporary identity in their battle to find a cross fertilisation between both polarised contested worldviews.

Bordas (2007) promotes an emphasis on the spiritual dimension of leadership. While such emphasis in western literature:

refers to working on oneself, developing better habits, improving one's character, or becoming a better person, such a perception reflects the individualistic orientation of the dominant culture in which spirituality is a personal focus and endeavour. Alternatively, in American Indian tradition spirituality is the unifying factor infusing all aspects of one's life- one's relationships, responsibilities, community obligations, and connection to the natural world (p, 17).

This view is supported by this study and by the researcher's experience in African culture. Walters, (2006) an American Indian from the Institute for Indigenous Wellness Research, University of Washington School of Social Work urges the understanding of the centrality of spirituality in Indigenous worldview and traditional knowledges. In centring this spirituality she maintains:

- Indigenous worldviews, the centrality of spirituality, and ways of relating form the core of any behavioural expression
- Traditional worldviews recognise the interdependency among humans and nature, the physical and spiritual worlds, the ancestors and future generations-connections that bind all living beings
- Contemporary re-traditionalisation are critical mechanisms for individual , communal and tribal healing
- Nativistic movements emphasise a return to traditional and spiritual practices and sobriety in developing nationalistic pride
- At their core are revitalisations of Indigenous traditions accompanied by traditional living (p, 40).

Similarly, Arbon (2008) in her recent PhD study reaffirms the centrality of spirituality in relatedness in pointing out that "the Arabana Ularaka, [Arabana worldview] like the worldviews of other Indigenous people, is fundamentally important in this effort to see the world from a position of relatedness that is far



removed from western science and philosophies” (p. 30). The practice of leadership roles revolves around relationships. In recent literature leadership theory is beginning to embrace a similar view. Duignan (2006; 2007) argues that relationships form the core of leadership roles and as such cannot be distributed as promoted by theorists of distributive leadership. Relationships can be so complex that the notion of distribution gives relationships only a mediocre attention. In the study, all the women expressed the significance of culture as the nucleus in their leadership journey and perceived duty as that revolving around relationships.

In each of the narratives the women talked about practising a form of leadership that is different from that practised in non-Indigenous or mainstream schools. When Esther opens her narrative she evaluated her role in noting that *principals like me bring a different type of leadership that will try and make sense* and Kilipayuwu starts her story with the difficulty of operating within a western structure when she recounted that *I found it difficult working as a principal everything that the principal had for me to do I found that difficult*. Determined to continue in the position rather than give up, she was visionary in suggesting alternatives that would reinforce her position by negotiating with the system. She embarked on skilfully working with and around the western structure by transforming it to suit the context. Her emphasis on Tiwi ways illustrates her tapping into cultural spirituality and ways of working. Similarly, Leah encountered difficulties during her training when she worked with the mentor who occasionally travelled to the island.

*[She] was the person I really admired because the person who can teach me the way that she is being in this role before, before she resign in St Mary's and I said to her it was completely different in the way you were principal before and will become difficult for me because the way I want to see the school running.*

At St Francis Xavier Miriam maintained the importance of operating differently:

*I've always said it that I suppose at times the system would expect me to be principal of an urban school and I couldn't have done that because the needs are different; you've got about five hundred people in the community and some of the people are my people, my family members.*

Similarly at Shepherdson CEC, Dhaykamalu's appointment came from the community and the school council unlike the normal bureaucratic appointments that would come directly from the central office.

The centrality of culture flows from the Indigenous belief that all life flows from one source that is present everywhere. There is a deep spiritual essence that defines the collective nature of work and relationships. This is deeply embedded in Indigenous epistemology and ontology which Umpleby, (2007) notes "appear to originate from the period in human mentation prior to the sixth century B.C." (p. 202). Arbon, (2008) maintains that all life is related and sacred and as such the rivers, the rocks, earth, plants, animals and all people are made of the same spiritual essence. Reinforcing this, Bordas, (2007) maintains that native Cherokee people follow a traditional way of acknowledging each other that is contained in the idea of kinship- of being family and thereby being responsible for one another. This belief is echoed by Australian Aboriginal academics such as Martin (2003) and White, (2007) who pledge an allegiance to the importance of kinship and the interrelatedness of beings and the circular view of the universe. This cultural centrality of collectivity and relatedness is merged into leadership practices which Bordas (2007) notes "impels a leadership form that centres on communal responsibility, a concern for the welfare of the people or the tribe, and stewardship for all life" (p, 16).

It is therefore little wonder that all participants in the study located their leadership within a cultural framework that sustained their transformative agendas. In their view schools belong to the community, a place where community can feel a sense of belonging and ownership, where cultural beliefs and norms find a place in leadership, teaching and learning. In a partnership there needs to be dialogue and, in schools, this requires each party to share responsibility, collaborate and take an active participation in decision making. Essentially, in negotiating partnerships with their communities, working with the communities can only be a reality when the people can relate to the school environment and feel worthy of contributing to the learning and teaching of children.

At Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School Kilipayuwu and Leah established group leadership to include all four clans in management and decision making at the

chool to reflect Tiwi culture. Dhaykamalu at Shepherdson CEC and Esther at Gumbalanya CEC worked collaboratively with the school council and further empowered their decision making role. However inline with cultural protocols, Miriam operated without a school board or leadership team but involved other community members in playing significant cultural roles in school matters.

All five women transformed the curriculum by introducing the teaching of language and culture that involved consultation with the community and employed community members as experts to teach at the schools. By establishing a cultural agenda it was easier though not without some difficulties, to get the community involved in building a community school. As discussed above, there is a difference between school leadership and traditional Indigenous leadership. Appointing these women in leadership positions did not automatically transfer to leadership in the community or promote them as custodians of traditional knowledge. The expertise of elders was needed to ensure the proper protocols were adhered to. As life long learners they also needed to continue to grow in traditional leadership which was critical in the practice of leadership from both worldviews – Indigenous and non-Indigenous. Culture was critical in its impact and influence on leadership practices and more importantly on the capacity of Indigenous principals to build partnerships with the community.

This centrality of spirituality serves as a unifying force guiding leaders in ways they relate to others, recognising the interdependency of all beings serving and sharing as part of traditional spiritual practices.

#### **5.4.2 Reinforcing Identity**

White (2007, p. 198) in a recent study involving Indigenous women recognised that “cultural identity continues to be an important aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait People’s lives”. Embedded in cultural identity are practices such as language, storytelling, song and dance, and observances of ceremonies that reinforce relationships and sense of belonging (Bruno, 2003, as cited in White, 2007). In quoting Bruno (2003), White (2007) reaffirms that embracing cultural identity, cultural traditions, and spiritual beliefs are important elements in the

journeys of Indigenous women. Studies conducted in Canada (Johnson, 1997; Trujillo-Ball, 2003; Umpleby, 2007), Australia (Stewart, 1994; Nolen, 1998; Wicks, 1999; Fitzgerald, 2003; Arbon, 2008), and New Zealand (Fitzgerald, 2006; Wick, 1999), reinforce this belief, and affirm the centrality of identity in contextualising the broader embodiment of being.

Essentially, for all five women, bringing culture to the fore was significant particularly in teaching and learning. Hoy and Hoy (2003) point to the critical role of instructional leadership for school principals. To demonstrate this role transformation of curriculum practices needed attention if they were to succeed in bringing the community into the school and reinforce traditional relationships. All five women recounted the importance of reinforcing student's identity by ensuring that "educational programs of their schools are owned by both the school and community" Gardiner (1996, p. 20). In partnering with communities the principals utilised community's knowledge, expertise and cultural practices to shape the work that schools do and made them relevant to the lived experiences of Aboriginal children. Harris (1990, p. xiii) notes that "neglecting community involvement in the development of Indigenous school children by allowing children to achieve academic success [alone] in the western school system could seriously undermine Aboriginal identity". Esther in her narrative reinforced the importance of having that real partnership happening in the classroom before we can even go out and discuss about real partnership with different agencies.

Building such partnership in planning and programming together requires listening and a give and take of both worldviews with knowledge built on the foundation of Indigenous worldviews. This is important in negotiating the curriculum.

In talking about identity, Dhaykamalu reinforced the need for involvement of the community in teaching children to realise who they are, to see themselves that they are Yolngu working in school; not just to learn mainstream but to learn both ways so later on when they grow up and come out of school they know where they stand. As a consequence this kind of interaction transformed communities and their involvement which was limited when schools were run by Europeans and western culture dominated teaching and learning.

Likewise Miriam observed the significance of culture in partnering with the community. Believing in the importance of identity, she recounted in her narrative that:

*The teachers and I as principal encourage students to learn more about who they are, where they come from and where they're going. And to instil in them that it's a good thing also who they are, an Aboriginal person for them to feel comfortable in that they've got to learn all these other things and not just the western way of educating them.*

Language is a powerful tool in communication. Partnerships with communities will be hindered without a common relatedness. Languages in all communities were a unifying force in negotiating school community partnerships. As pioneers of Indigenous education in communities Ngurrwutthun, (1991, p. 108) affirms "through languages we define ourselves and our social and physical world". In order to negotiate with the community all five women used the local language as a medium of communication. Leah at Murrupurtiyanuwu talk[s] in language, as a way of involving the community in building partnerships. To reinforce language and to contextualise education in both worldviews at Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School, *kids are taught Tiwi mostly in early childhood area and the bilingual model is where the kids are learning different levels*. This is significant as it brings not only involvement of the community in decision making and teaching but in strengthening relationships.

The role that culture plays in negotiating partnerships in communities cannot be overemphasised. The culture of a society and schooling are inextricably linked. The women believe that western education is a key to expanded life opportunities or holistic developments but reiterated that it is the transmission of Indigenous knowledge that gives both Indigenous staff and students a strong identity.

### 5.4.3 Creation Of New Knowledge

In essence, the reform agenda the women embarked on transformed their communities to include “community based education” (Corson, 1998). Corson makes a clear distinction between community education and community based education. Daigle, (cited in Corson, 1998, p. 240) sees community-based education as “a form of social action within a community framework that extends beyond schools as institutions and begins with people and their immediate reality. It also allows them to become meaningfully involved in shaping their own futures through the school and other agencies around them”. A collective sense of identity emerges in organisations as members interact and transform the workplace into distinctive institutions which Hoy and Hoy (2003) refer to as “this indigenous feel of the organisation” (p. 275). Community education on the other hand is “less dynamic which goes as far as questioning oppressive structures yet stops short of replacing them” (Corson, 1998, p. 240).

In shaping their own futures and that of the community, new knowledge was created in classrooms that required both Indigenous and non Indigenous to work in partnership and learn from each other. All five women, graduates of Batchelor Institute were influenced by the teachings of Paulo Freire’s educational philosophy. This great philosopher urged oppressed groups to shape their own education in a process of “conscientisation” According to Freire (1985) “conscientisation refers to the process in which men not as recipients, but as knowing subjects achieve a deepening awareness both of the sociocultural reality that shapes their lives and of their capacity to transform that reality” (p. 93).

Within the school community partnership framework it required skillful negotiation with their communities still suffering from colonial cultural genocide as happened in most colonised worlds. Since community based education is much more suited to reforming Indigenous education (Corson, 1998) it follows that the processes and activities had to be generated at grassroots level. Some elements of this include ownership, empowerment, commitment, negotiation, teamwork, shared responsibility, respect and trust which required a revival of culture in schools; a culture that the community owns and controls. In the practice of leadership new

knowledge was created. Elders and clan leaders became advisers in schools that were only just waking up from colonial practices. The women asked elders for cultural direction and relied on their judgement in giving advice. At Murrupurtiyanuwu school Leah noted *we do not want a tall poppy* referring to the western hierarchical leadership structure. Dhaykamalu although she worked *under the system* as she stated had very close mentorship from the school council and elders in decision making. Apart from the four Milimika clan representatives Kilipayuwu *sat with a group of women and we just talk about anything and then that's how I built my confidence to do my work to get strong by talking to women and also family.*

This finding is consistent with that of Nolen, (1998) and Wicks, (1999) who conducted studies in Northern Territory Indigenous community schools. A common theme that emerged from both studies and this study is the importance of the local culture in shaping the administrative context of educational leaders.

Transformation in the area of pedagogy was significant if schools and communities were to enter into strong partnerships. The literature on schools and community partnerships emphasises benefits to children's education when parents and other community members are involved in school activities. Nevertheless, schools continue to exhibit practices that marginalise views of the minority. Ingram (1981), Reynolds (1999) and Trigger (1992) contend that the 'dismissal of Indigenous knowledge and the marginalisation of the custodians of this knowledge and the practitioners of these pedagogies increase the schools' cultural gap from the community and contribute to the failure of education in remote Indigenous communities' (as cited in Bond, 2004, p. 30). This study affirms these views.

Essentially these problems needed to be corrected in order to close this cultural gap. One such way involved the community taking an active role in school matters including teaching. Although Kilipayuwu had initial problems of acceptance from the community that led to interpersonal conflict, on reflection she put the community interest ahead of personal interest; in this episode she recounted, *I trusted my own people to have a place in the school giving them responsibility; sometimes we make mistakes but we learn and change, we work together to make*

*a better place, better people.*

Realising that success as a school leader was heavily reliant on working collaboratively with her people, she embraced them. Leah had a similar experience when *the community wasn't told when [she] was appointed principal.... like CEO's responsibilities you know is to pass this message around, this is a community school we need to let the community know.* These two episodes reinforce the influence and impact of culture in leadership. They also illustrate the mistakes made by bureaucracy that flagrantly ignored proper processes. Imagine not consulting with communities first before appointing a principal!

Values and norms are important cultural elements. Every human being is born into a culture and is first introduced to primary socialisation very early in life. It is important to note that “values are important for determining our sense of who we are” (Duignan, 2006, p. 75). Duignan (2006) further states that this “task of developing the child and the development of cultural values over time are influenced by family, education, peers and a whole range of experiences, both good and bad, that have helped shape us” (p. 75). As such, this socialisation process has defined principles that must be followed and obeyed. As children make the transition to school life they further develop a mental programming through the curriculum that is largely prescribed by the state. Some children from minority groups who get formal education in environments predicated on western values will be initiated into a new culture that is very different to the primary socialisation. Aboriginal children in Australian schools are no exception. Children make this leap from home to school culture that is a much wider leap for Indigenous children than for white middle class children. Therefore we need leadership that eases and bridges the gap.

Although Australia as a multicultural society embraces diversity, this rhetoric does not easily translate into school curriculum and management practice including that in Indigenous remote community schools. The teaching of knowledge in classrooms transformed from a western monocultural perspective to one that embraced core values, shared norms, and artefacts that encouraged community members to feel a sense of belonging and ownership of the schools. Hoy and Hoy (2003) note that the key to a successful organisation was its culture and that core



values of success rely on trust, teamwork, commitment, cooperation, egalitarianism and intimacy. As such all women supervised pedagogical practices and played an active role in supporting non-Indigenous teachers who struggled with adapting to teaching Indigenous kids. Additionally, the Indigenous teacher assistants as cultural experts worked collaboratively with non-Indigenous teachers in the creation of new knowledge from a both ways perspective. Under the constant supervision of elders they also negotiated knowledge that was endorsed by elders for teaching in classrooms.

Trudgen (2000) notes, that Aboriginal society has complex processes for accepting and appropriating new knowledge. He also makes an important point that “the education experience for learning new knowledge must be organised by the “owners” of that knowledge – that is those who have the authority to hold or know about that particular thing”. As such any Indigenous knowledge-based curriculum was first negotiated with the “owners” of such information in order to make it authentic and valuable. The principals by themselves had little authority in doing so. For example, Leah spoke *first to the people about what languages should be taught in the culture program* and also *men participate in the culture programs that come into the school and talk about what activities they want to do with the boys*. In all sites, following this cultural protocol of involving elders and community impacted and influenced negotiating school community partnerships. They all agreed that the success of their respective schools was dependent on getting active community involvement in school matters by establishing proper cultural protocols.

## **5.5 SUMMARY**

In concluding this chapter and addressing the research questions the findings can be understood as interrelated components. Negotiating school community partnerships in Indigenous remote communities involves:

- Recognising the interrelatedness of the school and community environments where schools are seen as extensions of language and cultural reproduction

- Demonstrating leadership that is shared involving key clan groups and elders
- An awareness of incorporating Indigenous worldviews reflected in teaching and learning as a way of reinforcing identity
- Recognising parents, elders and the wider community as teachers and custodians of Indigenous knowledge
- Working in collaboration with school councils and recognising members as key decision makers
- Working in collaboration with other agencies within the community
- Sensitivity to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures
- Working in collaboration with the system and acknowledging the central office as an important stakeholder
- Recognising and employing the appropriate communication styles
- Trusting and respecting the views of others
- Consulting with family, elders, and the wider community
- Empowering stakeholders such as elders in decision making that relates to all aspects of students' learning and school governance
- Recognising the importance of spirituality and its centrality in guiding their leadership practice

The findings reveal the strengths and determination that the female Indigenous principals brought in leadership practice in their respective schools. Collectively with others they transformed education in remote Indigenous schools that formally exhibited practices that were western oriented to one that introduced a “both ways” philosophical approach. Their contributions have included transforming structures to reflect Indigenous cultural values that encourage school community partnership. They have also led in contributing to greater community control and empowerment through culturally appropriate skills and strategies such as the right kind of communication and acceptable protocols.

The study has also revealed that culture has a significant impact and influence in leadership and negotiating school and community partnerships. This centrality of culture is noteworthy in this study since it is the core of all school and community relationships. While they have shared these successes in their leadership in

working with both the community and the central office, they also shared stories of enormous challenges, pain, and retributions which will be discussed in Chapter 6 that follows.

## **CHAPTER 6 CHALLENGES OF BREAKING NEW GROUND**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter discusses the challenges and constraints experienced by all five participants in the study. While the study revealed that Indigenous female principals have achieved major advancements in their individual and collective ways in transforming the way Indigenous schools practise leadership and engage with school communities, the successes have nevertheless come at a price for all five women. Breaking new grounds brought with it enormous pressure, challenges, pain, over and above obstacles that often confront many individuals in leadership positions. Some of these included being at the centre of community politics that sometimes led to rejection, stress of families, prejudice of being black, struggles of trying to understand the bureaucracy, and their role as women in communities. Six compelling themes are discussed in relation to the research question and the literature. These are:

1. The colour bind
2. Gender
3. Community politics
4. Balancing school leadership, family and community commitments
5. Complexities of working with the mainstream
6. Transcending boundaries

### **6.2 THE COLOUR BIND**

Two of the principals explicitly recounted discrimination they suffered because of skin colour. The literature on educational leadership has given very little acknowledgement in leadership discourses in regard to race, ethnicity and skin colour and it continues to “claim that the functions and features of leadership can be transported and legitimised across homogenous educational systems” (Fitzgerald, 2003a, p. 9). Clearly, mainstream educational leadership discourses have barely taken into account differences and distinctions surrounding race, ethnicity, colour, context, language, spirituality, relationships, and individual

personalities promoting the myth of the “universal educational leader” (Fitzgerald, 2003, p. 14). In this study, skin colour and black consciousness (hooks, 1989) created tensions as the principals endeavoured to lead their schools and communities to work in synergy. Esther in responding to a probe about the hardest thing she experienced in the job promptly pointed out:

*Just my colour; and also non-Indigenous people also an Indigenous person who have no idea absolutely who this person was going to be whether she would operate in a white kind of way and they did not know how tough I will play in that role. They thought “okay, she could be pushed over and she could just throw hands and fall down she doesn’t know what she has got herself into”. It has been the hardest not only in me being principal but also the colour of my skin.*

Another principal recounting a particular incident made the same observation:

*I remember we had the floods and we had to replace the air conditioners in some of the staff houses because they have all gone under water, they come in and replace the air conditioners and all they put around the edge to make it sit properly, they put you know the sticky tape thing, masking tape around it; the funny thing was they said it’s okay, its only a blackfella place you know, its an Aboriginal principal so we just fix it up any how.*

Consequently, race and ethnicity continue to create a negative impact for most Indigenous people in the workplace. Current research on educational leadership reveals that Indigenous women are relatively new to educational leadership (Fitzgerald, 2003a, 2003b; Parker, 2004). This limitation in research on successful minority women, “denotes lack of respect for minority leaders” (Trujillo-Ball, 2003, p. 56). Fitzgerald’s (2006) study also revealed that women of colour and in particular, Indigenous women are a minority group and consequently face a double bind. Although the personalities of the women principals may have suffered with this lack of respect for an Indigenous black principal and an Indigenous school, the women devised their individual ways of coping with strains on their leadership. With determination to succeed the women focussed attention on trying to work with their communities and address such issues professionally as and when they occurred. Dhaykamalu recounted that:

*There were lots of things that balanda, especially balanda, there might be one or two Yolngu who are doing the same thing, not turning up and not letting us know where they were. From what I saw, how can I say that; from what the explanation to me was that those people were playing jokes at me, playing jokes, like teasing or trying to annoy me cause I could feel it. So I went and told them I want you and you and you, I want you in my office. When I was talking to them instead of responding what I was saying, the mind was far away it wasn't there listening; their ears were closed, their minds were closed.*

Others reported incidents of disrespect from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff or finding the reversal of role of authority too difficult to execute because they were still locked in a colonial mentality with the psychological scarring that an Indigenous person may not be as good in positions of authority such as the principalship. Kilipayuwu from Bathurst Island was uncomfortable and lacked confidence in dealing with disciplinary matters with non-Indigenous staff who refused to comply with curriculum guidelines. Her strategy in managing such issues required the intervention of the Catholic Education Office (CEO).

*Sometimes non-Tiwi did not use the school based curriculum. To approach the teacher was difficult for me; Indigenous telling non-Indigenous to follow the way, the school curriculum. Sometimes I had to bring in CEO; someone came out and we met and I told CEO about the teacher not following the curriculum. CEO and myself call all staff meeting with teachers and did not mention any names.*

This finding confirms similar findings in White (1998) who reported that “Indigenous people find it challenging to move away from the mindset of servitude” (p. 202) and in her doctoral study on Indigenous women and career development, the study revealed that “Indigenous people are still traumatised by their earlier negative treatment and plagued by self-doubt” (White, 2007, p. 203). Thus, these layers of identity, being black and female put enormous pressure on them as school leaders and as Miriam recounted, *it's probably ten or more times harder for an Aboriginal woman to accept and stand up to all the things.*

Unlike White's (2007) findings in her doctoral research where women “are not given the opportunities to move into leadership roles positions”, a unique finding in

this study reveals the position of educational leadership has been dominated by Indigenous females in Northern Territory remote Indigenous communities. The reasons for this include an early interest in education during colonisation and their willingness to continue playing the nurturing role of children in school matters. As such they were employed as teacher aides and later on had access to teacher training that ultimately led to executive positions.

### **6.3 GENDER ISSUES**

The study also found that *breaking new grounds* (Baumann, 2008) had a price tag that extended far beyond the school environment. Negotiating partnerships with their communities required communication with key leaders and different clan groups. Despite the women's commitment to serve their respective communities they encountered challenges in being accepted as women in leadership positions. Miriam-Rose at Daly River reported that the domain of leadership has always been that of Indigenous male and as a female principal, this was the hard part for her as she pointed out:

*It took a long time for men to accept that Indigenous people can go off and train and come back and become educators in their communities and it's much harder for women to do this if you end up being a leader in your community because you're a woman. I had to break new grounds.*

Notably, Miriam reported that *it wasn't just the men in my community it was also the non-Indigenous men that I had to face*. In a similar recount Esther from Gunbalanya reported the difficulties she experienced in working with non-Indigenous males at the school:

*It's so difficult and so draining for female like myself an Indigenous one to try and to listen to these two blokes trying to have a whinge at one another; it was draining talking to a male and then one's going away then there was another male I don't know how many males; one of the draining things I had too many males in my office...*

Likewise Kilipayuwu from Bathurst Island referred to issues of gender as one of the hardest parts of her job:

*The hard thing also is, like the male leaders in the community, well like the council, the Tiwi Land council, because they had their say about you know education. They were against bilingual, they did not want the kids to read and write in their language, they wanted kids to learn English.*

Thus, the findings are an affirmation in the literature which reveal that generally women experience a unique set of challenges in leadership positions (Astin & Leland, 1991; Nee-Benham & Cooper, 1998) and are considered not as important to research (Trujillo-Ball, 2003). Notably, literature on women's educational leadership has mostly been concerned with western (white, middle and upper class) women (Parker, 2004). Over and above such obstacles, Oyewumi (2001) notes the term "sisterhood as a model for feminist intercommunity relations has often proven more of a hindrance than a help for women of colour, as westerners have often used the term to assert inclusion without having any material basis for doing so" (P. 2). This sisterhood thus promoting a global view has not taken into account local leadership practices of different countries and elements of diversity in local settings even within countries such as Australia. This study is a major contribution to the scarcity of studies on Indigenous women in educational leadership positions and widens the lens to include race, ethnicity, colour and the significance of the role of women in communities in the Northern Territory in Australia.

#### **6.4 COMMUNITY POLITICS**

In the findings discussed in chapter 5, service to community was a major theme and a reason for the women's determination to work closely with their communities despite the seemingly insurmountable obstacles they faced. While they had some huge successes in transforming school structures to work collaboratively with communities they were not free from the onslaught of community politics. The women were unanimous in reporting the endless problems they encountered in their efforts to work with communities. Kilipayuwu reported that most people in the community were opposed to her appointment, preferring to have another non-Indigenous principal as she related in this episode:



*There was a lot of talk in the community especially the women they went around to ..... and they were asking ....., why a Tiwi principal? Why can't we have another non-Indigenous principal? and then some women there was some jealousy too in the community and they said like 'Well some times she goes to church; you know that came up you know; sometimes she goes to church; why can't we have someone that goes to church everyday? And, well that was that gossip you know around the community...you know that hurt me.*

This was a serious backlash in the desire to gain self determination and self management in Indigenous communities. This backlash is at odds with her vision of creating *a community school for Nguiu community* and one that *should be staffed with Tiwi teachers teaching Tiwi kids*. This reaction from the community is a multitude of historical issues that still haunt remote Indigenous communities. To fully understand the context in which the women practised their leadership, one needs to widen the lens on this “romantic view of community” (Maddison, 2009). While communities are generally viewed as representing a people with similar values, Maddison (2009) notes “the reality is that the majority of Aboriginal communities are a fiction, or at least a creation, comprising a number of kinship groups with tensions between different clans or kinship groups” (p. 144). This view is confirmed by other Aboriginal scholars who note the endemic inter-family conflicts in many communities (Pearson, 2000) being the result of colonial and assimilationist practices of relocating unfriendly groups to the same missions and reserves and expecting them to live harmoniously (White, 1998). It is no surprise that at one of the sites in the study, the women challenged and questioned the Indigenous principal's values together with that of her extended family which in their view were in opposition to Catholic values that are strongly held by the majority of the community.

Leah from the same school found herself in a similar plight after the Indigenous principal retired. Apart from experiencing difficulty working with non-Tiwi staff, working with her own people and engaging them in a collective effort on school matters was equally a problem as sometimes school matters extended to families in communities that put pressure on her job as principal. She pointed to the fact that *there are people in the community who don't respect her*. In dealing with student behaviour she gave examples of threats from *parents that come up with a*

*big stick* in retaliation. Reflecting on these incidents she evaluates her situation and recounts:

*I wonder why people are not showing me respect as an Indigenous principal and I said this principal thing is a challenge for me. I have to show courtesy and respect to the staff and no matter what my own family who works at the school I said I treat everyone the same. I said I am not there for my family and I am there for the sake of the children and the community.*

The individual experiences of the women principals can also be attributed to “self-depreciation” (Freire, 1960) where the oppressed have internalised opinions the oppressors held of them to a point where they also believe that they are not good enough for positions of higher authority as Kilipayuwu recounted in this episode:

*You know they were going around talking. How can a Tiwi be a principal when there's other jobs that person can do like teach or plant the garden or sew a dress why principal? How much experience does this person have? May be that was what went to their minds? How much does this person know about being a principal? Because it's not our culture may be some people would say that. Why a Tiwi principal when that person should be picking up rubbish or cleaning my house. Or yeh but if this person if there was an announcement made about a Tiwi nun, no question about it because religion is strong.*

Correspondingly, other principals did not escape the onslaught of community politics as reported by Miriam-Rose from Daly River; .... *the local politics [laughs] and lots of it is coming from your own people and that's the hardest part working in our community, a small community with your people and you have to be confident enough in being able to face those challenges.* Likewise, Esther constantly referred to the difficulty of trying to bring the community closer to the school with her choice of phrases such as *it's no easy task. It's been difficult.. it is very, very hard going out gathering people itself.* Dhaykamalu at Shepherdson College was particularly challenged by some of her Yolngu staff:

*There were Yolngu who wanted to play politics with me. Maybe those people didn't want me to be in that position. Cause they had a group, they had formed a group, where they can talk behind my back and share that idea with other balanda staff; So there were staff there stabbing me, behind my back, yes, Yolngu.*

The finding in this study echoes that of Johnson (1997) in her studies on Native American women in leadership positions who experienced jealousy from other tribal members, and native men. Consequently the study reveals that in the effort to create harmony between schools and communities Indigenous female principals are caught in a web of challenges with their own people who continue to be in denial of Indigenous people's capability of leading schools.

## **6.5 BALANCING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP, FAMILY AND COMMUNITY COMMITMENTS**

Even more revealing was the challenge of balancing work and attending to family and community commitments. The show of solidarity and serving people among most Indigenous cultures has been documented in literature (Arbon, 2008; Nolen, 1998; Stewart, 1994; Umpleby, 2007). For this group of Indigenous principals, commitment to serve their families and communities over and above the normal school responsibilities sometimes came at a heavy price. Dhaykamalu's strategy at Shepherdson College was to get the school council to talk to her family. She recounted this episode with great pain:

*When I was working because I knew it was hard and I didn't want anybody to sort of like humbug me in that position. I was getting a lot of coming in and talking especially my husband coming, yoh, because I was working with a male assistant principal; so I had to talk with them; I asked the school council to talk to them. If they are going to support me okay I'll stay; if they're not going to support me then I might as well go out from here.*

Relying on the supportive school council she was able to cope especially with family commitments that constantly challenged her on a daily basis. Despite talking about her strengths in coping with difficult situations, she revealed in a probe that

*The hardest part was not from the school, not from the community, but from my family; not my kids but my husband. What I might call it, he was annoying what you might call it; he was putting me out of my job by talking, saying things, wangai (one thing) , that's why I said I could have continued with my contract but I was so weak, so annoyed, and I said I want to stop there. I just stopped everything... He was talking to me all the time. You come and do*

*this, this, this, giving me other extra job at home. And I said that job's for this afternoon later when I finish here but so I had no way now.*

Ultimately such pressures led to her resignation.

Similarly, Miriam-Rose recounted the obstacles of working in a small community of only:

*500 where almost 70% of the people are my family pressure from everywhere, the families, the students, my family, immediate family and other families belonging to the students and mainly because you are a leader everyone wants to come to you – no matter who they are man, woman, black or white, the youth the kids and sometimes it was hard to say no, that was also a task that was put in front of me obstacles I mean, you know, the good thing is I made it to the end.*

Unlike Dhaykamalu she had the full support of her husband and she was strong in coping with the pressures until her retirement. For Kilipayuwu, *the hardest part of this job was my family, my family because my families were always with me, and may be pressure from families when things go wrong in the family I found that hard to involve with my work*'. Notably, she describes the cultural ways that family commitments take precedence over the job she did as principal. For example:

*There are other things that keep Indigenous people from doing those other things is probably family commitment where we may be problem at home; those problems, when Indigenous people have problems, the problems is dealt when it happens not after. For example, like there was a problem if say there was a problem with my family at home, then I fix that problem before I you know go to work. I don't take my problem to work. I fix the problem, when the problem is fixed then I go to work.*

Although Esther and Leah did not specify the difficulties of balancing work and family-community commitments in the interview they did mention the commitment to cultural obligations such as ceremonies that had to be integrated somehow with their work commitments. Sometimes they had to join the community in ceremonies that went long into the night and had to get up the following day alert and ready for school. It is significant that this study has given an opportunity to these otherwise silent voices to share these experiences which presumably principals in urban

school do not have to deal with. Consequently, it is important for other educators and service providers such as the central office to have an understanding of the context in which these Indigenous female principals practised and to consider providing the necessary leadership support that recognises and integrates both cultures.

## **6.6 THE COMPLEXITIES OF WORKING WITH THE MAINSTREAM**

In contrast to the pressures of balancing work, family, and community commitments, the women related consistent reports about their experiences at the system level mainly the Department of Employment, Education and Training, and the Catholic Education Office. At Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School both Kilipayuwu and Leah reported similar painful narratives regarding the process of their appointments as principals which significantly contributed to the challenges they experienced as women in leadership positions. Kilipayuwu reported that the community was not consulted and informed when the appointment was made by the Catholic Education Office. She narrated this incident with much seriousness and pain:

*In term three in 1997 that's when I took over as principal at MCS when we had the ceremony, the take over ceremony, it was done in the school, it was done in the school, it was done inside the building and the community was not involved just the school staff and the Deputy Director. My family weren't involved in the ceremony or the community. It was all done in the school in the literacy room.....I don't know; well I don't know why did not involve the community and the family. Only the school staff and it was done in the not the literacy centre but in the library where we used to have out staff meeting. I don't know why that was done like that.*

Likewise Leah recounted a repeat of Kilipayuwu's experience on her appointment:

*The community wasn't told when I was appointed principal but the school invited the Director ---to come over and talk to the staff and some of the local people who came in about Leah as a principal who is taking over from Kilipayuwu. ....you know CEO should come and announce it to the community, you know grassroots level...., like CEO's responsibilities you know is to pass this message around, this is a community school we need to let the*

*community know. This is a part of me, you know, and I pray about it too not to look back to the past about what happen.*

The definition of community and the connections among people in Indigenous remote communities has attracted some attention in scholarly writings (Trudgen, 2000; Maddison, 2009). It has been widely reported that what is romanticised as community is actually groups of families who as a result of colonisation were forced to live together. In many communities hostilities continue to exist from pre-colonial times. These complexities have far reaching effects when it comes to key decisions such as leadership. While these complexities exist, community people in many circumstances strive for cooperation and collectiveness as part of the traditional way of life. Wicks (1999) in his study on educational leadership in Indigenous schools reported the importance of relationships, celebrations and rituals among Aboriginal people as a “spiritual dimension of Indigenous cultures” (p. 20). Echoing this finding, Leah in this study stressed the importance of having a “ceremony” with the entire community to celebrate the appointment of an Indigenous principal. Hence, there is great importance and sensitivity surrounding the appointment of school principals in Indigenous communities. Almost every family in a community would have children attending the school and as such if people in communities are not part of the decision making and celebration about the leadership of the school it is most likely that such appointments create challenges for persons appointed with a breakdown in negotiating school community partnerships.

In traditional Indigenous culture men have always played the leading role as stated by Miriam-Rose and Kilipayuwu in the interview. Leadership structures and appointments in communities do not follow western patterns. In Indigenous communities and from an African traditional culture, leadership is cultivated and “considered a lifelong educational process” (Johnson, 1997, p. 251) and normally would have the endorsement of the whole tribe according to specific criteria from elders. Consequently, an individual qualified in the western academy does not guarantee leadership in and for the native community. Johnson (1997) in her study of Native American women leaders endorses this claim. Since “educational leadership in Indigenous schools recognises and respects the paramount importance of the local culture as it permeates the school community” (Wicks,

1999, p. 22) the appointment of educational leaders in remote Indigenous community schools requires the recognition of cultural protocols. As such it is important that central offices such as the Catholic Education Office become aware of these complexities and strive to have genuine consultations with communities in making such appointments. Leadership is at the core of negotiating school community partnerships and always operates in context and relationships (Chapman, 1998; Dimmock & Walker, 2005). Essentially, it may prove an onerous task in negotiating school community partnerships without an understanding of the cultural context and intricate relationships that impact and influence the sustainability of such partnerships.

A compelling theme that emerged from the study was the women's inability to engage with bureaucratic communication. Leah for example, reported that she *understand[s] some of the language but some languages that I need to be explained to me* and Kilipayuwu recounted her experiences at principals' meetings where all the NT principals came together. She explained that she *found those meetings difficult because most of the things that came out of the agenda were suitable for urban schools and sometimes during those meetings I sleep because people talk, people talk sometimes I don't understand what they talk about*. Similarly Dhaykamalu at Shepherdson College had some painful experiences with the Executive Contract Principal position. In this episode she emphatically reported:

*I'll like to share with you what I'm finding very hard. You have handed me a book of law, of Department law and there was no one there to sit with me to go through. I told them to talk to me in a big meeting with all the principals. I want you to talk to me straight. I am a Yolngu person, I'm finding it hard and all I've been given is a book, A BIG BO-O-K with all the words, how can I understand those words? I need to look three or four days in the dictionary to learn that? I don't want you to laugh. Look at it from your heart not from your head what I'm talking about Yoh (yes).*

Stewart (1994) in her study on the bureaucratic discourse of the Northern Territory Department of Education and its effect upon processes of Aboriginalisation talks at great length about English as a language of bureaucracy and "associated with supremacy" (p. 81). Participants in her study also mentioned their disempowerment in being compelled to communicate through English in

bureaucratic communication. Such encounters raise issues about racism within the bureaucracy where Aboriginal people are naturally expected to embrace the values and ideologies of the dominant culture. It is an ethnocentric demonstration of disregarding the existence of multiple realities. Such social constructions that further marginalise other cultures are orchestrated plots for suppression and continued supremacy. In Dhaykamalu's case she later revealed that the laughter of other principals further eroded her confidence. It is obvious that the lack of proficiency exerted enormous pressure on the Indigenous principals in trying to carry out their roles and responsibilities. Assuming an engagement with Standard English without any due consideration of their educational journeys and their cultural perspectives is being oblivious of their very existence. As Miriam rightly pointed out:

*I needed somebody even though that I might have finished being mentored I still needed somebody there because I wasn't sure what I had to do; three years weren't enough and I needed to have somebody....*

This finding is significant in this study as it draws attention to reconsidering firstly, the language of communication between the bureaucracy and Aboriginal people, and secondly, calls into question previous mentorship arrangements for Indigenous remote principals. Although both the Catholic Education Office and the Department of Employment Education and Training established mentor programs, such programs were more ad hoc with no real terms of references (Stewart, 1994) even though there have been reports of success in some schools. It may be that such a program should be re-defined with some definitive structure that would bridge the gap that exists in performance between Indigenous and non-Indigenous principals with due consideration to the contexts in which they practise.

## **6.7 TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES**

The polarisation and constant contestation between two worldviews was revealed as a major obstacle for all the principals in the study. Essentially, as Indigenous principals, an unremitting challenging feature of their leadership roles involved balancing both worlds- the Indigenous and non-Indigenous. In executing the day-



to-day tasks, operating in both worlds presented a unique set of challenges as captured in the following excerpts:

*I find that hard to separate myself from the group and come as a DEET representative. So I had to find a way of how I can move between those two worlds....If so called Department wanted to build that partnership with the community, try and use the cultural context bringing their culture to be reinforced at the school and try and build this partnership to try and close that gap between the school and the community.*

From another principal's experience:

*Whereas it was really hard because it meant that, what are my people going to think of me now? Am I going to be an outcast because of the way that I dress or because of the way that I'm working now?*

The challenges of "walking between two worlds" was also expressed by women in Fitzgerald's, (2006) study on Indigenous women in school leadership in Australia and New Zealand as well as studies involving Indigenous Australian principals in Stewart, (1994) and (Nolen, 1998). As educational leaders, these principals demonstrate deep commitment to achieving optimal cooperation and partnership between their schools and communities. Yet the very credibility of their leadership is eroded from both sides and is constrained by both the power and politics from the local community, and the frequent challenges and critiquing from both their own people and the western system.

## **6.8 SUMMARY**

In summary, this chapter has revealed some of the enduring tensions and strains on the school leadership of Indigenous female principals in their courageous efforts to negotiate partnerships with their respective communities. The themes revealed the women are undivided about the issues that they experienced as female school principals. The study is significant in that it has given them a voice that truly represents the problems that accompany such a position within their context. They have fearlessly discussed issues such as the layers of identity - gender, ethnicity and colour - that continue to be a perpetual marginalisation; the

struggles of balancing work and family commitments; the struggles with understanding mainstream cultural protocols and the difficulty of communicating these in trying to negotiate school community partnerships; and lastly the community politics that accompany their endeavours in engaging the community in school. Consequently, creating a climate and culture that mobilises a collective action would require an understanding of these constraints from both the central offices and the community. It is additionally important that stakeholders such as the central office are adequately aware of the diversity and cultural influences that impact on school leadership and processes of school community partnerships in Indigenous remote communities.

The literature reports on the multiple roles that women play over and above the commitment and responsibilities of a job and the stresses that accompany such multiple roles (Johnson, 1997; Nolen, 1998; White, 2007). What remains a gap in the literature are the experiences of Indigenous women in similar circumstances. This study echoes the findings of Nolen (1998), Wicks (1999) and White's (2007) studies that Indigenous women endure stress from family and work-related commitments that can sometimes take a heavy toll on them. The study revealed that although all the women were successful to a large extent in getting the school and community to work together it normally came at a heavy price with reports of jealousy, disrespect and sometimes family conflicts. Thus Indigenous female school principals would benefit from support networks from both their communities and the system if continued empowerment is to be sustained.

Chapter 7 is a conclusion and discusses the implications of the study with recommendations for further research, policy, and practice.

## **CHAPTER 7      CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **7.1      INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a summary of the research and addresses a number of significant outcomes. In this light, the chapter addresses four things: firstly, the purpose of the research, the chosen design and research questions; secondly, summary of findings; thirdly, conclusions of the research; and, lastly, recommendations for policy, practice, and theory; and concluding thoughts for educational leadership practice in Indigenous contexts.

### **7.2      THE RESEARCH PURPOSE AND DESIGN**

In time of increasing need for partnerships between Northern Territory Indigenous remote schools and communities, efforts are being sought for better dialogic processes, involvement and active participation that would improve school outcomes for Indigenous children. Notably, quite a few Indigenous women are school principals in some remote community schools that are relatively new to educational leadership and committed to improving Indigenous education. Though some studies have been conducted on Indigenous education in the Northern Territory, yet, very few of these have actually investigated the issues involving leadership practice and school community partnerships. Thus, the purpose of this study was to investigate how female Indigenous principals in Top End Northern Territory remote Indigenous community schools negotiate school community partnerships with their respective communities. In order to study the phenomenon the literature review focused on three major bodies of literature that were relevant to the study. Namely, culture and society; leadership skills and strategies; school community partnerships. These three identified bodies of literature provided a framework that underpinned the research questions. The central research question of the study was:

1. How do Indigenous women principals negotiate partnerships between their schools and their respective remote communities?

Arising from this central question were sub-questions designed to give shape and direction to the research process. These were:

2. What leadership skills and strategies do female principals employ to encourage community involvement in schools?
3. What impact and influence does culture have in negotiating school community partnerships?

With this purpose in mind it was necessary to consider a research design that would address the phenomenon in its real context. There was awareness that this study involved a marginalised group that has experienced social, political, economic and educational disadvantages through oppressed circumstances of colonisation. As a consequence, it was important in making sure that reference to contemporary thinking in social science would accommodate the voices of the Indigenous female principals in a context that does not compromise their worldviews.

In searching for a range of values and ideology that would answer the research questions, great consideration was given to *social constructionism* as the most appropriate in accordance with claims that Indigenous people have a worldview that is dissimilar to the dominant European group in Australia (Arbon 2008; Smith, 1999; Trudgen, 2000; White, 2007). Consequently, in defining the epistemology for this study, consideration was given to influences such as social, cultural, and historical contexts that are important factors that could be considered in the discussion of knowledge claims.

Through a campfire metaphor and narrative inquiry as a culturally appropriate way of representing the women's voices, the female Indigenous principals provided valuable insights into their leadership behaviours and issues in negotiating school community partnerships. As a technique in narrative interviewing the Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method (BNIM) was employed in this study, and considered most suitable for investigating the perspectives of the Indigenous female principals. The Indigenous female principals in this study brought to their leadership practice and negotiation of school and community partnerships their

varied social and cultural experiences that are critical to understanding why they did things the way they chose to do them.

### **7.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS**

With this careful orchestration of the research design and research questions, the women spoke freely about their experiences in school leadership. The choice of biographical approach particularly suited to explore the experienced interaction between individual subjectivities and purposes, and organisational roles and constraints was helpful in addressing the research questions that ultimately generated significant findings.

The participants in the study were among the first cohort of Indigenous principals in remote schools as well as acquiring a new status as women in leadership positions in their communities. The study revealed that as school leaders they were quick to realise leadership as a quality at the core of successful school community partnerships. Hence in an unyielding determination the women created transformative paths that responded to preferred Indigenous ways of leading and managing by initiating new educative dialogue that provided a departure from structures that reflected a mirror of western bureaucratic ones. This was an attempt to interrogate colonial practices that had widened the gap between schools and communities. Essentially, they described their work as school leaders who connected the school with the children, families, and the entire community. By creating structures that were in harmony with their world views they gave a voice to the community in school matters that ultimately led to the empowerment of communities.

For the women and particularly the two female principals from Murrupurtiyanuwu School, shared leadership was important and considered a reflection of the relatedness of their culture. The study also revealed that apart from the group leadership and role of school councils the female principals involved other key stake holders such as the Department of Education and Training Northern Territory (DETNT), the Catholic Education Office Northern Territory (CEONT) and other government agencies within the communities. At DET and CEO levels, there

were constant negotiations on most school and community related matters such as funding for various programs, policy, professional development, implementation of strategic plans and making sure the overall management of the school was within departmental guidelines and procedures.

Transforming structures led to an increase in employment of Aboriginal staff in all sites. The women succeeded in creating schools that were strong testaments to Indigenous culture of relatedness. By employing community people in remote schools Indigenous people started to see links between schools and communities and as an extension of community life. The study also revealed that the women negotiated such partnerships through the school curriculum. They aimed at creating a both ways learning and teaching where Indigenous children would benefit from both Indigenous and western worldviews. At the core of curriculum transformation Indigenous language was a key factor where community people could participate in negotiating cultural programs that were structured as part of the school curriculum.

The women regarded themselves as giving a service to their communities which they demonstrated through great dedication, energy, and resilience. As Indigenous women, they ignored hierarchical top-down decision making preferring a more consultative collaborative approach. Notably, they were flexible in their approach in realising that building partnerships required an investment in time, giving people an opportunity to internalise, reflect, and contribute to decision making. They also recognised that as pioneers in school leadership, they needed to gain the trust and respect of their communities. Notably, where kinship structures required proper communication protocols the women negotiated with clan representatives as advocates to disseminate information to the clan groups. Some of the women reported using their networks within the community for additional support. For example, the women elders played an important role as advisers and experts when the principals encountered problems. Taking some time out to sit with the women elders was comforting and confirmed they had a support group. All these forms of relationships were considered important in their leadership journeys without which they would have experienced a great deal of isolation.

All participants revealed working with the central offices was important requiring a different kind of relationship. They were more formal in their relationships in dealing with DET and CEO which relied heavily on bureaucratic processes and procedures. Some of them relied on corresponding by telephone or communicating directly when staff from the central offices visited their schools. Where such communication was not readily available, some principals admitted asking non-Indigenous staff they trusted at the school for the necessary support. In most cases this was readily available as both parties had invested time in building such relationships.

The inclusion of language and culture in teaching were important links in paving the way for school community involvement and shared ownership. Community people felt empowered to contribute in school matters because their culture was recognised as making a significant contribution to formal schooling.

At the classroom level planning and programming lessons involved shared responsibility of the Indigenous assistant teacher and non-Indigenous teacher. Working in partnership required each of them to contribute knowledge from their worldviews and stand on an even plain to make learning holistic for children. Indigenous teachers were empowered and felt they had a significant role to play in schools.

Despite the efforts and determination by these women to transform remote Indigenous schools to reflect their worldview and involve community, all principals reported that they experienced enormous challenges related to gender issues. Some of the principals reported that their communities were outraged when they were initially appointed since the domain of leadership in communities has always been that of Indigenous men who had difficulty in accepting that Indigenous women could “break new grounds” in school leadership. As such they experienced difficulty in negotiating partnerships on certain school related matters. They also reported an extension of this behaviour in non-Indigenous men who had difficulty accepting them as school leaders.

There were other challenges that accompanied their appointments. One principal revealed that other Indigenous women were envious and questioned her

appointment preferring a non-Indigenous person instead. School leadership in the community's view has always been the domain of non-Indigenous people and as such communities held the view that the women were not good enough to hold such positions.

It could be expected that having Indigenous principals in communities would yield better cooperation, understanding and promote shared responsibility. However, the day-to-day activities of these women were a constant uphill battle on all fronts. These obstacles however did not deter them from working with their people. As cultural women and leading schools in their communities, they were conscious of the right skills and strategies within cultural protocols in order to overcome and manage problems.

While the study revealed strength, determination and skilful strategies, their leadership was not free from the effects of community politics or constraints working with central offices. They suffered serious backlash from communities that were supposed to give them support and they all admitted one of the hardest things for them was working in their communities with their people especially in small communities where they were closely related to everyone else. These challenges put enormous pressure on their jobs as principals. Inter-family conflicts in the community often extended to school grounds which ultimately stalled school community partnerships.

The study revealed that the women faced enormous challenges balancing work and attending to family and community commitments. They experienced enormous stress in the effort to accomplish multiple roles. Given that family commitments take precedence over the work they did as principals, they normally found this role conflict difficult to balance.

In contrast to the challenges of balancing work and family-community commitments, the study revealed that transcending cultural boundaries was a major challenge for all five principals. The women recounted that walking between two polarised contested worldviews was a constant battle. The initial problems with the community were compounded by the lack of community consultation from the central offices. This oversight on the part of the central offices in appointing



women in educational leadership positions did not transfer to leadership in communities. The women therefore had to devise their unique strategies in getting community acceptance and trust.

Although they worked collaboratively with the central offices in their positions, one of their greatest difficulties was engaging with bureaucratic communication. They experienced difficulties contributing to matters at meetings for all principals in Darwin mainly because of the language barrier.

Although some of the women were trained through the mentorship programs, they were all in agreement that the programs were short-lived and lacked proper structure. In relation to mentoring they also suggested the appointment of Indigenous people such as retired principals or respected elders in the community should work in tandem with mentors appointed through the central office.

While they achieved substantial successes in bridging the gap between cultures, issues of race and colour haunted these women. Being relatively new to educational leadership, they experienced racism from non-Indigenous staff who held the belief that a black woman lacked the capability to manage a school. This normally put enormous strains on their relationships with some non-Indigenous staff that ultimately led to a lack of confidence in carrying out their duties. In spite of these challenges the stories of the women provide some lessons to be learned in the field of educational leadership and school community partnerships.

#### **7.4 CONCLUSIONS OF THE RESEARCH**

The study used constructs of the conceptual framework of leadership pioneered by Astin and Leland (1991) that leadership is strongly influenced by social, cultural, and historical contexts; that leadership involves activities that engage and empower others in a collaborative effort; that interdependence is a significant element in viewing leadership and its practice. Significantly, the findings of this study recognise and endorse these constructs and further draws the following conclusions. These conclusions are significant as they represent the perspectives

of all five participants who have played a major role in shaping educational leadership practices in Indigenous remote communities.

Thus the results of the study reveal that as pioneers in educational leadership they provided increased understandings of the relevance of practising leadership within Indigenous contexts that appeal to the wider Indigenous community. Essentially with determination and resilience and often amidst enormous struggles and backlash, they succeeded in transforming school structures that were culturally responsive to the Indigenous context. It was also significant that each community school was unique in the way they operated which points to the fact that communities are unique in their constitution. Essentially they demonstrated that leadership can be practised in other ways that are equally effective. They were all concerned about bureaucratic ways of leading schools particularly structures that encouraged managing schools in hierarchical ways. As one of the participants pointed out in the interview *we do not want anyone to be a tall poppy*. The women approached school leadership from a more community collaborative style that worked towards shared leadership and vision in education. They redefined power and authority “as energy, not control” (Astin & Leland, 1991, p.8) where elders, parents, and wider community actively participate in school matters. This suggests that there is a need to further understand Indigenous ways of operating that could assist community schools in enhancing the cooperation and support of Indigenous communities.

Furthermore, the women were concerned about bureaucratic forms of appointing Indigenous principals without prior consultation with members of the community. An extensive search of the literature reveals that schools are integral parts of the community and that the achievements of students are greatly improved when parents and families are involved in school matters (Bond, 2004; Epstein, 2005). The women expressed that appointment of a school leader is not easily transferable to leadership in the community. Given that Indigenous communities are interdependent in nature as expressed by the women in this study, a significant finding is the importance of consulting widely with communities in the appointment of Indigenous principals in remote community schools. Consequently there is a need for understanding from bureaucrats the contextual nature of Indigenous communities and the importance of consulting with key stakeholders

and the wider community before such appointments are made. Failure to do so might stall or jeopardise school community partnership processes.

The study findings reveal that Indigenous female principals are constantly under pressure trying to balance school leadership, management, family and community commitments. Additionally, they are still being marginalised by Indigenous men in communities who hold the reins of power. They expressed that it is impossible and sometimes unrealistic for one person to provide a wide range of needs to both school and community obligations. While they demonstrated enormous tenacity in leading their schools, there was the lack of adequate support that they required to carry out bureaucratic functions. Thus, consideration should be given to the appointment of a non-Indigenous senior staff as school manager to be solely responsible for most administrative tasks hence providing time for Indigenous principals to demonstrate leadership of the school including negotiating school community partnerships. Such a person should work collaboratively with the leadership of the school.

The research findings also conclude that using the proper channels and protocols in communication is important in negotiating school community partnerships. As such, elements such as language, right environment, time, and gaining trust and respect are not to be underestimated. Negotiating a collective view as expressed by the participants takes time and enormous effort, in order to garner the support of parents and the wider community. This suggests that for school community partnerships to be sustainable there needs to be an understanding from central offices about the importance of giving schools enough time to communicate through the right protocols with their respective communities involving key stakeholders such as elders, community council members and other agents in communities understood by all community members. This also suggests that Indigenous principals are in the best position to negotiate partnerships with their communities as they understand the culturally appropriate ways of doing things more than anyone else. It also further suggests that key stakeholders such as Department of Education (DETNT) and Catholic Education Office (CEONT) endeavour to have a better understanding of the correct protocols in communicating with Indigenous people.

Through collaborative partnerships between schools and communities new knowledge is created and reinforced. The employment and active involvement of community members as teachers or ancillary staff, teachers work collaboratively in classrooms to create knowledge from a both ways perspective where knowledge of both cultures - Indigenous and non-Indigenous, are valued and respected. This is an effective way of getting community involved in school, something of value to offer and in turn feel empowered to make a contribution. Given the importance of creating individual and collective identities in society the women demonstrated the importance of reinforcing Indigenous identity through teaching and learning by encouraging classroom teachers to work in partnership.

Essentially, the collaborative nature of schools and communities require working in partnership with the system. The women demonstrated that amid the challenges of working with the bureaucracy they have the skills of working with and through the system to establish partnerships that are culturally responsive and sustainable. While the women were constrained by bureaucratic protocols they were skilful in negotiating by “walking the tight rope” that appealed to both community and system ideals. The study findings reveal that cultural difference is a critical factor in the school community negotiation process. While it is acknowledged that Northern Territory “public education complies with national guidelines and thus derived from Anglo-Celtic traditions” (Cameron, 1998, p. 115) the review of literature on culture and society reinforce the importance of recognising and heeding cultural differences in leading and managing organisations (Dimmock & Walker, 2005; Heck, 1998; Hofstede, 1993; Quong & Walker, 1998).

The study findings indicate that all five women were supportive of mentoring programs in the past. Although they gained from participating in such programs they were concerned that the programs were short lived, lacked proper structure and delivered in an ad hoc manner. Additionally they raised concerns about the absence of Indigenous experts in mentoring programs. Thus, providers of such services should give due consideration to evaluating the success of past programs and provide improved programs for Indigenous principals in remote community schools. Tertiary institutions such as Batchelor Institute and Charles Darwin University that also provide post graduate courses for Indigenous executive staff should work collaboratively with communities and professional development

services providers such as Department of Education (DETNT) and Catholic Education Office (CEONT).

Additionally the female principals expressed grave concerns about the lack of succession planning for other Indigenous senior staff in community schools to aspire to leadership positions. At the conclusion of this study three of the participants were already retired. As the number of Indigenous principals continue to dwindle, serious consideration should be given to succession planning in remote communities else we see a resurgence of non-Indigenous principals in remote community schools. Such a regression is in opposition with the policy of Aboriginalisation in the early 1990s.

Perhaps the most disturbing comment from the women is that in spite of their resilience and determination, they suffered racism and sexism from non-Indigenous staff and also external contractors who travelled to communities. From their perspective non-Indigenous workers felt they lack the capability to do the job and furthermore contractors had a lack of respect for “black people”. The findings suggest that there is still some amount of racism against Indigenous people. This confirms the findings of other research carried out involving Indigenous participants that there is a need to promote cultural awareness training in the workplace and the wider Australian society.

A significant finding in this study is the importance of the role of language and culture in building school community partnerships. The benefits of including the teaching of language and culture were clearly articulated by all participants as best practice in gaining the support of, and involving parents, elders and the wider community in school matters. All four schools endeavoured to involve cultural experts in decision making on curriculum programs and utilised their expertise when and how needed. It is worthy to note this conclusion in this study. Hence, consideration should be given to promoting and resourcing language and culture programs in Indigenous community schools. This would enhance school community partnerships and additionally develop community capacity building.

Notably, all the five Indigenous female school principals conceive of leadership and school community partnership negotiations as a collective and collaborative

process. Though they constantly had to “walk the tight rope” in working with the central office and being caught in community politics, they still felt that such collaboration was an important part of school leadership and building school community partnerships. Their collective vision was to lead schools and negotiate partnerships that were culturally responsive.

## **7.5 IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

This study is a remarkable narrative of five Indigenous female principals in the Top End of the NT and issues in negotiating school community partnerships with their respective community schools. The study is significant for a number of reasons. Firstly, it sheds light on the practice of educational leadership from Indigenous female perspective. Secondly, a search of the literature revealed a considerable gap on studies involving Indigenous female school leaders who are a minority group in Australia. Consequently, it is a major contribution to the leadership and school community partnership literature from an Indigenous perspective. Thirdly, it informs policy and practice on opportunities for improvement at both local, State/Territory and Federal levels on matters involving not only school community partnerships but other forms of partnerships within Indigenous contexts. Lastly, it is the first study focusing on Indigenous women narrating stories utilising two separate threads of lived life and told story thus giving a parallel view of the relationship between two biographical elements. This technique provided a richer holistic understanding and justification for the reasons for the Indigenous principals’ leadership behaviour.

The uniqueness of the study stems from the fact that the women who collaborated in the investigation have never been studied as a pioneering cohort in school leadership in Indigenous education in Northern Territory or elsewhere in Australia.

Arguably, as a pioneering study, it provides an understanding of educational leadership practice in Indigenous contexts that is perceptible and commendable. Following are recommendations based on the findings in the study.

### **7.5.1 Recommendations for Further Research**

Notably, the study has provided insights into female Indigenous school leadership and issues that involve negotiating school community partnerships. It accentuates the need for further research into school leadership and school community partnerships in the following areas:

- Further research on leadership practice using models incorporating BNIM as a methodology. The data gathering in this study provided the participants the opportunity to take control of the research process with the researcher relegated to a passive minimalist collaborator position. This balance of power in research is particularly relevant in studies involving Indigenous people. Additionally, the contribution of panel teams as a process of triangulation was enriching and significant in validating the research findings.
- Further research involving a diversity of Indigenous female school leaders from other parts of the Northern Territory such as Central Australia. Such investigation would give a more holistic view on leadership practice and school community partnership negotiations in Indigenous remote community schools.
- Further research is required on school community partnership negotiations involving community participants that will throw light on perceptions of the community over school community partnership development.
- Conduct a comparative study involving both Indigenous female and male educational leaders to discern differences in school leadership practice particularly that involving school community partnership issues.
- Conduct research evaluating school community partnership initiatives in Indigenous remote community schools to provide data on opportunities for improvement.
- Further research on leadership practice involving non-Indigenous school principals in Indigenous remote school contexts.

## 7.5.2 Recommendations for Policy

It is recommended that:

- Central offices such as the Department of Education and Training NT (DETNT) and the Catholic Education Office NT (CEONT) in consultation with communities negotiate the appointment of Indigenous principals in remote Indigenous community schools. Such grassroots consultation and input in school leadership appointments will generate positive support from elders and community members thus creating a more supportive environment for Indigenous school leaders.
- Central offices negotiate policies that affect remote Indigenous communities with such communities and that communication is open to all stakeholders including principals, staff, community members and parents. This should involve flexibility and a reasonable timeframe for feedback and dialogue from communities prior to implementation. Sensitivity to cultural differences will initiate better understanding between parties that will lead to better practice.
- The NT Government and central offices work collaboratively with communities to provide on going support for bilingual programs through formal policy and appropriate resources where communities strongly believe such programs reinforce teaching and learning in remote Indigenous schools. A major result of the study revealed a compelling impact and influence of culture in negotiating school community partnerships. Such collaboration and shared responsibility will lead to improved community involvement and will ultimately support leadership practices and improved educational outcomes.
- At a central organisation level that a systemic plan be developed, resourced, and implemented to provide on going mandatory intercultural leadership in- service training (for all staff including senior executives at system level) that recognises and integrates Indigenous ways of knowing and practice drawing on various expertise in and outside the Northern Territory. Such training should endeavour to include leadership capabilities for development and outcomes that will lead to better



understanding and acceptance of management practices of various cultures.

- At a national level re-establish comprehensive adult education programs in collaboration with communities. Such programs should be tailored to promote capacity building individually and collectively as a community. This will require the establishment of well resourced facilities with some strategic terms of reference to ensure targeted outcomes are achieved.
- At a system level explore, develop, and support scholarship that advances Indigenous knowledges.
- Policies on combating racism and sexism be promoted and reinforced widely at a local school and system level.

### **7.5.3 Recommendations for Practice**

It is recommended that:

- Central offices in collaboration with communities develop intensive and structured professional development programs in line with leadership capabilities that are context bound for Indigenous school principals. The programs should be tailored to meet the needs of this cohort with a maximum time frame of five years. Implementation of such a program should recruit a group of experienced and qualified staff called Professional Development Consultants (PDC) who will work collaboratively and should be available to all Indigenous executives including those working with the central offices. In Indigenous communities, it is further recommended that central offices negotiate with communities for a suitable Indigenous individual in a paid position and in the same capacity as the PDCs to work closely with Indigenous school leaders and aspiring Indigenous school principals.
- Central offices develop well resourced plans and implementation strategies and engage the expertise of retired Indigenous principals in remote community schools and the central offices that will ensure continued and effective application of their knowledge and expertise.

- In consultation and collaboration with Indigenous communities, the central offices should plan an intergenerational focus on leadership development that will incorporate succession planning for educational leadership positions targeting senior Indigenous executive staff in remote community schools. Additionally, it is strongly recommended that in consultation with communities who develops a strategic plan be developed aimed at retaining Indigenous teachers in remote communities.
- Central offices commit to funding on-going professional development for Indigenous school council members in remote Indigenous communities on their roles and responsibilities in school management.
- A strategic plan is developed for partnerships with institutions such as Batchelor Institute and Charles Darwin University to work collaboratively with experts such as Professional Development Consultants (PDC) in identifying skills Indigenous principals may require in their training and development.
- Some amount of flexibility needs to be exercised by the central offices in recognising the multiplicity of roles Indigenous women play in their communities. The appointment of a non-Indigenous manager to assist the Indigenous principal in all remote schools will significantly improve practice and provide quality time for Indigenous principals to engage with their communities in building school community partnerships.
- There be on-going support at a system level for families, schools and communities in partnership developments to address appropriate cultural protocols emphasising community strengths and resources.
- The communities be given the flexibility to practise leadership and manage their schools as their unique contexts require and not impose systemic generalised policies. This could require an assessment of readiness of individual communities in taking up certain responsibilities.
- The central offices work with principals and implement continuous monitoring of school community partnership practices that will lead to an evaluation every two years.
- The central offices in consultation with communities commit to funding activities that will involve senior Indigenous students in school

community partnerships. The students should be selected initially from each school community with the aim of developing cluster/regional programs. Such programs will give students a “voice” in school matters and provide leadership opportunities for the upcoming generation.

## **7.6 FINAL THOUGHTS**

This research was born out of a desire to explore the issues that impact on school community partnerships in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. Though the findings of this study report the perspectives of five Indigenous women educational leaders from four Top End remote communities, their views are extremely significant as representative of a pioneer cohort of school leaders in Indigenous remote communities. With a service in education spanning over two decades each of the women principals narrate with passion their individual and collective ways they set an agenda for school leadership that is antithetical to Anglo-American ideologies that have dominated their schools over the past years. As the women attest in their stories, their journeys in education and school leadership have been mostly thrilling, confronting, and priceless. They express the need for collaboration, corporation and respect for a dialogic process at all levels from stakeholders.

While embracing a nationwide concern for the safety and well-being of Indigenous children in remote communities, one of the participants raised the concern that it *“is very interesting these people are coming to find out what is best for our children”*. This is reminiscent of the activities of colonial days where consultations with communities were non-existent. Their voices have created a forum for discussion and deliberation on bureaucratic reform agendas on Indigenous issues not only in NT remote Indigenous communities but on national issues that should create a sense of freedom and self determination. As new initiatives are about to be implemented on engaging communities in school life, educationists and policy practitioners are challenged once more through the distinctive stories of the women to reflect on implementation measures that in the past have created further entrapment of the lives of Indigenous Australians.

## APPENDIX A

### Human Research Ethics Committee

#### Committee Approval Form

**Principal Investigator/Supervisor:** Professor Tony D'Arbon Sydney Campus

**Co-Investigators:** Dr Jack Frawley, Dr Lyn Fasoli (BIITE) Sydney Campus

**Student Researcher:** Ms Martha Kamara Sydney Campus

**Ethics approval has been granted for the following project:**

Indigenous Female Educational Leaders in Northern Territory Remote Community Schools: Issues in Negotiating School Community Partnerships.

**for the period:** 31 August 2007 to 30 April 2008

**Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number:** N200607 63

The following **standard** conditions as stipulated in the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (1999)* apply:

- (i) 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
- (ii) 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.



Signed:

Date: 31 August 2007  
(Research Services Officer, McAuley Campus)

## APPENDIX B



Australian Catholic University Limited  
ABN 15 050 192 660  
Strathfield Campus (Mount Saint Mary)  
25a Barker Road Strathfield  
New South Wales 2135 Australia  
Locked Bag 2002 Strathfield  
New South Wales 2135 Australia  
Telephone **02 9701 4187**  
Facsimile **02 9701 4023**  
www.acu.edu.au

### INFORMATION LETTER TO PARTICIPANTS

TITLE OF PROJECT: Indigenous Women Leaders in Northern Territory  
Remote Community Schools: Issues in Negotiating  
School Community Partnerships

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS: Professor Tony D'Arbon  
Dr Jack Frawley  
Associate Professor Lyn Fasoli

STUDENT RESEARCHER: Ms Martha Kamara

COURSE: Doctor of Philosophy

Dear Participant

You are invited to participate in a research-funded project by the Australian Research Council (ARC). I am a doctoral candidate enrolled at the Australian Catholic University investigating Indigenous female principals and their perspectives on negotiating school community partnerships. The study seeks to generate insights into leadership, and the skills and strategies involved in negotiating and sustaining school community partnerships that are culturally desirable in remote Indigenous NT community schools. Specifically, this study asks the question, *'How do remote NT Indigenous women principals negotiate partnerships between their schools and their respective communities?'* The study will explore the experiences and views of six Indigenous female principals from five remote communities in the Northern Territory.

Five indigenous female principals will be invited to participate in face-to-face interviews and discussion.

There will be visits to each participant in their familiar community setting for interviews and follow up. The face-to-face interview will be in the form of storytelling. The questions will be open-ended to help obtain detailed views and opinions from participants. However, some initial 'closed questions' will be used to establish details such as educational history, employment history, family relationships and any other details necessary to provide basic context information. Throughout the interviews, a digital recorder will be used to record your responses during the conversations and care will be taken to identify individual interviews by labeling each participant using their name and date of interview. This will be transcribed later and a member check carried out in order to validate recorded interviews.

Great care will be taken to store information in a lockable location for confidentiality purposes. During the research process, important documents such as departmental policies, and other related local school documents will be collected and examined. The researcher will maintain a journal throughout the research process outlining the topics and issues discussed at all interviews. It will also be used to document incidental encounters with you in informal conversations.

The date and timing of interviews and discussions will be negotiated with you and there will be minimal disruption to your professional and domestic normal routine. There will be on going telephone conversations with you to ensure you are comfortable with the process.

The potential benefits to you as a collaborative researcher is sharing ownership of the research and having the opportunity to be involved in negotiating and modifying the research process such as your comment on the questions and the format of the interview. Your involvement will also give you an opportunity to share your experiences with your colleagues and make a contribution that could benefit not only other Indigenous principals but also education policy makers and Indigenous education in general.

Your participation is on a voluntary basis and you are free to participate and under no obligation to whatsoever in this research even though you are personally known to the researcher. As such, non-participation will have no consequences. You are free to withdraw consent and discontinue with the study at any time during the process without giving any reason.


Also, you will be given the option to be identified if you want to, that is, actually using your name in the research. You will indicate this on the consent form attached to this letter. If you choose to be named or remain anonymous, you will have full access to your data during the research process for your clarification and every effort will be made to keep you informed of the progress of the research. If you have any questions about the project please contact the principal supervisor, Professor Tony D'Arbon on 02 97014187 in the Flagship for Creative and Authentic Leadership, Mount St Mary Campus at the Australian Catholic University, 25A Barker Road, STRATHFIELD NSW 2135.

The Human Research Ethics Committee at the Australian Catholic University has approved the study and it is supported by the ACU Indigenous Research advisory Group (IRAG). You will be encouraged at the beginning of the study to consider identifying an individual to act as a critical friend you can talk to during and after interviews or focus group discussions and throughout the research process for debriefing if you are upset or have concerns about any issues relating to the research process. Further to this, in the event that you have any complaints or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, or any query that the researcher has not been able to satisfy, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee at the address below.

Chair, HREC  
Australian Catholic University, Sydney Campus  
Locked Bag 2002  
STRATHFIELD NSW 2135  
Tel: 02 9701 4159  
Fax: 02 9701 4350

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated, and you will be informed of the outcome.

If you agree to participate in this project, please sign the attached informed consent form. You should sign both copies of the consent form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the student researcher. Your support for the research will be most appreciated.

.....  
  
Martha Kamara (Student Researcher)

.....  
Professor Tony D'Arbon  
(Principal Supervisor)

.....  
Dr Jack Frawley (Co-supervisor)

.....  
Dr Lyn Fasoli (Associate Supervisor)

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT FORM

TITLE OF PROJECT (block letters): Indigenous Women Leaders in Northern Territory Remote Community Schools: Issues in Negotiating School Community Partnerships.

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR (block letters): PROFESSOR TONY D'ARBON

CO-SUPERVISOR (block letters): DR JACK FRAWLEY

CO-SUPERVISOR (block letters): DR LYN FASOLI

NAME OF STUDENT RESEARCHER (block letters): MARTHA KAMARA

I ..... have read and understood the information provided in the Letter to Participants. Any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in the face-to-face interviews (current principals only) and focus group discussion which may be audiotaped. I realise that I am under no obligation to participate and that I can withdraw my consent at any time without comment or penalty. I am aware that although the researcher will do everything in her power to maintain confidentiality, given the small sample size, it is possible that identification of my participation may occur by inference. I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or may be provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way if I choose not to be identified. I am also aware that I am given the option of giving my consent to be identified.

Do you give your consent to be identified in the research report?

Please tick the appropriate box.  YES  NO

NAME OF PARTICIPANT(block letters): .....

SIGNATURE ..... DATE ...../...../.....

SIGNATURE OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR: .....

DATE ...../...../.....

SIGNATURE OF STUDENT RESEARCHER: ...  .....

DATE:...../...../.....



## APPENDIX C (Panel Team Invitation)

Dear colleague

This letter is to invite you to participate in a panel session of interviews I have conducted, transcribed and in the process of analysing. In my research I have employed 'The Biographic Narrative Interpretive Method' as an analytical tool and part of the process of analysing data is the recruitment of reflecting teams that facilitate the introduction of multiple voices as a collective means of deliberation.

I hope to recruit colleagues (two or three per team) from various backgrounds, professional as well as demographic to be immersed in chunks of data to open up possibilities in interpretation rather than relying solely on my primary interpretation of the interview. This activity will not require you to have a research specific or academic background. This allows a diversity and unique contribution to the process. I hope to commence panel teams in the next fortnight. Each panel team will meet for a maximum of two sessions with each session lasting approximately three hours. I'll be facilitating all sessions.

Please respond by email or telephone if you are able to participate in this process. I can be contacted on 89411836 or mobile 0408459713 or email [Martha.kamara@student.acu.edu.au](mailto:Martha.kamara@student.acu.edu.au). If you agree to participate in the sessions you'll be advised about your session dates and times.

Food will be provided at all sessions and if you have any special preference please let me know and I'll do my best to cater for your needs.

Thank you for your assistance and I look forward to a productive session.



Martha Kamara

## **Appendix D (Agenda for Panel Teams)**

Welcome

### **Why are we here?**

To generate ideas and consider a range of possibilities in the interpretation of interviews

### **What role will you play?**

Your role is to add value to the project by contributing different perspectives and interpretations about the life of an individual and her perspectives.

### **What role will I play?**

Facilitate the analysis, keep a written record about contributions, and say very little about my interpretations of the individual's life or story.

### **Meeting agenda**

9.00 am - Introductions

Information about the process

Process commences

10.45am – coffee/tea break

11.00am – process continues

12.30pm – finish – lunch – enjoy a variety of delicious African dishes

### **Important points**

Ethical issues: respecting confidentiality

Listen positively to everything

Importance of generating as many interpretations as possible

Don't worry about BNIM terminology

Have fun – 'the future belongs to those who live intensely in the present'  
(Anon)

### **Central questions the panel needs to ask themselves about each datum in turn (BDA)**

1. How could the event be experienced – in relation to the context of age, personal development, family, generation and milieu?

2. How could it contribute to the shaping of her life?

3. What events and actions might be expected to follow next or later in life if those experiential and/or shaping hypotheses were correct?

### **Central questions about each datum of TFA**

1. In which thematic field is the single sequence embedded?

2. What might be the hidden agenda?

3. Why is the interviewee talking about the topic using this specific kind of text?

4. What might come next in the interview if the hypotheses about 1-3 turned out to be true?

5. What, if any hypotheses about the thematic field of the whole story suggest themselves at this stage?

## **APPENDIX E**

### **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP)**

#### **MAJOR GOAL 1 - Involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Educational Decision-Making**

##### *Long Term Goals*

1. To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of pre-school, primary and secondary education services for their children.
2. To increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed as educational administrators, teachers, curriculum advisers, teachers assistants, home-school liaison officers and other education workers, including community people engaged in teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, history and con-temporary society, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.
3. To establish effective arrangements for the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and community members in decisions regarding the planning, delivery and evaluation of post-school education services, including technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.
4. To increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed as administrators, teachers, researchers and student services officers in technical and further education colleges and higher education institutions.
5. To provide education and training services to develop the skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate in educational decision-making.
6. To develop arrangements for the provisions of independent advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities regarding educational decisions at regional, State, Territory and National levels.

## **MAJOR GOAL 2 – Equality of Access to Education Services**

### *Long Term Goals*

7. To ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children of pre-primary school have access to pre-school services on a basis comparable to that available to other Australian children of the same age.
8. To ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have local access to primary and secondary schooling.
9. To ensure equitable access of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to post-compulsory secondary schooling, to technical and further education, and to higher education.

## **MAJOR GOAL 3 – Equity of Educational Participation**

### *Long Term Goals*

10. To achieve the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in pre-school education for a period similar to that for other Australian children.
11. To achieve the participation of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in compulsory schooling.
12. To achieve the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in post-secondary education, in technical and further education, and in higher education, at rates commensurate with those of other Australians in those sectors.

## **MAJOR GOAL 4 – Equitable and Appropriate Educational Outcomes**

### *Long Term Goals*

13. To provide adequate preparation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through pre-school education for the schooling years ahead.
14. To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander attainment of skills to the same standard as other Australian students throughout the compulsory schooling years.
15. To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attain the successful completion of Year 12 or equivalent at the same rates as for other Australian students.
16. To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attain the same graduation rates from award courses in technical and further education, and in higher education, as for other Australians.
17. To develop programs to support the maintenance and continued use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages.
18. To provide community education services which enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people develop the skills to manage the development of their communities.
19. To enable the attainment of proficiency in English language and numeracy competencies by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults with limited or no educational experience.
20. To enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at all levels of education to have an appreciation of their history, cultures and identity.
21. To provide all Australian students with an understanding of and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditional and contemporary cultures.

(Source: Department of Education, Science and Training, 2007).

## **APPENDIX F**

### **Indigenous Education Strategic Plan 2006 – 2009**

#### **Five Major Outcome Areas**

1. Valuing school

*Improved community and school partnerships.*

2. Coming to school

*Increased enrolments and attendance.*

3. Learning and achieving at school

*Increased achievement at all levels of schooling.*

4. Staying at school

*Increased retention of Indigenous students  
through the critical stages of schooling.*

5. Choosing opportunities after school

*More opportunities for Indigenous students  
after school.*

(Indigenous Education Strategic Plan. Department of Employment,  
Education and Training, NT Government, 2006)

## APPENDIX G

### A chronology of events in the development of Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education

DATE	DEVELOPMENT	COMMENTS
1953	Decision to employ Aboriginal Teaching Assistants in NT Aboriginal schools	Roles and responsibilities: prepare teaching aids; assist in correcting pupils' work; supervising students
1960	First training for 20 Aboriginal Teaching Assistants	Course aims: instruction in teaching methods and range of experiences
1968	One year full-time Aboriginal teacher training course at Kormilda College	Opportunity for career structure from TA1 to TA2
1972	Vocational Training Centre established at Batchelor	Emphasis was on supporting their roles as Teacher Assistants and also give them an opportunity to acquire European skills
1973	Darwin Community College (DCC) provided third year of training for Aboriginal Teaching Assistants	Awarded certificates of Aboriginal Teaching Assistants limited to Aboriginal schools; first time admitted to Commonwealth Teaching Service
1973	Watts, McGrath, Tandy Report released	Recommended introduction of Bilingual Education in Aboriginal schools and team teaching; Report recognised significant role for Aboriginal teachers and Teaching Assistants
1974	Aboriginal Teacher Education relocated from Kormilda College to Batchelor	Renamed Aboriginal Teacher Education Centre (ATEC); School of Australian Linguistics set up to provide short basic training for Aboriginal people working in Bilingual schools

<b>DATE</b>	<b>DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
1976	Beginning of Remote Area Teacher Education (RATE) at Yirrkala	Teaching Assistants studying part-time and working part-time in classrooms
1979	ATEC renamed Batchelor Institute	Commonwealth agreed to fund new facilities
1980	Board of Governors established with majority of members from Feppi (NT Aboriginal Education Advisory Committee)  Proposal for Batchelor to deliver a Teacher Education course	Very little mention was made about this board in official documents. Reports indicate it was an ineffective body; Associate Diploma of Teaching (Aboriginal Schools) accredited with little consultation with Aboriginal people
1982	New Batchelor facilities occupied with continued Commonwealth funding; proposal to establish College Council to replace former Board of Governors	Proposal for Accredited Diploma course to recognise Aboriginal teachers as "equal but different" to mainstream graduates rejected by Minister of Education
1983	Batchelor Institute Council and Board of Studies established to advise NT Education Department	Mr Jim Gallacher first Chairman of Council; first students graduate with an Associate Diploma of Teaching (Aboriginal Schools)
1984	Evaluation of RATE program by Deakin University staff	Most of the research done in 1984-85; report released in 1988
1985	College moved to full-time on campus mode; RATE program continued; Move to establish permanent presence in Alice Springs for staff to work with students in communities	Batchelor Institute under governance of NTEd with the principal responsible to the Assistant Secretary; John Ingram principal of the College



<b>DATE</b>	<b>DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
1986	Beginning of the Deakin-Batchelor Teacher Education Program (D-BATE) leading to BA (Ed); plans to establish an annex in Alice Springs	Three full-time and three part-time students enrolled; College strengthened identification with communities in order to respond to community demands and interests
1988	College reorganised into two Schools: Teacher Education and Community Studies. Six months consultation with communities for the College's future to be recognised as a national Institute of Tertiary Education	Annex officially established in Alice Springs; Move to recognise College led to preparation of Batchelor Institute of Aboriginal Tertiary Education (BIATE). Decision to transfer training of Aboriginal Health Workers to Batchelor Institute
1989	Establishment of an Assistant Director position; NT Education Amendment Act of 1989 giving the College Council significant powers in management	Dr David McClay appointed. First edition of College's by-laws, rules, and delegations prepared; Bill Baird appointed first Indigenous Chairman of Council for a period of six months; In July Commodore Johnson appointed Chairman with an Indigenous majority
1990	Academic programs organised into four Schools: Education, Health, Community, and Student Services	Central Australian Campus relocated to Bloomsfield; annexes set up in Katherine Nhulunbuy, Darwin, and Tennant Creek; Enrolments reached 665
1991	College committed to "both-ways approach to cultural interaction and cross-cultural learning; affirming principles of self-determination and self-management for Indigenous people	Development of Ass Dip and Dip in Early Childhood, Health Science, Linguistics (Aboriginal languages), Cert in Community Skills
1994	Commonwealth and NT government agreeing on College progressing to independence under an autonomous Council	1150 students enrolled from over 220 locations in over 20 courses; About 55% in Higher Ed; about 70% were women aged between 30 and 45 years; Colleges first Grad Cert program in Hearing Impairment

<b>DATE</b>	<b>DEVELOPMENT</b>	<b>COMMENTS</b>
1995	Under the PSEMA and NT Education Amendment Act Batchelor Institute became an agency within the NT Public Sector	Five students began the Grad Cert in Educational Administration; Indigenous senior staff in remote Aboriginal communities aspiring to principal positions
1996	Veronica Arbon appointed Head of School of Community Studies first Indigenous member of staff to be appointed at this level	Student enrolment totalled 1920. Students enrolled in the first Grad Dip in Ed Admin program; Gatjil Djerrkura appointed Chairman of Council with Commordore Johnson as mentor
1998	Nearly 40 Community Study Centres recognised under partnership agreements with additional study facilities in 25 other communities. Succession planning for Director position became a matter of urgency	Veronica Arbon promoted Assistant Director (Academic Development)
1999	Batchelor Institute Established as Batchelor Institute of Indigenous Tertiary Education (BIITE)	Veronica Arbon– First Aboriginal Director appointed Meg Friel (Aboriginal) appointed Head of School of Community Studies
2000	Discussions to appoint an all Indigenous Executive in line with Institute's vision for self-management	Discussions continue for the Institute to acquire University status and negotiations with government over establishment of Central Australian Consortium
2003	Rose Kunoth-Monks Indigenous woman from Utopia in Central Australia appointed Deputy Chair of BIITE	
2005	End of Veronica Arbon's term as Director of BIITE and appointment of John Ingram, former Director as interim Director	Community consultation on-going

DATE	DEVELOPMENT	COMMENTS
2006	Appointment of Dr Jeannie Herbert as Director BIITE	
2007	Approval by Council to enrol full fee-paying non-Indigenous students for the first time in the history of the Institute.	Finalisation of Remote Community Consultation Report

## APPENDIX H

**Table History of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory**

<b>Year</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Indigenous Education</b>	<b>Policies and Reviews</b>
1877	Lutheran	Finke River Mission (Hermannsburg)		
1886	Jesuits (Catholics)	Daly River		
1908	(CMS)	Roper River Mission		Police take responsibility from medical officers - Protection of Aborigines
1910	(Catholics) OLSH(Our Lady of the Sacred Heart) sisters		Orphanage for 'half-caste' girls	NT Administration Act
1911	Catholics	Bathurst Island Mission led by Fr Gsell		NT transferred to C'wealth under NT Acceptance Act
1912	Our Lady of the Sacred Heart sisters	Bathurst Island mainland	School for half-caste	
1914	Government administration	The Bungalow in Alice Springs	Half-castes taught in the afternoons	
1916	MOM	Goulburn Island	School for Tiwis	Aboriginals Ordinance – cohabitation of Aboriginal women by whites & Asiatics forbidden (1918)
1921	CMS	Groote Eyland		
1923	MOM MOM	Milingimbi Elcho Island		
1925	CMS	Oenpelli		

<b>Year</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Indigenous Education</b>	<b>Policies and Reviews</b>
1928-29	Chief protector of Aborigines in Queensland's Bleakley	Inspection and report on NT half-caste and Aborigines		Study on status of Aborigines & half-castes in NT Conference of missionaries pastoralists & unionist on wages for half-castes
1932			Removal of half-caste boys from Kahlin compound to Pine Creek	
1935	MOM Catholic	Yirrkala Port Keats		Study of Arnhemland tribes for Commonwealth
1938	Government	Bagot	First govt Aboriginal school	Policy on Native Affairs tabled in Federal parliament
1941	Catholic OLSH	Port Keats Garden Point	School at Port Keats Children moved from Bathurst Island and Darwin to half caste homes	
1943	Ella Shepherdson (principal)	Elcho Island	School	
1948	Conference on education of Aborigines. Policy developed including assimilation			
1949	Survey into problems of educating 'full-blooded Aborigines assumed responsibility to administer system of education for Aborigines			

<b>Year</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Indigenous Education</b>	<b>Policies and Reviews</b>
1950-51	Establishment of government schools for Aborigines – Bagot, Bungalow, Yuendumu, Areonga, Beswick			Commonwealth Office of Education assumed responsibility for education of full-blood Aboriginal children
1952	CMS	Numbulwar		Aboriginal Benefits Trust Fund established for royalties
1953	Catholic	Santa Teresa Beswick reserve gazetted		LegCo passed Welfare Ordinance to introduce assimilation in NT
1954		Settlements at Areyonga & Papunya	Pre-school for Aboriginal children	Policy on Assimilation becomes official
1954 – 1958	Government Catholic	New Daly River mission	Pastoral schools established School at Milingimbi & Finke	Policy on secondary education for halfcastes in southern schools Welfare Ordinance came into force (1957)
1960		Warrabi Aboriginal reserve gazetted	Pre-school opened at Yirrkala	
1963	Government and Mission	37 special schools for Aborigines - 12 Govt - 5 Govt on pastoral leases - 5 subsidised on pastoral properties - 15 Mission	Kormilda College opened	Conference of state and Commonwealth ministers. Assimilation policy restated

<b>Year</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Indigenous Education</b>	<b>Policies and Reviews</b>
1964			Watts/Gallacger Report on formal education for Aborigines Pre-school opened at Oenpelli (1965)	Social welfare Ordinance to replace Welfare Ordinance
1967	Referendum inclusion of Aboriginal natives in census			
1968				
1972	Commonwealth responsibility	Aboriginal schooling		Labor government put aside policy of assimilation; integration in favour of self determination
1973		Bilingual Education in five schools		
1974				National aboriginal consultative group appointed
1976				Aboriginal Land Rights Act NT
1977				National Aboriginal Education Committee (NAEC) Assimilation policy nationally revoked

<b>Year</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Indigenous Education</b>	<b>Policies and Reviews</b>
1978	Feppi formed : Aboriginal Education Consultative group for NT		Kevin Rogers appointed principal at Ngukkur	
1979				
1980				
1982	Legislation passed for establishment of school councils			Review of research and developments and related policies in the education of Aborigines
1983	NT Schools: Direction for the Eighties		Action groups established in schools developing determination of Aboriginal people to take control of education decision making processes	
1984		Yirrkala	First Action Group established without principal's support	Information statement: education for Aborigines: Strategies for improving the academic performance of Aboriginal students in primary and secondary education
1985				
1986				Feppi 12 point plan NTDE Report: Aboriginal education in the NT



<b>Year</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Indigenous Education</b>	<b>Policies and Reviews</b>
1987 - 88	Towards the 90's: Excellence, Accountability and Devolution in Education for the Future Vol 1 & 2	Yirrkala  Galiwin'ku	Trial program for Aboriginalisation of the school  Aboriginalisation program	Aboriginal Education Policy Task Force replaced NACE
1988	ATSIC	created		
1989	Common and agreed National goals for Schooling in Australia	Yirrkala  Milingimbi	Aboriginalisation program	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (AEP)
1990			13 teachers in mentor support programs towards taking up promotional positions	Review of Education of Traditionally Oriented Aboriginal people in NT
1992	High court	Mabo Judgement	Miriam-Rose Bauman – Principal St Francis Xavier School Daly River  Rose Guwanga- Principal Shepherdson College  Shirley Nirrurranydiji- Principal Gapuwiyak CEC	Recognized native title
1994			100+ Aboriginal teachers & 300 Assistant teachers	National review of Education for ATSI: Discussion paper
1995	FEPPi renamed NT Aboriginal Education consultative committee			

<b>Year</b>	<b>Organisation</b>	<b>Community</b>	<b>Indigenous Education</b>	<b>Policies and Reviews</b>
1997			Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School first Aboriginal principal appointed- Kilipayuwu Puruntatameri	
1999	Implementation of	Schools our Focus		Phase out Bilingual language program Collins Review of delivery of education to Indigenous students in NT, 'Shaping Territory Education Initiative report, Learning Lessons
2000	Commonwealth		Appointment of Esther Djayhurrgha – Aboriginal principal Gunbalanya CEC	Commonwealth initiative to improve outcomes for education for Indigenous Australians
2000 - 2004		Nguiu Murrupurtiyanuwu Catholic School	Leah Kerinauia appointed Principal	National Indigenous English literacy and numeracy strategy
2006-2009			Indigenous Education strategic plan	
2006	NT Government	NT Indigenous remote communities		Investigation into child abuse in Indigenous communities

Year	Organisation	Community	Indigenous Education	Policies and Reviews
2007	Federal Government Intervention NT government			Wild/Anderson Report into Child Abuse submitted  Federal govt. suspends -- Racial Discrimination Act  -Permits to NT Indigenous Communities
2008				Closing the Gap on Indigenous education
2009	Federal Govt/NT Govt	NT Indigenous remote communities		Implementation of Wild/Anderson report

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