

CONDITIONS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS IN SCHOOL

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STATEMENT OF AUTHORSHIP

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

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

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

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



Lynette Riley

31 March 2015

DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my family and dear friends:

My wonderful children, in-laws and grandchildren who have been so patient with giving their mother/grandmother the time and space required to complete this research.

I particularly thank my youngest child Garigarra Riley-Mundine who listened and listened to her mother and told her to stop crying and just get it done.

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As a post note I will add that it took me sometime between the initial research; the writing up of the research and submission of the thesis; which was followed by a year of being very ill with advanced breast cancer in my spine, in 2015. But I have gotten through that and was determined to get the corrections made and get this thesis completed. Thank you to all the above who hung with me through that difficult stage and assisted me in getting it all done. I am very proud that for my 60th I have completed this important study and will graduate with my doctorate. This thesis just goes to prove, anyone can do it with the will to get it done; and I offer my apologies to those schools – the students, parents, principals, teachers and Aboriginal staff who have waited for so long for this research to be published.

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DEFINITION OF TERMS

It is important to firstly identify and acknowledge the term *Aboriginal*, which refers to Aboriginal Australians in New South Wales (NSW) and used in accordance with the advice of the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group Inc. (NSW AECG), the leading Aboriginal Education Consultative Group in NSW. This thesis has focussed on *Aboriginal* people of NSW. Aboriginal people refer to themselves by their Nation and/or Clan groups, such as: Wirajduri / Dubbo-ga, unfortunately Aboriginal Nation and Clan group distinctions are not generally recognised in wider Australian communities.

The word *Indigenous* is used by governments in Australia and refers to the First People of Australia, including both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The phrase *Aboriginal Education* refers to the teaching of and about Aboriginal peoples of Australia. *Aboriginal Education* incorporates *Aboriginal Studies* which is the way in which all students are taught about Aboriginal people inclusive of Aboriginal perspectives and culturally embedded programs of study.

In **Aboriginal cultural relationships** there are terms which must be adhered to and references when working with Aboriginal people, they are:

Elders – refers to Aboriginal cultural knowledge holders; and *elders* in reference to aged Aboriginal people in the communities, who may also be referred to as *Aunties* or *Uncles* in recognition of their status in the Aboriginal community.

Kinship – This is a proper noun and refers to Aboriginal Kinship structures within Aboriginal Nation and Clan groups.

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS & TERMS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AECG	Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
AEO	Aboriginal Education Officer
AEW	Aboriginal Education Worker
AEP	Aboriginal Education Policy - NSW Department of Education and Communities
AER	Report of the Review of Aboriginal Education: <i>Yanigurra Muya: Ganggurrinyma Yaari Guurulaw Yirringin.gurray (Freeing the Spirit: Dreaming an Equal Future)</i> (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004)
AETP	Aboriginal Education and Training Policy
ASSPA	Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness Program
ATSIC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATYP	Australian Theatre for Young People
CAR	Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation
CDEP	Community Development and Employment Projects
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
COGS	Community, Opportunity, Growth, Success – units of study within schools based on these four focus areas for students
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DEST	Department of Education, Science, and Training
DETYA	Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs
EEO	Equal Employment Opportunity
HREOC	Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission

IESIP	Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAEC	National Aboriginal Education Committee
NAIDOC	National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee
NATSIEP	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey
NIELNS	National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy
NRPIET	National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training
NSW DEC	New South Wales Department of Education and Communities
NSW DET	New South Wales Department of Education and Training
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PPL	Personalised Learning Plans
TAS	Teacher Aide Special
UN	United Nations

ABSTRACT

Despite a willingness by stakeholders to address Aboriginal education disadvantage and recent successes in outcomes, Australian education largely continues to fail to provide Aboriginal Australians with educational outcomes and life opportunities commensurate with those of their non-Aboriginal peers. Well-intentioned and widely presumed assumptions about what works to seed success for Aboriginal students seem to prevail and are often unquestionably accepted and implemented as making a real difference in the absence of tangible proof and systemic results. Whilst a diversity of interventions have been implemented they are small-scale in nature, have not been rigorously tested, often rely on a deficit model as opposed to what works for successful students, and have not resulted in fuelling systemic change. Lack of reliable data is impeding progress in addressing the educational disadvantage that Aboriginal children suffer and the development of new solutions for interventions aimed at enhancing the educational outcomes of Aboriginal students. Theory, research, and practice are all inextricably intertwined; neglect in any one area will undermine the others.

In Australia research has set the path for Aboriginal education across schools, vocational education and universities, with the emphasis being — and rightly so — on closing the massive gap of up to 36 months behind in learning for the majority of Aboriginal students by the time these students reach Year 7 (New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (NSW AECG) & New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET), 2004). This has often meant that in the practice of teaching Aboriginal students there has been a focus on the problems of Aboriginal students, which has tended to place Aboriginal students in a deficit position in education, where they are seen to be the problem; or often creating a stereotype, that Aboriginal students are incapable of learning. Yet there are many Aboriginal students who despite all the odds are doing well academically. As Hattie (2003) says we need to look at success and determine what breeds this success. This research aims to provide an overview of conditions which support successful educational outcomes for Aboriginal students who have been performing well academically.

The overarching purpose of this research was to determine what conditions surround

Aboriginal students in achieving sound academic outcomes, using information gleaned from the NSW Aboriginal Education Review (AER, 2004) to determine a theoretical model of the conditions of success for Aboriginal students (also see Craven, 2006). The research aims to gain information from those students most affected by educational outcomes and the least engaged in research. This research in focusing on Aboriginal students who have been placed in the top 10%–25% as evidenced in their NAPLAN Year 5 tests, has taken a qualitative approach across seven primary schools in the NSW public education system: three Metropolitan and four Regional schools. The research was carried out with $N=34$ Aboriginal students, using in-depth interview techniques through use of individual brainstorm focus session and photography to elicit Aboriginal students' perspectives as to the conditions they believed most supported their achieving sound academic outcomes. This was further strengthened by in-depth interviews with key stakeholders in students' achieving academic success: their parents; teachers the student had in Years 3, 4 and 5; principals and Aboriginal staff in the selected schools.

The findings in this research whilst supporting much of the theorised determinants provide valuable insights and practical recommendations specifically in the practice of teaching Aboriginal students and in provision of support which may assist in raising academic outcomes for all Aboriginal students.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We have to challenge the ‘watered down’ expectations of our children. Our kids have to see that they are stronger and smarter than this society has so far given them credit for. ... There are plenty of examples of Indigenous success; we just have to recognise it and replicate it (Dodson, 2009, p. 3).

This quote emphasises the need to build upon success to strengthen Aboriginal education. The responsibility for improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students relies on public sector agencies and must be seen through the lens of a three tier approach at international, national, and state levels in response to human rights and social reform agendas that see equitable outcomes in education as a priority for Aboriginal students (Commonwealth of Australia, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2011; United Nations (UN), 2002). However, international research from the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) (De Bortoli & Cresswell, 2004; De Bortoli & Thomson, 2010) demonstrates that Aboriginal students are not meeting Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) benchmarks and that Aboriginal students are up to 36 months behind in learning by the time they reach Year 7, in high school (NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (NSW AECG) & NSW Department of Education & Training (NSW DET), 2004); NSW Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC), (2010).

Appreciating the depth of the gap between Aboriginal students and their non-Aboriginal peers requires urgent solutions to ensure Aboriginal students gain equitable educational outcomes. This is a requisite of international agendas, such as the United Nations (UN) Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (2002) to be achieved by all nation states by 2015, a primary goal being to achieve educational equity up to Year 5. The issue of course is that whilst Australia can demonstrate attendance and access to schools by Aboriginal students, equitable educational outcomes as demonstrated by statistical evidence such as the Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Reports (Commonwealth of Australia, Steering Committee for the

Review of Government Service Provision, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2009, 2011) and from Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) Census reports (2011, 2012). As such, these reports call for targeted Indigenous education policies by the Commonwealth of Australia and State education agencies to close this gap in achievement. Aboriginal people also have the highest population growth in Australia, with 38% of the Indigenous population being under 15 years of age (ABS, 2012). This sets the scene for a future of highly disenfranchised people traversing education in Australia and further points to the need for improved delivery in education for Aboriginal students.

Policy directions often rely upon statistically based reports (Commonwealth of Australia, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2009, 2011; ABS, 2012), as with the NSW Aboriginal Education Review (AER) (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004); the only major research undertaken in the public education sector in the last decade; to compare Aboriginal students' successes or failures within the education system to students whose privilege immediately outranks the sense of this comparative method. Quantitative measures as Walter and Andersen (2013) suggest are "Often positioned as a subset of overall national social trends, these data are accepted as a straightforward, objective snapshot of an underlying reality. As such, they have also become the backbone for the creation and implementation of social policy for Indigenous peoples." (p. 8). Unfortunately, as the gaps in Aboriginal educational outcomes indicate, not a lot has been gained by using this model. To really appreciate the status of Aboriginal students within the education system we need to go beyond the statistical trends that identify low educational achievement levels for Aboriginal Australians. We need to consider that there are other ways of assessing Aboriginal students' success within the mainstream education system. It is vital that we understand what supports higher academic outcomes for Aboriginal students. This is the imperative of this thesis.

In examining Aboriginal education and determining what seeds success for Aboriginal students this research will show that there is a multiplicity of entwining factors which affect Aboriginal students' educational outcomes. An understanding of the role of education in improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal students is vital, as education is the key to improving socio-economic conditions for Aboriginal communities. It is therefore important to

recognise what the key conditions of success for thriving Aboriginal students are. We need to understand what conditions these students themselves identify as supporting their academic success, as they are often voiceless participants and this research seeks to provide an avenue for students' perceptions and insights.

It is also pertinent to determine what other key stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers, principals and Aboriginal staff) perceive are the key conditions for Aboriginal students' success. It is imperative that when addressing Aboriginal students' educational success, these successes be seen in relationship to parents' engagement with the school, leadership in Aboriginal education, and Aboriginal leadership in education, as these are relevant stakeholders in Aboriginal students' success within the education system. Of particular importance in the school environment is the influences of the teachers; as teachers are seen as having more impact on student outcomes than any other influence within the school. Hayes, Mills, Christie, and Lingard (2006) identify these influences as, quality teaching: what and who is a good teacher for Aboriginal students, classroom practice, and pedagogical influences.

The conceptualisation for undertaking this thesis arose for the researcher through involvement in what became known as the Aboriginal Education Review (AER) (2004) in her former role as the State Manager of the NSW Department of Education, Aboriginal Education Unit. The AER was undertaken in partnership with the NSW AECG and the NSW DET (2004) in response to the Commonwealth Government seeking to address MDG (2002), which called for greater accountability across nation states, in public sector agencies. The AER was the process used in NSW to determine the extent of Aboriginal student disadvantage and where the barriers to success were. This thesis research therefore focuses on schools in NSW following on from the AER.

The research and final report from the AER was ground breaking, as it was the first time that a major state-wide analysis of data relating to Aboriginal students and Aboriginal education had been carried out in Australia. Although we desperately needed to have the statistical data which proved the educational gaps for Aboriginal students really did exist; it also reinforced (for some) the negative image that Aboriginal students were not capable of achieving. Critically the

smaller cohort of Aboriginal students who were achieving sound academic outcomes—despite their challenges and hurdles—were being overlooked and not acknowledged.

The focus for closing the gap and its methodology has basically ignored the successes of Aboriginal students. For this reason the researcher chose to explore what enabled successful Aboriginal students to succeed and to determine if it was possible to replicate these conditions for success. Hattie (2003) highlights the need to use success to create success, that is, if you want to seek change and create excellence in education then you should be looking at excellence as the guide for developing educational approaches; this is particularly pertinent when assessing future approaches in Aboriginal education. The NSW Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC) have shown in their annual report (NSW DEC, 2010) that the *National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) statistics show we have Aboriginal students gaining sound academic outcomes; as such we should be looking to students with sound academic outcomes to understand what they consider it is that enables them to seed success. By listening to the voices of the students along with multiple stakeholders who have a vested interest in the students' gaining sound academic outcomes, such as their parents, teachers, principals, and Aboriginal staff in their schools, we will be better able to find out what are the conditions of success surrounding and nurturing these students, that assist them to gain sound academic outcomes. By gaining knowledge about these conditions in NSW schools, and identifying these successes, we can learn and emulate these conditions of success to assist other Aboriginal students, with the aim to improve their academic outcomes.

The aims of this research were to: (1) Identify personal attributes and skills which Aboriginal students and stakeholders believe assist Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes. (2) Discover the conditions Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider important in assisting Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes in their *school* environment. (3) Discover the conditions Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider important in assisting Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes in their *home* environment. (4) Determine the priority conditions for Aboriginal students in what they perceive assist them to achieve successful academic outcomes.

Hence, this research focuses on Aboriginal students across schools in NSW in Year 5 and Year 6 to allow Aboriginal students to identify what they perceive to be the conditions which they think best support them to gain sound academic outcomes. The research utilises qualitative methodology, since quantitative methodology was not deemed to be able to provide the depth of insight required. Semi structured in-depth interviews were used as they are “a more valid explanation of the informant’s perceptions and constructions of reality” (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays, 2008, p. 51). A qualitative method allowed the researcher to seek out: What are the perceived conditions of success which Aboriginal students believe have enabled them to gain sound academic outcomes. The research with Aboriginal students in Years 5 and 6, was done through a unique one-on-one in-depth interview process involving a Brainstorm Focus Session whereby students’ comments were written on large sheets of art paper and up to ten photographs taken by students—to elicit the students’ opinions—of images that they considered provided them with academic support. In-depth semi-structured interviews were also held with stakeholders with an interest in the Aboriginal students’ success in the $N=7$ participating public primary schools to supplement students’ perceptions.

This research identifies conditions of success, as perceived by $N=34$ Aboriginal students ($n=9$ Metropolitan and $n=25$ Regional Aboriginal students), who have achieved sound academic outcomes as was evidenced in the student NAPLAN test results in 2010. Their results placed these students in the top 25%, in Year 3 to Year 5, from across $N=7$ (3 Metropolitan, 4 Regional) public primary schools in New South Wales. The student interview results are supplemented with comments from their parents ($N=26$), teachers ($N=22$), Principals ($N=7$), and Aboriginal staff ($N=8$). The research addresses four research questions: (1) What are the personal attributes and skills which Aboriginal students and stakeholders believe have assisted the Aboriginal students to achieve successful academic outcomes?; (2) What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider being important conditions that assist Aboriginal students to achieve academic outcomes in their *school* environment?; (3) What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider as being important conditions in assisting Aboriginal students to achieve sound academic outcomes in their *home* environment?; and (4) What are the priority conditions which have contributed to success of Aboriginal students and how relevant are these? Interviews

with multiple stakeholders: parents, teachers, principals, and Aboriginal staff were undertaken to answer Research Questions 1, 2 and 3 to compliment and enrich students' perceptions.

This thesis presents the voice of academically successful Aboriginal students and provides a unique insight into conditions of success as identified by multiple stakeholders, which can be built upon and replicated in the future. This approach provides rich detail and real life examples of Aboriginal students and multiple stakeholders' perceptions of the conditions of success for high achieving Aboriginal students. Hence this thesis aims to contribute significant conceptual advances in theory, research, and practice in the understanding of the conditions of success for high achieving Aboriginal students. As such this research is innovative in assessing these conditions as perceived by Aboriginal students and stakeholders as a building block for future programs of support.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH CONTEXT

This chapter provides an overview of the factors that have affected and continue to affect the conditions of success for Aboriginal students. The chapter comprises four sections. The first section provides an overview of the complexities of issues facing Aboriginal people and an overview of the role of public service agencies. Finally it alerts the reader to the United Nations focus on human rights and Australia's response to achieving these outcomes through education. The second section examines the national focus on education in Australia, which emphasises the importance of a sound education for all Australians. This section shows that there is a focus in Australia on enhancing Australia's human capital and that education is a key factor in this process. Yet, there is a clear indication that equitable outcomes are not being achieved by Aboriginal communities. The third section provides a statistical overview of the profiles of Aboriginal Australians, their educational levels, and availability of appropriate educational services. Finally this section provides an overview of statistics as they relate to Aboriginal educational outcomes and the implications of these for improving educational delivery for Aboriginal students. The final section examines the implications of the issues reviewed in this chapter for the present investigation.

Equitable Educational Services

To provide an equitable educational service to Aboriginal students it is essential to have a clear understanding of the complex and interactive factors associated with educational delivery and receipt of that service by Aboriginal students, their parents, and community. This complexity is wound up in the history of contact and the ensuing relationships which have developed between Aboriginal people and the wider community; the role of the bureaucracy in managing and controlling Aboriginal people; and the cycle of poverty and dependency within which Aboriginal people have found themselves. Whilst we could blame historical factors and state, "this was long ago, Aboriginal people live in contemporary society and need to forget all that

was done, this is, accepting the lie that the history of contact and the ensuing policies did not create the current situation of cultural deprivation, economic dependency, and segregation of Aboriginal people.” (Keating, 1992).

Public Sector Agencies

Public service agencies such as, Education, Social Services, and Health and Medical Services are established to provide core public services for the wider community in Australia. Therefore, public sector agencies and their strategic approaches are integral stakeholders in ensuring the development of National and State education and employment plans. These agencies have been advised by the Australian Government to use the following key focus areas to improve social outcomes for Indigenous people: Recruitment, Skills Acquisition and Career Development, Retention, Cultural Education and Training, and Community Engagement. These focus areas are to be incorporated into public sector agency management and implementation plans (Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate, 2009; Australian Government, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2006a, 2006b; Commonwealth of Australia, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2009, 2011; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2000b).

There is a multi-layered focus which affects the achievement of socially just outcomes for Aboriginal people with targets at national and local levels. These include numerous policies, plans, reports, support documents, and suggestions to assist Aboriginal communities to achieve these targets within health, employment, housing, law and education. With such an array of targets in such a wide arena of government agencies, internationally and locally, governments need to work in a joint concerted effort to ensure equitable educational, social, economic, and cultural outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

Human Rights and Social Reform for Indigenous Peoples

At the international level, the United Nations (UN) has a focus on human rights, which is clearly addressed in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 1948). This is ratified through the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination,

adopted and opened for signature and ratification by General Assembly resolution 2106 (XX) of 21 December 1965 *entry into force* 4 January 1969, in accordance with Article 19.

The Human Rights Declaration is re-interpreted as action through social justice reform, to be dealt with in practical measures by nation states such as Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), 2010) which aims to ensure practical measures are being targeted in accordance with agreed conventions. One such set of agreements as determined by the UN for Indigenous Nations, is the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) (2002), to be achieved by 2015 (UN, 2002). Through the intended achievement of these goals, Nation states/countries are to provide reports as a method of country-level and global monitoring of educational and socio-economic (employment, health, housing) outcomes along with cultural recognition and rights of Indigenous peoples across all nation states. When this focus is brought to individual countries, there is a requirement for each nation state to report on Indigenous outcomes and improvements on their educational and socio-economic conditions. An example of such reporting requirements can be clearly seen in the Dakar, Education For All (EFA) strategy (UNESCO, 2000). This aims to have universal: early childhood care and education; free and compulsory education of good quality by 2015; acquisition of life-skills by adolescents and youth; expanded adult literacy by 50 per cent by 2015; elimination of gender disparities by 2005 and gender equality in education by 2015; and enhanced quality education. The EFA also included set targets with nation states, such as, by 2002 each nation would have action plans for achieving the Dakar Goals and must be part of anti-poverty strategies, in consultation with all groups in society: community leaders, teachers, parents, and children. The targets also included that by 2005 the nation states would ensure equality in education for boys and girls; and finally by 2015 the realisation of universal education (UNESCO, 2000, p. 4).

Equitable Educational Outcomes for Indigenous Australians

The Australian response to progress the MDG (2002) outcomes is to take Aboriginal issues through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), which in turn develops national policy directions for States and Territories in managing, improving, and monitoring Aboriginal outcomes (Commonwealth of Australia, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2009, 2011;). At the State and Territory level, Premiers work

with Ministers and public sector heads, to establish targets and systems to ensure improvements are made for Aboriginal peoples to equalise socio-economic outcomes. (NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA), 2004, 2005, 2006a, 2006b; NSW Premier's Department, 2006; NSW Premier's Department & Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, 2004; NSW Premier's Department, Public Employment Office, 2004; NSW Public Sector, Director of Equal Opportunity in Public Employment, 2006). This, alongside legislative requirements under the Anti-Discrimination Act 1977, places demands on all public sector agencies to become proactive in developing plans and strategies to achieve sustainable practices and outcomes for Aboriginal people. Organisations have legislative requirements to develop, implement, and monitor management plans for equity and diversity. Within this planning process there is a requirement to address the needs of all diverse groups: women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people from racial ethnic and ethno-religious minority groups, and people with disabilities (AHRC, 2010; Commonwealth of Australia, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service, 2003, 2005a, 2005b, 2007, 2009, 2011).

The UN focus sees creating equitable outcomes clearly within the systems and structures devised by government agencies through their public service sectors. A key provider of this change is educational service delivery which is discussed in the context of Australia in the following section.

Educational Focus In Australia

Background

As a result of international benchmarking through the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2002) on education and economic standing, the "Education Revolution" announced by the Australian Labor Party (ALP) in 2007 was to be a national investment in social structures. This approach highlighted the importance of education for the nation as a whole and identified a need to focus on human resources as its primary investment for the future. To not recognise the dire place of Aboriginal people within this national agenda places them at risk of lower educational achievements, reinforcing their place in a continuing "Cycle of Poverty" (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2013).

Australia had fallen behind other nations who recognise the values of an educated population and therefore the ALP proposed to make a greater investment in people's education (ALP, 2007). The general consensus in the ALP at that time was that, to sustain economic prosperity, Australia must lift productivity growth through prioritising Australia's key resource; its people. As such, Commonwealth and State governments agreed in 2006, at a Council of Australian Government (COAG) meeting, that Australia's future depended on a motivated workforce which was healthy and skilled; and that skills development helped all citizens to achieve their personal potential, and this would benefit Australia as a nation (ALP, 2007; see also Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, 2013).

The PISA Study

International research has identified that there is a clear need to address educational inequities experienced by Indigenous Australians. For example, the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) was initially sponsored by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2000), to benchmark standards internationally across 42 countries, for literacy in English, Maths, and Science. In averaging the results of this survey Australia was classified (see Figure 2.1, far right arrow) as one of the top four performing nations in literacy achievement. Note the central arrow which indicates the OECD average benchmark for literacy achievement for all nations. Then note the arrow on the far left which indicates the placement of Indigenous Australians in literacy achievement: well below the OECD standard.

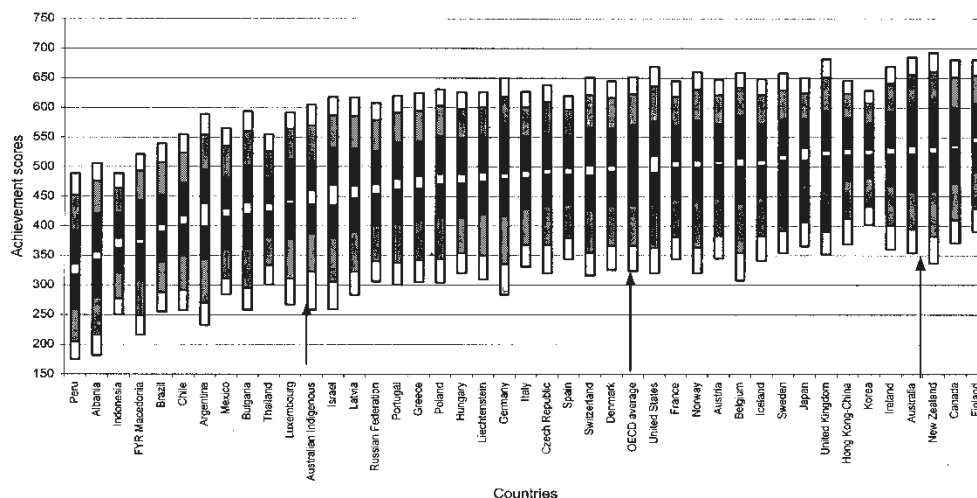


Figure 2.1 PISA Benchmarks and Australia’s Indigenous Students in PISA 2000: Results From PISA Research (De Bortoli & Cresswell, 2004)

The PISA Report (2004) extols the standing of Australian students as being one of the top performing nations in achievements in English, Maths, and Science. However, results for Indigenous Australians are comparable to those in the lower performing nations and well below the OECD standard expected in literacy competence (De Bortoli & Cresswell, 2004). These findings have been reaffirmed by De Bortoli and Thomson (2010) in their overview of factors influencing Aboriginal students from the 2000–2006 PISA research. The question which needs to be asked is: how can a top performing nation, such as Australia, explain why one particular category of students—Indigenous students—performs so poorly, in comparison to the majority of all other students? (see also Riley-Mundine, 2007).

New South Wales Department of Education and Communities Initiatives

The New South Wales Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC) in prioritising Aboriginal education (Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate, 2009), has emphasised the goal of enabling Aboriginal students to match or better the outcomes of the broader student population. To achieve this the NSW DEC aims to target three priority areas: four year old children, particularly in remote communities to have access to pre-school programs; lower the literacy and numeracy gap by 50% and to have the gap eliminated by 2016; and reduce the gap in completion of Year 12 or equivalent VET qualifications by 50% by 2020 (NSW DEC, 2010, p. 44). However, NSW DEC has found this gap is slow to close. For example

the NSW DEC Annual Report (2010) found that since 2008 the percentages of Aboriginal students in NSW at or above the national minimum standard have improved in Year 3 Reading and Year 5 Numeracy. However, the percentages of Aboriginal students in NSW at or above the national minimum standard has stayed about the same in Reading in Years 5 and 7, and has declined appreciably in Years 3, 7, and 9 Numeracy and Year 9 Reading (NSW DEC, 2010, p. 45). The following three figures (2.2, 2.3, & 2.4) from the NAPLAN NSW DEC Annual Report, (2010, p. 46) show that: there is still a large gap in Aboriginal students achieving at or above the minimum reading standards (see Figure 2.2); small numbers of Aboriginal students are placed in the top two bands of the NAPLAN reading results (see Figure 2.3); and retention to Year 11 and Year 12 for Aboriginal students is lower in comparison to their non-Aboriginal peers (Figure 2.4). What these figures also indicate is that there are a growing number of Aboriginal students who are achieving. In the words of Dodson (2009) “we just have to recognise it and replicate it”.

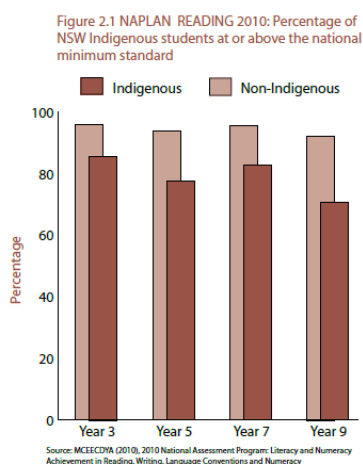


Figure 2.2 Percentage of NSW Aboriginal Students At or Above National Minimum Standard For NAPLAN Reading (NSW DEC, 2010, p. 46)

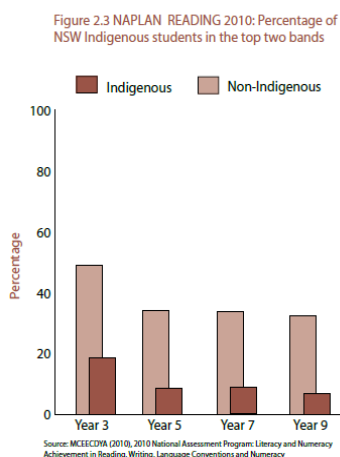


Figure 2.3 Percentage of NSW Aboriginal Students In Top Two Bands For NAPLAN Reading (NSW DEC, 2010, p. 46)

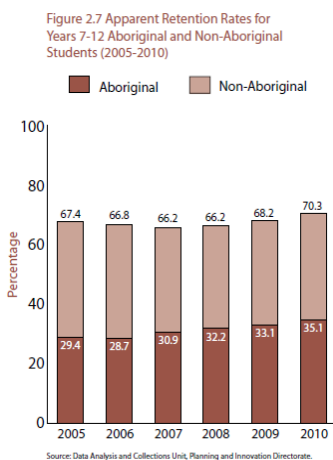


Figure 2.4 Retention Rates For Aboriginal Students to Year 12 (NSW DEC, 2010, p. 46)

Aboriginal Statistical Profiles

The following section provides an overview of statistical information pertaining to Aboriginal people in relation to: population growth, educational levels, educational availability, and educational outcomes. In addition, the implications of these statistics for educational delivery are discussed.

Indigenous Population—Growth

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is young as shown in Figures 2.5 and 2.6 below, with most of the people in the younger age group (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2006a). The 2006 Census shows half the Indigenous population was aged 21 years or less. In contrast, half the non-Indigenous population was aged 37 years or less. Children aged under 15 years comprised 38% of the total Indigenous population (compared with 19% in the non-Indigenous population); people aged 15–24 years comprised 19% of the Indigenous population (compared with 14%), and people aged 65 years and over represented only 3% (compared with 13%).

These different age profiles reflect the higher birth rates and greater death rates occurring among the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (ABS, 2006a, p. 15). There have been little changes to these figures as shown in the 2011 Census (ABS, (2012) whereby the Indigenous population had a younger age distribution than the non-Indigenous population, with the median age (the age at which half the population is older and half the population is younger) 21 years compared with 37 years of age for non-Indigenous people. Nationally, more than one in three Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is under 15 years of age (36%), with 4% being aged 65 years and over (ABS, 2011).

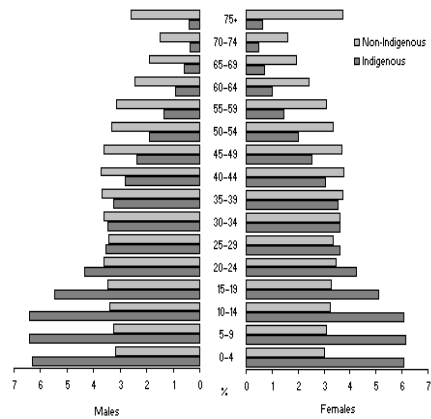


Figure 2.5 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census (ABS, 2006)

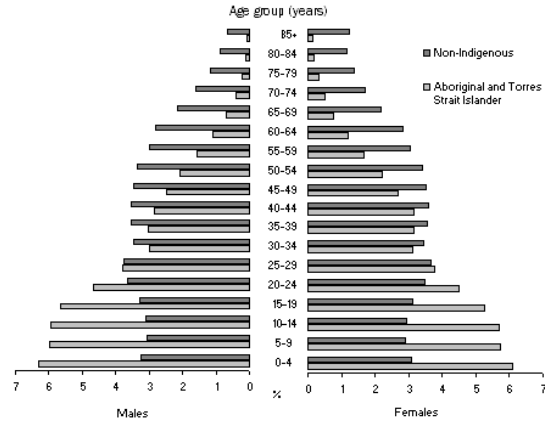


Figure 2.6 Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census (ABS, 2012)

The ABS (2012) has upgraded this information with a comparison between 2006 and 2011, as per Figure 2.7 below, which demonstrates little significant population changes since the 2006 census data was undertaken.

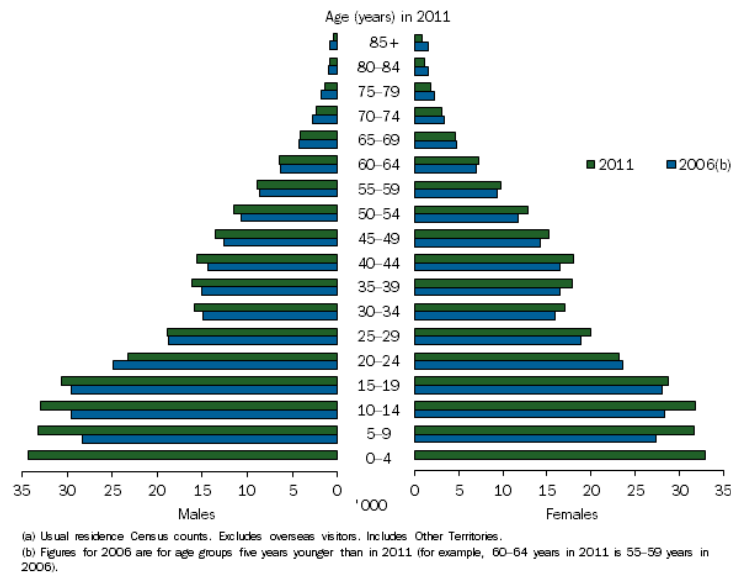


Figure 2.7 Aboriginal Population Differentiations Between 2006 and 2011 (ABS, 2011)

In analysing the above information, it is clear that the Indigenous population is one of the fastest growing in Australia and its growth trajectory is almost in direct opposition to the majority population. This places a different emphasis on Aboriginal peoples' needs. Generally

government policy decisions are made based on the wider majority which shows the Australian community as an aging population (see Figures 2.5 & 2.6, above), as opposed to Aboriginal people who have a younger population. In addition, the stress in Aboriginal communities where the majority of the population is under 21 years is generally exacerbated in many rural and remote communities. In analysing this data it is clear this means that in these communities there are fewer older people (elders) to support and care for this growing younger generation and fewer public service sector services appropriate to the Aboriginal community's needs. There is therefore potential for future disenfranchisement if this growing generation are not afforded the opportunity to gain a good education and thus good career opportunities (AHRC, 2010). Hence there is a need to target this younger Aboriginal population to develop appropriate strategies to ensure their learning needs are addressed so that they become self-actualised, self-reliant, and resilient. The next section discusses the importance of educational achievement for Aboriginal people.

Indigenous Population—Education Levels

The ABS (2006) Census mentions that 11,400 Indigenous children aged 3–5 years were reported to be attending pre-school and 6,800 attending primary school. The level of attendance at pre-school or primary school was similar for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children, with Indigenous children slightly less likely than non-Indigenous children to be attending pre-school or primary school. Three year old Indigenous children in non-remote areas were more likely to be attending pre-school than in remote areas (31% in major cities compared with 14% in very remote areas). Four year old Indigenous children were similar across all levels of remoteness with between 55% and 63% attending either pre-school or primary school. Five year old Indigenous children in non-remote areas were more likely to be attending pre-school or primary school in remote areas (87% in major cities compared with 70% in very remote areas).

In the 2011 Census, over half (53%) of the people who identified as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin and counted in the Census lived in nine of the 57 Indigenous regions. The three largest regions are located on the eastern seaboard of Australia: Brisbane (53,271), NSW Central and North Coast (52,319), and Sydney–Wollongong (52,171). These

three regions accounted for 29% (157,761 of 548,370) of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander count for Australia (ABS, 2011).

The issue for the delivery of educational services for Indigenous communities is the geographic spread of the population. This requires careful analysis of the location of current educational facilities, access by Indigenous children to those services (for example, places available and numbers of children who can access these places), and barriers to accessing places (for example: cost, travel, and cultural comfort in these centres). These issues will be discussed in the following sections.

Aboriginal Education—Availability

Often a key strategy in closing the gap in educational outcomes is to address educational delivery for the youngest stakeholders, that is, the Early Childhood Education (ECE) sector. As such, much work has been done to determine what educational services best facilitate learning for Aboriginal students. The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) collects data to assess quality service delivery in Early Childhood Centres, and what best supports the ECE sector, through the role of state and territory governments (OEC, 2009). The OEC suggested the following criteria, as being essential in supporting children to gain appropriate skills for future high educational achievements, the key focuses being family support, school integration of programs, and partnerships with community. These are mentioned by the OEC (2009) as being:

Firstly, family processes that can affect educational outcomes are: higher educational expectations; and attendance in high socio-economic status (SES) neighbourhoods has a positive impact on student achievement; dysfunctional families affect negative outcomes for students; less than 3–4 hours of television (TV) relates to higher educational achievement; positive contact with extended family; meaningful maths experiences and varied language encounters link to higher academic achievement.

Second are community factors that increase educational achievement, being: social networks that develop cultural identity and belonging; opportunity to access local community resources, such as libraries, doctors, and schooling.

A third tier is early childhood centres or schools, family and community partnerships that enhance children's achievement with integrated programs; school-like activities within home or community contexts; and collaboration between home and school. (Department of Education, Science, and Training (DEST) Early Childhood Learning Resources, 2005, pp. 6–7).

Aligned to the above general ECE factors, the OEC suggested that there needs to be cultural education about Aboriginal communities and their children's early childhood needs, such as:

Aboriginal educational processes. Consideration needs to be given to Aboriginal families' experiences in education and assumptions of low expectations. Note that in low SES neighbourhoods the attendance of the majority of Aboriginal students at school is below average. It is important to remember here that while the PISA (De Bortoli & Cresswell, 2004) research indicates that low attendance was also a factor for non-Aboriginal low SES students, cultural needs must also be factored in for Aboriginal students. Misunderstanding of what is a dysfunctional family and "Cultural Difference" and Aboriginal Kinship systems, may be seen by educators as Aboriginal people being "dysfunctional", due to culturally different roles in Aboriginal families, for example grandparents being required to have responsibility with students (teachers may see this as parents' inability to take control for their children) and not developing an understanding of Kinship structure into school communications.

Access to external activities is often limited due to economic levels which prohibit many families from low SES families from paying for club membership and sporting attire for their children. This can lead to access to sedentary activities such as TV as the only form of entertainment; and remote geographic isolation can lead to reduced availability of entertainment. Teach the teachers who come from different home environments, by providing an environment for positive contact with Aboriginal people and allowing them to gain an understanding of the obligations of Aboriginal people and their extended family which are vastly different due to socio-economic conditions and cultural Kinship obligations. Understand teachers' expectations which may be vastly different to the students' cultural differences in mathematic experiences and language experiences through language difference, such as, traditional Aboriginal languages, English, and Aboriginal English (dialectical language) encounters.

Community engagement factors. Building strength through community engagement that increases educational achievement by fostering cultural identity and sense of belonging: internally within Aboriginal communities and externally within the wider community. By working with local community resources—Aboriginal references, engagement and interaction with the wider community and understanding Aboriginal agencies—their roles and responsibilities in the community can add value to educational experiences.

Centre or school, family and community partnerships. Developing and enhancing partnerships that improve children’s academic achievement through strategies such as embedding cultural content: building in Aboriginal control of where this input occurs and the type of cultural knowledge conveyed. Ensuring there is a reflection of the Aboriginal communities: cultural diversity; cultural difference; and diverse languages. And finally, creating Aboriginal auspices with opportunity to lead partnerships.

The DEST Early Childhood Learning Resources literacy review (DEST, 2005, pp. 6–7), notes what is required to support early childhood education for Indigenous students as being: first, an educational environment with inclusive culturally appropriate materials; programs which build upon children’s home and community experiences; and writing programs which are connected with familiar experiences in home language and Standard Australian English (SAE) (DEST, 2005, p. 54). Furthermore the review noted that there was a need to surround “kids with supportive people and a supportive context, lots of Aboriginal role models, heaps of culture. The kids should say, we are proud of who we are every single day” (DEST, 2005, p. 54).

The secondary factors that influence children’s success in education (DEST, 2005, p. 16), are: cultural recognition; acknowledgement and support of Aboriginal children; development of requisite skills; and adequate levels of participation with parents. Additionally DEST noted that: “Success will not be achieved without recognition of the cultural factors which may impact on the success; nor will it occur without the consent, approval and willing participation of those involved” (DEST, 2005, p. 16).

The third set of factors was around quality teachers being required who are explicit in making the links between home culture and school culture (DEST, 2005, p. 6). And that these

teachers have pedagogical approaches; they suggested there are three ways of supporting Aboriginal children's learning: telling; showing and modelling; and working together (DEST, 2005, p. 23).

The result of such research provides strong evidence that the best possible outcomes for Aboriginal children are achieved when they experience quality education, with positive family and community experiences. The question which one could ask oneself is, how does this relate to primary schooling for Aboriginal students? Indeed the strong influence from this research provides an impetus to assess Aboriginal students who are achieving sound academic outcomes and determine if the same conditions of success are evidenced for successful primary Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal Education Outcomes

The NSW AECG and NSW DET (2004) Aboriginal Education Review (AER) suggested that the majority of Aboriginal students commence schooling on an equal footing with other students and yet, when national NAPLAN tests were carried out in Years 3, 5, and 7, Aboriginal students were up to 18 months behind, 20 months behind, and then up to 36 months behind respectively in their schooling achievements in reading; with the results being comparable in writing and maths (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004). Highlighted in the AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) is that with regard to the levels of educational achievements being gained by Indigenous students, the highest level of average educational attainment is Year 9, with small numbers of Indigenous students achieving Year 12 or higher. This is a cause for concern as to gain meaningful employment individuals need higher educational attainment at certificate and degree levels. There is little evidence in current NSW DEC annual reports (2010) that these figures have changed.

With low literacy levels, Aboriginal students are placed at a massive disadvantage in regard to overall educational achievements, further education, career opportunities, and community capacity to be self-actualised if they are not learning at the same rate as other Australian children. The AER also found that educational sectors were instrumental in assisting with four key aspects of Aboriginal education. The first aspect was being able to identify needs

of Aboriginal students for: sound academic outcomes, health, well-being, early intervention and support programs, and achievement of syllabus outcomes. Secondly, non-Aboriginal students should have access to Aboriginal education and cultural knowledge. Third, was that Aboriginal parents must be acknowledged as first teachers, Kinship structures need to be recognised, and cultural links and teaching need to be strengthened. Additionally parents need to: have positive education experiences, be more involved in education of their children, and have greater communication strategies developed and opportunities for leadership in the education sector. Fourthly, sector educators, that is those who lead Aboriginal education, must be provided with appropriate Aboriginal education and cultural awareness training and understand Aboriginal socio-economic conditions. They must be aware of and build on Aboriginal cultural strengths whilst creating positive relationships between Aboriginal community and students. The executive also need to ensure quality teaching for Aboriginal students and be aware of transitional stages for Aboriginal students. Additionally, school leaders are required to be familiar with and aware of cultural differences, learning difficulties, and behavioural problems. To reach these objectives the AER recommended that sector educators should have a profile of their Aboriginal community; be able to track, monitor, and evaluate Aboriginal students' progress and achievements; and identify Aboriginal students' talents and gifts.

Importantly, public service agencies are required through whole of government approaches to serve a larger role in assisting to redress the imbalance in educational and life outcomes for Aboriginal Australians. This is particularly relevant when as with Aboriginal people, population trends are taken into consideration with other low socio-economic conditions, such as: low employment, poor housing, high incarceration, low health and life expectancy, and low educational outcomes (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004).

Implications for the Present Investigation

Whilst the Aboriginal population is the fastest growing population in Australia they remain the most disenfranchised Australians based on a wide range of low socio-economic indicators including education (ABS, 2006a, 2006b, 2012; De Bortoli & Cresswell, 2004; De Bortoli & Thomson, 2010). The focus for educational improvement for Aboriginal students is often on the

ECE sector agenda and in fact criteria have been developed as a guide to these providers on what needs to be in place to ensure sound educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. However, little is known about the extent to which similar criteria would apply in relation to the primary education context. Furthermore, much more remains to be done to identify what conditions seed success for Aboriginal students so that these conditions could be emulated more widely.

Clearly, there are examples of conditions of Aboriginal success in education with Aboriginal students achieving excellent results on standardised tests; however we are yet to identify, by rigorous research, what the conditions of success are for these students. Also little is known about what Aboriginal students and other stakeholders identify as what is helping them to succeed. The aim of the present investigation is to contribute to increasing our knowledge and understanding by identifying what successful primary Aboriginal students perceive to be the conditions that support them to gain sound academic outcomes.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of equitable educational service through the public service, relating to Aboriginal education as part of the human rights agenda to address UN goals such as the MDG (2002) for Indigenous peoples. As such, the educational focus in Australia to meet OECD benchmarking and the educational standards of Aboriginal people are within the national agenda which has been aimed to raise the educational standards in the nation's human capital. Yet in recognising international research such as the PISA (De Bortoli & Cresswell, 2004 & De Bortoli & Thomson, 2010) and local research such as the AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) the "gap" between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students is not closing. This is further explained through statistical profiles of Aboriginal people and their impact on Aboriginal educational levels, participation and outcomes. Finally the chapter addresses what are the implications for the current investigation.

The following chapter provides an overview of the research in the foundations of self-efficacy and self-concept theory and how that research relates to Aboriginal Australian students and the current investigation.

CHAPTER 3

THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

This chapter seeks to establish the foundations of self-efficacy and self-concept theory and consider the implications thereof for schooling. First will be a brief overview of early studies in human development and motivational studies; followed by definitions of self-efficacy and self-concept as identified by significant researchers; this is followed by the significant differences between self-efficacy and self-concept. There will then be a brief introduction to self-determination theory. This is followed by the motivational impact on schooling, which is broken down into interpersonal relationships and connections with other students, teachers and school, parents, and peers. This final section provides an overview of the research undertaken in self-efficacy, self-concept, motivational and aspirational goal setting as it relates to Indigenous Australian students.

Brief Overview of Early Human Development and Motivation Studies

Pajares and Schunk (2001) noted that much of the study around human development and growth was initially influenced by behaviourists and psychoanalytical such as, William James, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, and Erik Erikson on the importance of self-processes. William James (1981a; 1981b) in his career is renowned as the principal person behind research which established a turning point in the development of psychology in America, being a science rather than being seen as just a philosophy; James was a proponent of functionalism in psychology and pragmatism in philosophy. James' work concentrated on free will and the power of a person to change their life events to change their future. James' work focused on the mind-world connection he deemed as being an inter-weaving interplay which influenced each other through an ongoing 'stream of consciousness' and the 'stream of thought' in relation to interaction between people, society and the natural world; and that people were influenced by the society they lived in and that they in turn influenced that society. It was James belief that truth came from observing fact and that new facts emerged or validated past experiences each time you observed the world around you (Mouce, 1997); additionally he believed that experience changed

a person's world view (Buss, 2009). James' work influenced all other major philosophers and psychologists to influence Western philosophical systems (Pajares and Schunk, 2001).

During the 1950's a person's inner experiences, inner processes, and self-belief became highlighted by people such as Maslow (1954) who put forward the notion that human beings are driven to action by different motivating factors at different times (e.g., biological drives, psychological needs, higher goals). In the 1960's and 1970's self-belief was emphasised as important to many psychologists and educationalists that turned their attention to the inner experiences, processes, and self-belief (Beane, 1991; Kohn, 1994). This was espoused by educationalists such as Shalveston, Hubner, and Stanton, (1976) and Hansford and Hattie (1982) to support a healthy and positive self-concept in individuals and was viewed as critical in sound academic achievement (Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Graham & Weiner, 1996).

In the 1980's interest in motivation shifted to the cognitive and information process, heavily influenced by technological advances (Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Bracey, 1991). Emphasis was placed on cognitive tasks rather than the influence of students' self-belief in schooling. Research in the field of self-belief waned as there was a push for a back-to-basics and a focus on curricula practices which also side-lined students' emotions as being irrelevant to academic achievement. In the 2000's a shift of focus saw self-belief become critical in educational research in student motivation. Two types of self-belief have dominated motivational research, being: self-efficacy and self-concept beliefs.

Self-Efficacy

Central to self-efficacy belief is that people are proactive and not reactive and it is their personal belief in their capabilities, knowledge, and skills which help determine on-going actions and high achievement (Bandura, 1986; Bandura, 1977; Shalveston, Hubner, & Stanton, 1976). That is, a person's self-efficacy influences the choices they make. For example, self-efficacy is proposed to influence participation in actions people feel confident and competent in and avoidance of actions people do not feel competent about. Self-efficacy is also proposed to effect the time and effort spent on tasks; and in turn success in the task supports and strengthens resilience; which in turn supports an on-going self-belief, that they are capable of achieving new tasks. As Pajares and Schunk (2001) emphasised:

A strong sense of efficacy enhances human accomplishment and well-being in countless ways. Confident individuals approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided. They have greater interest and deep engrossment in activities, set themselves challenging goals and maintain strong commitment to them, and heighten and sustain their efforts in the face of failure. They more quickly recover their confidence after failures or setbacks, and attribute failure to insufficient effort or deficient knowledge and skills which are acquirable. High self-efficacy helps create feelings of serenity in approaching difficult tasks and activities. Conversely, people who doubt their capabilities may believe that things are tougher than they really are, a belief that fosters stress, depression, and a narrow vision of how best to solve a problem. Not surprisingly, confidence in one's academic capability is a critical component of school success (p. 241).

As such it seems that a self-fulfilling cycle or self-efficacy for learning is created whereby accomplishment creates confidence leading to belief in action or performance, this in turn creates a confidence in a person's judgement or capabilities which assists the person to successfully accomplish future unknown tasks (Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

Self-Concept

Self-concept is the belief a person has about themselves, their characteristics, and traits. Self-concept is a person's self-knowledge of what they believe themselves to be and is also a reflection of how they perceive others - who are important to them - see them (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Self-concept is not static and differs across different areas of a person's life. That is a person may have high concepts of themselves as a daughter, but not as a mathematician. Hence a person will have a global sense of themselves and more specific concepts of themselves academically, socially, emotionally, or physically (Marsh & Shalveston, 1985).

Self-concept is both a reflection of how a person sees themselves and of how they perceive others see them (Coopersmith 1967; Cooley, 1902). Self-concept is the "totality of self-knowledge that one possesses about oneself, and self-esteem, (which) is considered the

evaluative component of the self-concept” (Pajares & Schunk, 2001, p. 242). As further explained by Coopersmith (1967) self-esteem extends to an individual’s judgements of their own capableness, significance, success, and worth and can be seen in the individuals’ attitudes towards themselves (Hattie, 1992). Marsh and Shavelson (1985) and Shavelson and Marsh (1986) have identified seven features as being critical to a person’s self-concept: it is organised, multifaceted, hierarchical, stable, developmental, evaluative, and differentiable. Self-concepts also vary across different domains of functioning and change as people’s experiences influence them and change as they grow older.

Self-Efficacy and Self-Concept

Pajares and Schunk (2001) describe the differences between self-efficacy and self-concepts as being:

Self-efficacy is a judgement of the confidence that one has in one’s abilities; self-concept is a description of one’s own perceived self, accompanied by an evaluative judgement of self-worth. Because self-concept beliefs involve evaluations of self-worth, self-concept is particularly dependent on how a culture or social structure values the attributes on which the individual bases those feelings of self-worth. Self-efficacy beliefs are not as tightly bounded by cultural considerations (p. 242).

As such self-efficacy revolves around a person’s ability to complete a task and when they ask themselves: how well can I do this task? Whereas self-concept revolves around being and doing feelings, such as: how well do I feel about myself in completing this task? This means that questions posed to individuals to determine self-efficacy are to determine low and high confidence; and questions posed for students’ self-concept are aimed at revealing how positively or negatively particular tasks affect their feelings of ability; and how they feel in the completion of those tasks.

In research it is therefore essential to view the student’s self-efficacy and self-concept rather than just global measures of achievement (Marsh, 1993). Pintrich and De Groot (1990) comment that students’ high achievement is dependent on both their skills and will to be successful in classrooms, additionally Schunk (1989; 1991) suggests that students’ perceptions of

control, outcomes expectations, value of outcomes, attributions, goals, and self-concept provide students with cues to assess their self-efficacy. Bandura and Schunk (1981) note that self-efficacy and skills development is stronger in students who set and meet proximal (short-term) goals rather than for students who set distal (long-term) goals. In addition Schunk (1985) noted that students who experience verbal encouragement to set their own goals gain greater confidence, competence, and commitment in attaining those goals. Schunk (1987) comments that with frequent and immediate feedback on achievement students attribute this feedback on their effort and as such work harder, experience stronger motivation, and have greater efficacy in their learning.

Bandura (1997; 1986; 1978) describes the causal nature of self-efficacy on student's academic achievement as impacting upon: personal factors – cognition, affect, and biological events; behaviour; and environmental which create a triadic reciprocity of human functioning. It is important to realise that students self-influence ensures they are contributors to what they become and do. As a result it is student's belief in their capability to achieve academically that assists in their academic success. This success is supported by teachers, parents, and peers as work is modelled, failure is mediated with coping behaviours, and comparable learning is modelled (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Student feedback and modelling must be done with honesty as best put by Erikson (1980):

Children cannot be fooled by empty praise and condescending encouragement. ... (they) gain real strength only from wholehearted and consistent recognition of real accomplishment, that is, achievement that has meaning in their culture. (p. 95)

Self-Determination Theory

Theorists who expound Self-Determination Theory (SDT) claim that innate psychological needs motivate people to grow and change. Additionally motivation is driven by both extrinsic (outside the person) and intrinsic (inside the person) factors in doing things purely for their own sake (Myers, 2010; Plotnik & Kouyoumjan, 2011). Deci and Ryan (2000) claim that three keys needs are required for students to behave in adaptive and efficacious ways, the need for: competence, autonomy, and connectedness.

Competence relates to how individuals accomplish and have success in both internal and external outcomes which in turn supports their own view of themselves as being a person capable of high achievement. Autonomy is the extent of perceived internal control a person has in any given situation, that is, the opportunity to have control over and of a situation which they feel they have skills and knowledge to complete on their own. Connectedness is where an individual's sense of security and attachment to significant others, provides the impetus for ongoing success and achievement, as they aim to prove their abilities for others to see and praise them; this in turn provides motivation for further success. (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Deci, Vallerand, Pellettier, & Ryan, 1991).

Motivation: Impact on Schooling

Research has demonstrated that students' individual internal personal goals and expectations promote positive academic behaviour and achievement, whilst students' perceptions of support through external influences in a student's social environments may facilitate or inhibit these motivations into actual behaviour (McInerney, 2005). As such student's interactions with teachers, parents, and peers are instrumental in impacting on students' academic achievements.

In the academic domain research has shown that teacher effects are stronger than parent effects on students though the parent-child relationship is significant with achievement motivation and general self-esteem. Research has also identified that a students' academic outcomes, engagement, academic self-concept, and experiences at school are heavily influenced by interpersonal relationships and connectedness to teachers and parents (Martin, Marsh, McInerney, Green, & Dowson, 2007).

Students. Belonging to schools can affect a student's health and well-being in a positive way, in building social networks for individuals and influencing school-community relations (Allen & Bowles, 2012). Libbey (2007; 2004) discusses factors which support student's feelings of belonging in schools as being demonstrated through teacher supportiveness and caring, having good friends at school, students are engaged in their own academic progression, discipline is seen as fair and effective, and students are engaged in extra-curricular activities. The Wingspread Declaration (2004) states students see belonging in schools where adults care about their learning, have interest in them as individuals, have high academic expectations, teachers have

positive relationships with their students, students feel safe at school (Allen & Bowles, 2012; Hattie, 2009; Libby 2007), and school was a place where students feel they are respected and have a voice (O'Connor, Sanson, & Frydenberg, 2012). Sanchez, Colon, and Esparza (2005) concluded that students' sense of belonging in schools significantly impacted on academic outcomes, motivation, effort, and low absenteeism. Student's sense of connectedness to their schools creates a positive attitude towards learning and academic self-efficacy (Allen & Bowles, 2012).

Teachers and Schools. Teacher's sense of efficacy is related to their instructional practices and to their students' achievements and well-being. Teachers who have a high level of efficacy create classrooms with academic rigour and challenge students intellectually. Teachers have an equal share and responsibility in nurturing and cultivating their students' self-belief. Teachers who assist in this self-belief create a beneficial environment which cultivates cognitive skills. This cultivation assists to raise students' perceptions of competence, motivation, and student choices which in turn increase students' self-efficacy, academic behaviours, educational interest, achievement, and engagement in tasks (McInerney, 2005; Pajares & Schunk, 2001).

Transforming schools, classrooms, and teaching practices (Kohn, 1994) with a focus on the school, curriculum, pedagogical approaches, and student's intellectual development assist in raising students' personal, social, and psychological well-being. A person's self-belief in their achievement does not end with school, but rather schools have a responsibility to prepare students to become self-assured individuals capable of pursuing their own goals and ambitions (Pajares & Schunk, 2001). Research conducted by Martin, Marsh, McInerney, Green, and Dowson (2007) demonstrated the importance of the teacher-student relationships in the academic domain; in that a student's strong and positive relationship with a teacher provided students with ongoing motivation to achieve academically. Becker and Luthar (2002) noted that when teaching students from different backgrounds it is essential that professional development be used to target improving teacher-student relationships, so as to lift student's academic outcomes.

Parents. Mansour and Martin (2009) contend that a positive relationship between a child and their parents assists in young people's development and in shaping their academic well-being, motivation, and engagement. Further Mansour and Martin (2009) stress that parental

involvement in schools with their children assists students to be more task-focused. Belief in students contributes to student performance; parent interaction with school also assists students to have greater sociability at school with their peers, as they have better emotional adjustment, communication, social skills, and achievement orientation (McInerney, 2005; Hill & Craft, 2003).

Mansour and Martin (2009) discuss five key intertwining factors which parents contribute to their child's academic success: home resources, in-home parental assistance, out-of-school parental assistance, parental involvement in the school, and demographics such as – gender, age, ethnicity, and value of schooling. A contributing factor to parental engagement is parent's cultural rules for involvement in schools, ranging from a feeling that there is an open invitation to be engaged in the school through their children and the school (Lopez, Scribner & Mahitvanichcha, 2001), or that a student's education is the prerogative of the teacher only, or alienation from the school which leads parents not to participate in their child's education (McInerney, 2010).

A parent's self-efficacy and engagement in their child's education stems from their perception of their own abilities to contribute to their child's schooling; that is, do they have the ability to influence their child's educational development. Parents are influenced by their familiarity and knowledges of the educational system and conventions. Non-mainstream members may not have socialised practice of these conventions (Hollins, 1996). There may often be a lack of resources, books, and computers in the home environment; parents may have a different first language to that used in the school setting and/or had a poor education themselves, so feel inadequate and limited in how they can support their children (McInerney, 2010; Hoover-Dempsey, & Sandler, 1997). Parents view these factors in relation to others who they perceive may have greater resources and skills to support their children. Becker and Luthar (2002) suggest that parents could benefit from skills development in how to support students at school.

Peers. Research has indicated that the quality of peer interaction can have a bearing on student's academic performance and behaviour in schools. Peer support was seen as particularly important in the development of valuing education, academic, and general self-concepts; that is, students would achieve higher academic results and seek to set higher academic goals, if their

peer group held similar ideals and supported the student in their endeavours as well (McInerney, 2005; Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004).

Self-Efficacy, Self-Concept, Motivational and Aspirational Goal Setting

McInerney (2010) stresses that student engagement in learning is influenced by both social and cultural factors such as: gender, race, class, family, religion, and socio-economic status (see also, Ferrari & Mahalingham, 1998). For Aboriginal students there is also the added impact of historical contact through government policies and practices on each generation of Aboriginal people and their communities since Australia was invaded (Price, 2012; Riley-Mundine, 2007; Parbury, 2005). As such what is defined as engagement and academic success in one social and cultural setting may not be the same for other groups; and it is clear that inclusion of socio-cultural factors help to determine success or lack of success for students at school. It is therefore an imperative that schools when considering dimensions of motivation; consistently and positively use the students rich source of cultural diversity, as an inclusive component in their pedagogical practice and create school approaches which build in the strengths of students from a range of cultural backgrounds, to avoid a mono-cultural and mono-systemic approach, and to strengthen academic success (McInerney, 2010).

Student achievement and motivation is based on a complexity of personal, family, and cultural values. Two key interacting goals are often the focus in western perceptions of individualised academic success: mastery goals (task/learning goals) – personal effort leads to success with an intrinsic value of learning, that is for personal satisfaction; and performance goals (extrinsic goals) – a focus on a person's ability and sense-of-worth through doing better than others. Thus creating in students' a sense that they have a high image in front of others (Magson, Craven, Nelson, Yeung, Bodkin-Andrews, & McInerney, 2014; Linnenbrink, 2005). Aboriginal students, also, see mastery and performance goals as being inclusive of group orientation – that is, preserving in-group integrity, interdependence of groups and harmonious relationships is a key influence to achieving academic success. Students may as such hold multiple goals within a complexity of motivational determinants for action (McInerney, Roche, McInerney, & Marsh, 1997; McInerney, McInerney, & Roche, 1994; McInerney, 1994).

Maehr's Personal Investment Model (McInerney, 1994; McInerney, McInerney & Roche, 1994; Maehr & Braskamp, 1986; Maehr, 1984) posits three global variables: personal incentives (multiple goals), sense of self, and facilitating conditions. Within the arena of multiple goals are: task, ego, social solidarity, and extrinsic reward goals. Sense of self refers to: organised perceptions, beliefs, and feelings related to who the student sees themselves as being in handling competence, autonomy, and purpose. Facilitating conditions relate to behaviours that a person perceives are available and appropriate in situations of sociocultural norms and external factors such as geographic locations and socio-economic conditions.

Much of the research undertaken to assess Aboriginal students' engagement and motivation at school has been undertaken with students attending secondary school. McInerney and Dowson (2003) found in their research with Australian Aboriginal, Navajo, and Anglo students that despite the vast differences in academic outcomes – with the Indigenous groups having much poorer academic outcomes to majority groups - the overwhelming research findings were similar for all students in goals, competitiveness, attitudes, and motivation. The implications being from these researchers that they were unable to define any clear patterns of difference between the Australian Aboriginal, Navajo, and Anglo students and that they had similar motivational and incentives in their learning. Researchers such as McInerney and Dowson (2003) have considered why there would as such be much poorer outcomes for Indigenous students. They have suggested that key influences may be sociological variables – structural and historical, poor quality resources, and/or poor quality teaching. Additionally that whilst the research questions were the same for all students the possibility is that students from different cultural backgrounds may have different motivations and incentives; may not experience support from parents and peers in the same way as Anglo students; and that Indigenous students may in fact feel more alienated from school, face more negative teachers, and have weaker future options which impact on their learning. These factors were not covered in their research, though considered important for future research.

The previously mentioned research was supported by research undertaken in the Northern Territory, Australia with Indigenous and non-Indigenous students by Herbert, McInerney, Fasoli, Stephenson, and Ford (2014) in urban, remote, and very remote locations, in Years 5-12. The researchers posited that Indigenous students valued education and wanted to complete Year 12,

mainly as they saw competing year 12 would lead to good employment in the future. The difference was that very remote students saw education as essentially being about English acquisition. The motivators for student engagement in urban, remote, and very remote schools were that it was a place to: socialise, meet and make friends; have a close relationship with teachers; engage in sports and elective subjects as opposed to mandatory subjects; be challenged at school as home was perceived as boring; and have an opportunity to learn. Competition with other students was not seen as a value; rather it was understood that all the students were good at different things, with the emphasis being on helping others and on being, doing and trying to do your best. Students' learning centered around: supportive and good teachers who understood them, resources at home such as access to computers and books, parental support, and doing homework with support and clarification of work required. The research also found that a key difference was in the concept of sharing which at home meant sharing information, food, clothes, and shoes. Whilst at school it was possible to share much of the same things with their friends; sharing of information was frowned on by the school as it was viewed important to learn as an individual. Whereas in reality, Aboriginal students' felt it was better to learn off and with peers (Herbert et al., 2014).

Weiner (1990) comments that "school motivation cannot be divorced from the social fabric in which it is embedded" (p. 621). Magson et al. (2014) suggest that current understandings of the how social goals influence classroom dynamics and student achievement is underdeveloped (see also, McInerney & King 2013; Wentzel, 1996). Additionally they suggest that in the majority, most research in goal theory has been conducted with Caucasian samples; and that particularly in Australia most research fails to explore the significance of race, ethnicity, and class on student motivation.

Triandis (2004) states that collectivist groups such as Indigenous Australians emphasise social goals such as: security, obedience, duty, and in-group harmony. Individualistic societies tend to stress values consistent with individual pleasure; winning, freedom, autonomy, and achievement (see also Martin, 2006). Magson et al. (2014) state that, "Western schools tend to emphasise individualistic mastery and performance goals, which are often incongruent with many of the values held by minority students" (p. 97) (see also Urdan & Giancarlo, 2000). This creates a dilemma for minority students in forming a balance between the Western values in

schools and not feeling that they are betrayers of their cultural heritage (Covington, 2000). McInerney and King (2013) suggest that particularly for Indigenous groups it is relevant to add social goals to assessing motivators for academic achievement, these are defined as “perceived social purposes of trying to achieve academically” (Urdan & Maehr, 1995, p. 232). Students pursuing social goals are driven to enhance feelings of belonging and group interdependence measured through self-regulated learning – cognitive, metacognitive and resource management strategies – and deep learning (McInerney & King, 2013).

Graham (1994) developed a taxonomy for motivation with African-Americans taking into consideration their historical and social factors, which Martin (2006) saw as relevant in relation to Australian Indigenous students. Martin’s (2006) study looked at a range of factors which influenced Aboriginal student’s success in schools. Firstly Martin (2006) reflected on how students see themselves within the school environment, such as, having a positive identity as an Aboriginal person, as a student, having an academic self-concept and having resilience. Secondly, Martin (2006) assessed the cognitive and affective determinants of behaviour, such as: student’s academic achievement, their motivation to continue, ongoing engagement and attendance, and incorporation of Aboriginal learning styles. Thirdly Martin (2006) considered student’s sensitivity to the dynamics of failure, that is: their fear of failure and ‘shame’ in front of peers and in the classroom setting. Fourthly, Martin (2006) looked at the complexity and interplay of relations between race and social class within the school as it formed the underpinnings of motivational psychology for Aboriginal students. Fifthly, Martin (2006) looked at socialisation practices in families and Aboriginal communities along with child-rearing antecedents of achievement striving. Sixthly, Martin (2006) considered achievement as contributions to understanding human behaviour, that is, what were the values, attitudes, and behaviours held towards school. Martin (2006) observed that these six inter-twining factors must also be viewed in context of the role of significant others; the context of support within the school, the positive role of teachers, formation of good relationships with Aboriginal people and community, and pastoral pedagogy for the development of effective schools for Aboriginal students (see also Munns, Martin, & Craven, 2008).

A main concern identified with Aboriginal students low academic achievement is Anglo-centrism which exists in schools (Tracey, Craven, Yeung, Treagle, Burnstein, & Stanley, 2015;

Keddie, 2011) where there is low expectations for attendance, participation, and achievement (Sarra, 2012); as such it is recognised that school-based factors are a key factor in educational disadvantage (Keddie & Niesche, 2012). To create changes that most readily achieve positive transformation and social justice through improved educational achievement it is essential to harness resources within the local community and extend partnerships beyond the classroom (Rhea, 2012). One such example of a community partnership to support Aboriginal students is that as reported by Tracey, Craven, Yeung, Tregeagle, Burnstein, and Stanley (2015) in relation to a Barnados Learning Centre. Tracey et al. found that academic success for Aboriginal students was impacted on by having: extra support to meet needs of the individual child; one-on-one attention; positive relationships with adults; local connections; and staff being part of the same community.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of research undertaken on self-efficacy and self-concept theory. Much of this research has been undertaken with Caucasian students although some research has been undertaken with Indigenous students in secondary schools. The present investigation seeks to build on this body of research by assessing holistic conditions of academic success for primary Aboriginal students.

The following chapter provides an overview of what research says seeds success for Aboriginal students.

CHAPTER 4

WHAT SEEDS SUCCESS FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS:

WHAT RESEARCH SAYS!

This chapter focuses on factors which have been identified in research and other reports as conditions required for Aboriginal students to succeed in the educational arena. The chapter will commence with a focus on what was identified through the recommendations of the New South Wales Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (NSW AECG) and New South Wales Department of Education and Training (NSW DET) Aboriginal Education Review (AER) (2004) and supported by other researchers as the critical conditions effecting Aboriginal students' engagement and sound academic achievement. Following will be an exploration of the role that parents and communities serve in the educational achievements of Aboriginal students. Next, the chapter will consider the contribution of and interconnected roles of the school community and its environment. The particular focus is on: (1) the role of school executive and leaders; and (2) within the classroom, the interplay of teachers, quality teaching, and culturally appropriate pedagogical approaches for Aboriginal students. The final section of this chapter will provide an overview of the role of friends and Aboriginal educators in schools on the perceived conditions required for high academic achievement of Aboriginal students.

Background

Education is seen as a key factor in developing the ability of Aboriginal students to move between cultures and gain skills necessary to be citizens in the global world (Frigo, Corrigan, Adams, Hughes, Stephens, & Woods, 2004; Price, 2012). McGinty (2003, p. 66) further reinforces the notion that educational achievements must be considered in the context of socio-economic advantage. Thus it is acknowledged that education plays a pivotal role for Aboriginal students providing skills required to set the agenda for their future and their community. Education can strengthen employment skills, which assists to break the poverty cycle many Aboriginal families and communities are caught in. This in turn can lead to better health,

housing, and accessing government services (Australian Government, 2013; Department of Education, Employment, and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), 2011).

The recognition of the importance of education for Aboriginal students is evident in the *National Aboriginal Education Policy* (Australian Government, 1989) and was reinforced by the Australian Government and NSW Government (2005) in their *Overarching Agreement on Aboriginal Affairs Between The Commonwealth of Australia and The State of New South Wales 2005–2010* and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014* (DEEWR, 2011). Policy directions and strategies have been developed to support Aboriginal students as part of National, State, and Territory partnership agreements (Australian Government, 2013). The overarching goal of these Aboriginal education policies, is that “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will match or better the outcomes of the broader student population” NSW DET, (2009b, p. 6). To achieve this goal it is important to understand what seeds success, as measured by sound educational outcomes, for Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal Educational Research Findings

Section Overview

This section provides an overview of the issues which impact on Aboriginal students. To understand these issues a condensed review of the themes which arose from the key research impacting on Aboriginal education in NSW in the past decade, the Aboriginal Education Review (AER) (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) is provided. This is followed by an exploration of some of the major issues which work against Aboriginal student academic success in the school system. Finally, in recognition that Aboriginal education does not exist in a vacuum and is impacted by a multiple of factors, there is a presentation of the big picture issues for Aboriginal education.

Aboriginal Education Review—Issues for Aboriginal Students

The research suggests there are multiple intersecting factors that contribute to Aboriginal students’ engagement and academic success within the education sector. These factors range

across Aboriginal parents' perceptions of the need for education and their engagement in the school. This is aligned with approaches and acceptance of Aboriginal culture within schools. For Aboriginal students it is their self-esteem and value of learning. With teachers it is their understanding of Aboriginal education and cultural difference; which impacts on their curriculum delivery and pedagogy. Finally it is the value and use of Aboriginal workers in the school setting (Munns, O'Rourke, & Bodkin-Andrews, 2013; Rose, 2012; Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Gunstone, & Fanshawe, 2000). Many of these factors hinge on the leadership in the school system to support and direct this multiple approach (Price, 2012; Riley-Mundine, 2007; McGinty, 2003; Schwab, 2001).

Research undertaken in the development of the Aboriginal Education Review (AER) (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004), highlighted nine themes (p. 183) which needed urgent consideration to address the inequity in educational outcomes for Aboriginal students and which stakeholders said, "Do something about ..." (p. 183). These themes are:

Strengthening policy, planning, and implementation. The focus in this theme was the involvement of Aboriginal people with policy, planning, and implementation strategies at all levels across the education system:

The Department was urged to promote a shift in organisational culture so that contributing to improvements in the attendance, retention and academic performance of Aboriginal students becomes part of everyone's business in schools, on TAFE campuses and in offices. This would ensure that responsibility for overcoming resistance and making improvements is not left to committed individuals, nominated officers or special Aboriginal Education Units (p. 185).

This also means early engagement of the Aboriginal community, not simply at implementation stage, to ensure Aboriginal educational needs are "built in" (p. 185) and not "bolted on" (p. 186).

Extending quality teaching and learning. Quality teaching and learning as a theme was seen as a multiple approach, which included: early engagement of Aboriginal students by

building on cultural knowledge and oral traditions (p. 189); development of sufficient and appropriate reading and writing skills (p. 189); and options for varied curriculum and VET experiences (p. 189). The “make or break” element (p. 189) was identified as the quality of the teacher and the identification of “quality” teachers of Aboriginal students. This was based on the teacher’s abilities to: have expectations of Aboriginal students’ success; have a commitment to working with Aboriginal students, families and workers; develop quality relationships with Aboriginal students and their families; and build success into learning programs to build belief in students as competent learners. Additionally they understand Aboriginal English; have the ability to create learning sequences and tasks which are interesting, challenging and meaningful; and ensure Aboriginal students meet the demands of the curriculum. They are professionally discerning and make accurate assessment of learner needs; and have a thorough knowledge of syllabuses and flexibility for Aboriginal student diversity. Importantly they have an ability to adapt pedagogical approaches, content, assessment tasks, and classroom management to cater for Aboriginal students (pp. 189–190).

Fortifying identities of Aboriginal students. This theme saw the need for educational centres, such as schools, to make Aboriginal students, their families and community members welcome, and to cultivate a sense of belonging, and nurture and affirm their identities (p. 195). As opposed to “schools, campuses and offices in which Aboriginal people are made to feel anything but welcome, where Aboriginality is more often ridiculed, denied, discounted or deemed suspect and where the presence of Aboriginal students and their families is begrudgingly ‘tolerated’” (p. 195). Hence the need for school sector staff to understand the importance of Aboriginal identity, Connections to Land, and sense of “Belonging” in the school environment.

Engaging Aboriginal students. This was the focal theme of the AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) finding “ways to make schooling and training more responsive to the needs, potentials and aspirations of Aboriginal students, to make things better” (p. 198). The first issue discussed was about teachers getting to know Aboriginal students better, their diversity in “geographical location, heritage, language, cultural knowledge, family structure and socio-economic status” (p. 198) with students’ “unique combination of strengths, potentials and vulnerabilities” (p. 198). That is, what are students’ talents, gifts, and strengths, and what are the

barriers they face in their learning? This targeted the range of students' abilities, not just as "problem" students. Incorporated into this is the need to engage families in the Kinship system attached to each student. There was also concern for improved identification and support for students "at risk", as it was felt too many students fell through the "gap", through lack of adequate and appropriate identification and support.

Applying Aboriginal cultural knowledge. Whilst it was acknowledged that Aboriginal cultural knowledge is not a single body of knowledge (p. 202) and that this cultural knowledge is specific to each geographic area and to each Nation and Clan group, it was also expressed that it was important to create a greater awareness amongst students and school staff (p. 202) about Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge (ACK), in the main to develop an understanding of cultural matches and mismatches. Aspects of ACK is the sole business of Aboriginal communities, whilst other aspects can be shared, and this would be done, the AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) states, by involving Aboriginal Elders (specialist cultural knowledge holders) to build ACK into appropriate syllabus content, to ensure correct knowledge is taught, and to engage students and in so doing creating a "community of learners" (p. 203). This approach would benefit Aboriginal students in learning cultural knowledge as well as gaining academic knowledge. Also non-Aboriginal students and schools would learn about ACK. Finally there would be practical and productive systemic engagement between schools and communities, which would result in a weaving together of ACK and Western Knowledge (WK), to enrich teaching learning and assessment processes (p. 203). Another imperative is that appropriate resources need to be used in teaching across syllabus areas with built-in ACK.

Collaborating in partnerships. The AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) stated that:

From tens of thousands of years of working together, arguing together, compromising together and agreeing together, Aboriginal peoples understand the wisdom of consensus and expect decision-makers in schools, on TAFE campuses and in offices of DET to include them as active partners, not silent partners, in decision-making (p. 205).

This would therefore be best served through the creation of partnerships at system levels; state levels (“oversee, coordinate, monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of policies, plans and programs” p. 205); and at local levels (“plan, support and, where appropriate, deliver specific initiatives or programs” p. 205). It was suggested through the AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) that this would, in turn, create communities that worked together using one another’s knowledge to ensure mutual respect for experiences and skills. Aligned to this is the value of ongoing research which builds on knowledge that promotes learning and success for Aboriginal students.

Building community capacity. The AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) clarified that most of the work done in Aboriginal education built the capacity of school staff to work with Aboriginal communities, but did not build the capacity of Aboriginal communities to work with schools. This theme was viewed in an historical framework of understanding that the current generation of Aboriginal students is the first generation to have open access to schooling. This means that the majority of their parents and extended families do not have the same level of experiences and understanding of school systems as do the wider community to draw on to engage with the school sector and schools in the same confident manner. Additionally it is also about valuing and using Aboriginal methods to resolve issues, such as, having a “Circle of Friends” (p. 208) to resolve behavioural issues and prevent Aboriginal student suspension within schools. This building of capacity in the Aboriginal community was seen as potentially being able to be used and applied by the Aboriginal community in the wider community.

Challenging racism. The AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) wanted it to be made clear that:

Aboriginal students continue to encounter both *overt* and *covert* influences of racism. The overt influences include name-calling, teasing, exclusion, verbal abuse and bullying. Subtler, covert influences are rarely brought into conscious awareness but stereotype Aboriginal people, constrain expectations of Aboriginal students and induce reluctance within Departmental offices, schools and campuses to challenge discriminatory attitudes and behaviours (p. 211).

The AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) suggested that racism could be identified in the over-representation of Aboriginal students' suspension rates, either as schools who did not know how to deal with Aboriginal students' challenging behaviours or as a direct example of racism in action (p. 211). In either case it was felt little had been done to determine the key factors in a group of students who were often less than 2% of the school population, yet having often nine times the suspension rates (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) of the whole school population.

The issues around not addressing racism with regard to Aboriginal students were seen as: the “fear” factor of being labelled a racist; inadequate data collection of student suspension or complaints on racism by Aboriginal students and community; lack of complaint and appeal processes at the local level; and lack of training for teaching staff on how anti-racism approaches translate into pedagogical approaches in the classroom (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004, pp. 211–212).

Advancing leadership and accountability. This theme area explored the importance of recognising leadership, not simply for those in executive positions, but also all those team leaders, section heads and head teachers, who had a role in directing and managing other staff and educational focuses. It was about these educational leaders' understanding of the vision to improve Aboriginal educational outcomes and translating this into practical action. This means that someone must have explicit accountability (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004, p. 214) to build this vision into system operations, whether this is in the management of the school or classroom practice. Progress needs to be monitored followed by reports on successes and failures, that is, to be accountable for what occurs. It was also acknowledged that this would entail a pro-active approach by the department to create a holistic approach and provision of training to assist in creating these approaches. The AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) determined that this multi-layered approach and focus was required to ensure an improved approach to resolving the educational inequalities of Aboriginal students, which in turn influenced social inequalities of Aboriginal communities.

What Works Against the “Successes” of Aboriginal Students

Aboriginal student success within the school sector is complex and is often judged in terms of the accepted “gap” in Aboriginal students’ educational outcomes and the perceived level of potential success, rather than non-Aboriginal students’ measurements of academic success. The concept seems to imply, but does not state categorically, that for Aboriginal students to be academically successful within the current educational system, they need to lose their cultural identity (Price, 2012). This section will present an examination of the literature in regard to what enhances success for Aboriginal students.

Campbell (2000) discusses the concept of success as it relates to students who are identified as being from a cultural background which is different than that catered for by the school system. Whilst the importance of cultural diversity is acknowledged in educational policies, the sub-text is that this cultural background is a disadvantage as these students do not possess mainstream cultural knowledge required for success in the education system and that the system is at fault for not catering for diverse students. The assumption fails to recognise the successes of these students and the ability to move across cultural boundaries as an advantage, not a disadvantage (p. 31). Additionally, Gunew (1998; also cited in Campbell, 2000) says the same educational policies state that non-mainstream cultures are entitled to maintain their traditions, but it is these same differences in language backgrounds, value systems and attitudes which create problems of non-attainment in education. Thus we quite often see the blame for non-achievement placed back onto the students, their families and communities, rather than the system and its staff. Differences in cultural background therefore become a substitute for racial differences as an explanation for the lack of educational achievement of students from non-mainstream cultural backgrounds.

What this establishes is an acceptance of the inevitability to bridge the gap between home and school cultures (Campbell, 2000; Price, 2012) and the insurmountability of cultural differences (Campbell, 2000; Nakata, 2012; Friedel, 1999). This short-sighted approach also fails to acknowledge differences between cultural groups, or individual difference within cultural groups. This cultural stereotyping is unacceptable in most educational and political contexts as it

underestimates students' abilities to successfully work across cultural barriers and to achieve academic success (Campbell, 2000; Price, 2012; Rose, 2012).

De Bortoli and Cresswell (2004) in their research to establish international benchmarking standards in English achievement in their international study for the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) research explored Australian Aboriginal students' success against this benchmark. They judged that whilst the general student population in Australia was one of the top performing nations, on average Australian Indigenous students' results were well below non-Indigenous students' results and the standardised Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) average. As presented in Figure 4.1 Proficiency Levels for Indigenous Students and Non-Indigenous Students on the Reading Literacy Scale (2004, p. 12) as follows:

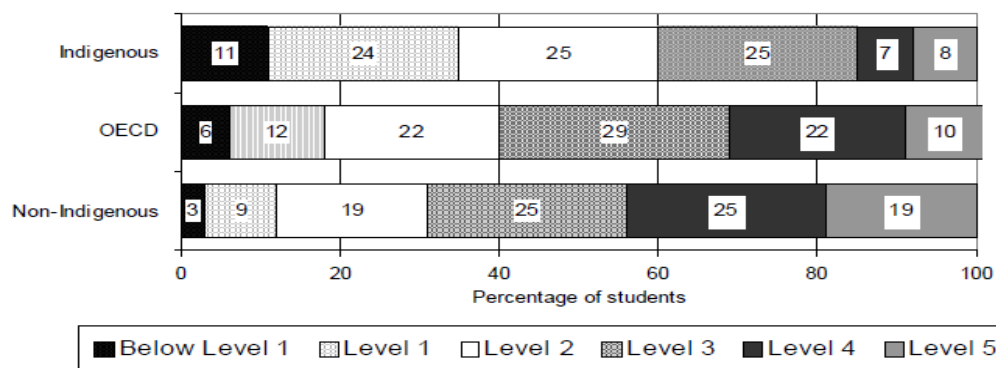


Figure 4.1 Proficiency Levels for Indigenous Students and Non-Indigenous Students on the Reading Literacy Scale

These figures when set against accepted norms are particularly distressing in a nation that can pride itself on its general high levels of educational achievement, but this is not the case for Australian Aboriginal students. When assessing the characteristics of Aboriginal students who were achieving in the higher bands of 7% and 8%, what De Bortoli and Cresswell contended was that:

The students in the high achieving group are more likely to be female, have more than 50 books in the home, and have one or more parents who have achieved higher educational levels than students in the low achieving group.

Students in the high achieving group have more positive attitudes and behaviours towards reading than the low achieving group. High achieving students are also more likely to be motivated to manage their own learning.... Students in the high achieving group have a more positive sense of their belonging at school and have better teacher–student relationships. They report their English teacher is more supportive than students in the low achieving group (2004, p. 35).

Questions raised for Aboriginal students are, what is considered success in the school environment, and how is this success measured. Chaffey (2001) in his research examining Aboriginal students' academic success in schools explains that Aboriginal students often play down their abilities and do not score high on achievement tests because of low expectations. That is, no one expects them to do well so they 'deliberately' do not, or they do not want to 'stand out' in front of their peers, that is, in front of other Aboriginal students. This is as a result of cultural difference and not wanting to be 'shamed' (look bad) if they get it wrong, or stand out ('big note' themselves) for getting it right (see also Munns, 2005). These findings are mirrored in the American context, where Fordham and Ogbu (1986) explore this phenomenon. They noted, "the fear of being accused of acting white" can cause a social and psychological situation which diminishes black students' academic effort and leads to underachievement (p. 176). Additionally they found that there is cultural orientation which defines academic learning in school as 'acting white' and academic success as the prerogative of white Americans, thus placing social pressures against striving for academic success and fear of striving for academic success (p. 177).

Fordham and Ogbu (1986, p. 176) also identified that when 'Black' students do well they generally face an interrogation (by non-Black people) as to how much of the work is 'actually' their work. This in turn leads to not wishing to demonstrate their talents. They go on to say students are applying adaptation techniques as historically set, accepted and required by their environment. In summation this is directly due to three factors. Firstly, the educational provision of inferior schooling and treatment in educational settings. Secondly, through imposed job ceilings, where when educational attainment is achieved they are not rewarded for this accomplishment. Thirdly, it forces these individuals to focus on coping devices which limit striving for academic success (p. 179). Beaulieu, Figueira, and Viri (2005) discussed the need to

recognise the unique educational and cultural needs of Native American children in academic achievement and that Native students “can be ‘disabled’ or ‘empowered’ as a direct result of interactions between teachers and minority teachers and between schools and minority communities” (p. 3).

Similarly in Australia, this can be seen as having direct correlation to Aboriginal students and their perceptions of success (Munns, 2005). Unfortunately because of the “educational problems” and the “gap” between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal student academic outcomes, little research has been given to conditions of success for Aboriginal students in Australia. Schwab (2001, p. 7) has emphasised:

One of the features of educational research and policy formulation is that they are often reactive, particularly where there is a perceived crisis. Not surprisingly, policy-makers and educational researchers are drawn to ‘problems’, and there is a natural tendency to try to repair what’s ‘wrong’. Yet while ‘problem’ students demand attention and students who are ‘at risk’ certainly deserve care, it can be argued that there is potentially a great deal to learn from successful students as well.

This focus on “problem students” is evident in the lack of research undertaken with “academically successful” Aboriginal students. The trend is to focus on Aboriginal students at the bottom end of the achievement ladder and to find solutions to “close the gap” (Australian Government, 2013; Price, 2012).

Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Gunstone, and Fanshawe (2000, p. x) have classified positive self-identity in a student as being associated with school success, and that for Indigenous students, to develop a positive self-identity they need to perceive value in schooling. These factors include: schools in which students have a sense of belonging; where they view teachers as being warm and supportive, with positive expectations; a curriculum which is relevant; with support and encouragement from their family, peers, and community. Schwab (2001) sees these successes being built around what happens specifically in the school, with the interaction of Indigenous staff, executive vision and leadership, committed and creative staff, community

engagement, recognition and celebration of the individual, empowerment, and community engagement (see also Beaulieu, Figueira & Viri, 2005). These are reiterated by Munns, O'Rourke, and Bodkin-Andrews (2013) in their research on seeding success for Aboriginal students, whereby schools seen to be achieving successful academic outcomes for Aboriginal students have strong community relationships, cultural spaces, and Aboriginal people are central to the school's work. Additionally, Aboriginal perspectives are embedded in the curriculum, with specific focuses on quality teaching, serious concentration on learning, and targeted support for Aboriginal students. In these schools Aboriginal students are seen as important, responsible, and able to achieve (p. 2). Whilst these conditions are credited with academic success for Aboriginal students, the concern is that little extensive research has been done directly with successful Aboriginal students to identify what they perceive they need, within the school community that would best support them to achieve sound academic outcomes.

The Big Picture in Aboriginal Education

Since 1992, the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training, and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) has had a key government focus, through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), with the "National Commitment to Improved Outcomes in the Delivery of Programs and Services for Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples" (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2000a; 2005) on improving the equity situation faced by Aboriginal students in education. The attempt being to: change perceptions that the educational "gap" for Aboriginal students is normal (Commonwealth of Australia, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2000a; McGinty, 2003; NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004; Price, 2012; Rose, 2012); change the systemic acceptance of Aboriginal students' low academic achievements to one of being optimistic that change can occur; and ensure that Aboriginal education is "core business" with a recognition that there is a need to strengthen partnerships with Indigenous communities (Commonwealth of Australia, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2000a; McGinty, 2003; NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004; Price, 2012).

MCEETYA (2005, pp. 53–55) discusses the need for “The Partnership Cube for Indigenous Education” (see Figure 4.2 below). MCEETYA (2005b, p. 53) explains Figure 4.2 thus: “A new partnership model is proposed in order to address the need for rigour in designing new and better approaches to improving educational outcomes. This approach is called the ‘Partnership Cube’. The Partnership Cube focuses on developing stronger partnerships between government, communities and education systems and is designed to provide a diagrammatic representation of these cross-portfolio complexities, at the same time providing a simple framework for identifying the issues and enabling all participants to develop solutions”.

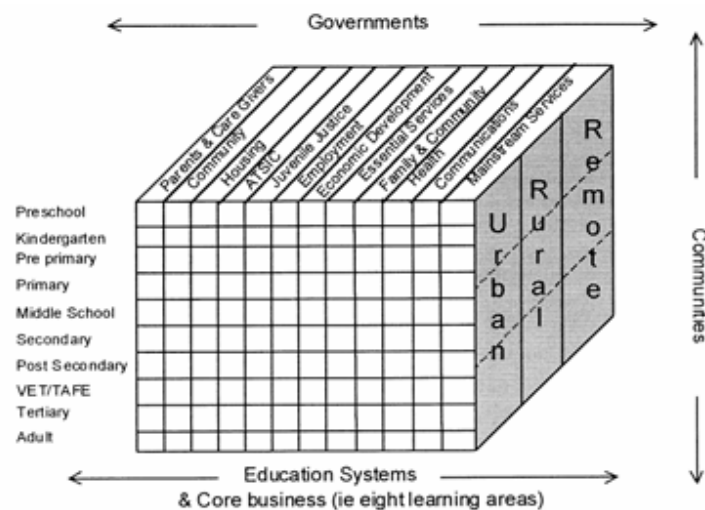


Figure 4.2 The Partnership Cube for Indigenous Education

(MCEETYA, 2005, p. 54; McGinty, 2003, p. 77)

Riley-Mundine (2007) further explains this concept as she discusses the need for a “Stakeholders Matrix”. The “Stakeholders Matrix” (see Appendix 1: Stakeholders Matrix—Conditions For Success For Aboriginal Students) originated from the findings of the AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004), which demonstrated the need for all partners to engage in the delivery of improved educational outcomes for Aboriginal students, being the students themselves, their parents, teachers, principals, and other associated Aboriginal staff. These partnerships were required to fulfil a number of roles and responsibilities, to ensure Aboriginal students’ academic outcomes were improved. The pivotal key is that all partners are not only

aware of their roles, and have appropriate cultural knowledge of one another, but have the knowledge and skills, aligned with appropriate structural support from within the service delivery agency, in this case the educational system, to create a systemic wide approach which creates a series of sustainable programs.

The MCEETYA “Partnership Cube” (MCEETYA, 2005) and Riley-Mundine’s “Stakeholders Matrix” (2007) were depicting the urgent need to have a planned approach to resolving the educational “gap” faced by Aboriginal students through targeting resources and ensuring all stakeholders recognise the role they serve in closing the educational “gaps” (Price, 2012). Without this combined stakeholder approach, there will only ever be ad hoc success and a reliance on individuals, who may leave or get burnt out. Hence the process starts again with new people leading that often have to re-invent the wheel which creates time lags whilst allowance is made for new people to catch-up with the program; which in turn results in jumps in success for Aboriginal students, schools and their communities, rather than smooth continuous success and development.

This approach is clearly evidenced in the MCEETYA *National Statement of Principles and Standards for More Culturally Inclusive Schooling in the 21st Century* (2000a); the NSW AECG and NSW DET *Aboriginal Education Review* (AER) (2004); the MCEETYA *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* (2006); and the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014* (DEEWR, 2011). These reports emphasise school and community educational partnerships, school leadership, and quality teaching, to ensure engagement in learning. It is clear from these reports that education is seen as a key service delivery area in improving equity issues as it relates to improved social and economic conditions for Aboriginal people.

Section Summary and Implications for the Present Investigation

This section has provided an overview of the key systemic themes and issues facing Aboriginal education, as presented from the AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) and the impacts these have for Aboriginal students' academic success. Second was a presentation of what appears to be working against Aboriginal students' academic success within schools. Then finally what are the big picture issues which impact on Aboriginal students as they attend schools within systemic institutions. The intertwining of these issues needs to be recognised to fully appreciate what is required to ensure Aboriginal students' academic success.

The implication for this research; is in what way are these factors reflected in or have impact on the conditions which support Aboriginal students who are achieving academic success.

The following section looks at the role of parents and Aboriginal communities in assisting Aboriginal students to gain academic success.

The Role of Parents and Community

Section Overview

Parents play a pivotal role in Aboriginal students' engagement in education. In turn the important roles schools and staff play in providing respect, commitment, collaboration and accountability with parents and Aboriginal community to ensure engagement is sustained and authentic are discussed in this section.

Parental Engagement

Parental engagement with teachers and schools is valuable and indeed when parents and extended families are involved in schools there is an increase in student achievements and students demonstrate a positive approach to school (Friedel, 1999; Greenwood, Frigo & Hughes, 2002; Hughes & More, 1997; Price, 2012). While this engagement is not contested it is important to understand that many Aboriginal parents may not wish to be engaged with the educational systems, particularly in NSW (NSW AECG & NSW DEC, 2010). Friedel (1999) explains this as being relevant to our understanding of parental school interaction, as often the non-participation of Aboriginal parents means that they are blamed for their child's non-achievement or poor behaviour. Herbert (2012) comments that Aboriginal people feel they have been positioned for failure within educational services (p. 40), hence may choose not to engage with this system.

Perceptions about levels of Aboriginal parents' support of their children may arise out of parents not participating in standard activities, such as non-attendance at parent teacher interviews. This can lead to teachers assuming that Aboriginal parents lack concern for their child. There is often a lack of understanding of the historical reasons why many Aboriginal parents are uncomfortable going into schools (these historical reasons will be discussed later in the chapter). Friedel believed that it may be more accurate to say that some parents may feel that they lack specific school-cultural knowledge (1999, p. 141) to engage with the school system, rather than that they do not care what happens with their children. Friedel (1999) provides evidence that, rather than involving parents on a continuous basis, what schools tend to do is

only engage them when it is convenient for them or to assist with a problem child. What happens is that schools only want parents to be involved, based on their own terms (p. 143) (see also Price, 2012).

The reasons why Aboriginal parents may not be involved in schools often stems from their own alienation and negative experiences within the education system (Dudgeon & Ugle, 2010) which they do not want perpetuated for their children. Often these parents feel the system is incapable of changing. Other parents may see the school as a proponent of the cultural invader, pushing their own world views on those they have invaded, to curb Aboriginal people's cultural expression; or they do not wish to push the school's agenda onto their children (Friedel, 1999, p. 141). What this often leads to is a judgement by the school of Aboriginal people's intention and competence rather than an awareness of cultural difference, an invisible cultural conflict or developing from "silent apartheid" (Rose, 2012). Hence cultural competence is vital as it provides an understanding of cultural biases (Buckskin, 2012). What happens argues Friedel (1999), is that it is Aboriginal people who are expected to be more culturally competent which is known as "standpoint epistemology" (p. 146; see also Nakata, 2012). This is further summarised as:

It begins with the idea that less powerful members of society have the potential for a more complete view of social reality than others, precisely because of their disadvantaged position. That is, in order to survive (both socially and sometimes even physically), subordinate persons are attuned to or attentive to the perspective or the dominant class ...as well as their own. This awareness gives them the potential for ..."double vision" or double consciousness—a knowledge, awareness of, and sensitivity to both the dominant world view of the society and their own minority ... perspective (Friedel, 1999, p. 146).

As Friedel (1999) suggests, this can lead to a "culture of silence" (p. 147) where it is only through Aboriginal people making the approach, that Aboriginal perspectives and their voices will be included or "silent apartheid" where staff ignore the needs of Aboriginal students and parents (Rose, 2012). Friedel (1999, p. 150) also proposes that because the education system is large and bureaucratic, systems and routines have been established to simplify and formalise

previous practice. Change to existing entrenched practices and efforts to implement new processes are often very difficult and are met with resistance. So what tends to occur is that Aboriginal students' needs and engagement are relegated to "special programs" (p. 151) or targeted with limited resources (p. 153), which relegates Aboriginal people to the position of beggars rather than empowered individuals with control to govern and make change, as suits their culture and educational requirements. Due to this lack of empowerment Aboriginal people often see "failure" in the non-Aboriginal system as "success" in resisting cultural, spiritual, and psychological genocide. In essence this resistance means that Aboriginal people preserve their dignity, in a system that labels them as incompetent (p. 153). Needless to say, there are ongoing attempts to create equal partnerships between the school sector and Aboriginal communities, and this is evidenced as being important and relevant by the Partnership Agreement 2010–2020 developed between the NSW AECG and the NSW DET (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2010), "based on the principles of *respect, commitment, collaboration* and *accountability* in order to improve educational and training outcomes for Aboriginal learners" (p. 3).

Respect, Commitment, Collaboration, and Accountability

Schwab (2001, p. xi), in his discussions on successful school programs emphasises the importance of community engagement in success (see also Dudgeon & Ugle, 2010). He believes that success is when schools develop mechanisms to consult with and link with community, to ensure the community is a full partner in the educational process of young Aboriginal people, where everyone becomes equal stakeholders in the process (see also Price, 2012).

Historically, there are two focuses to be recognised and resolved. First, there has been permeation within the education system of low expectations for Aboriginal students and the acceptance that they are not able to excel. Garvis (2006) commented that the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC) (2000) believes "there's a lack of systemic optimism that Aboriginal students can excel in the school sector" (p. 43). As such, the priority for staff in the schooling system is to recognise and understand where such perceptions may have originated. This could be in their own limited knowledge base and experiences, rather than to proactively redress these perceptions to ensure their expectations of Aboriginal students within the school sector are raised" (Rose, 2012).

Second, is the relationship factor between the Aboriginal community, school staff, and the non-Aboriginal community, and this can either build or destroy trust. There are valid historical reasons for the non-involvement of Aboriginal parents in schools (Beresford, Partington & Gower, 2012; Dudgeon & Ugle, 2010; Price, 2012), such as the long-term social disadvantages created through schools in the past. These were identified by the AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) which expounded that for many Aboriginal parents “it is their own negative experiences within schools that are critical in provision of successful outcomes, if they find schools confronting and overwhelming places” (Garvis, 2006, p. 56).

Effective partnerships are essential to create a cohesive community. For example, the more involved parents are with their children at school, the greater the impact and more comprehensive learning outcomes for students (Beresford et al., 2012; Hone, 2005; Price, 2012; Snow, 2005). In creating sound partnerships with local Aboriginal communities there needs to be open communication and common goals being set and addressed (Noonan, 2005). To optimise this partnership it is essential to have: a real reason to meet; clear focus, goals and aims; timeline for implementation of recommendations; and to recognise achievements which are celebrated. Aboriginal parents can just as easily be disengaged through inflexible and lengthy bureaucracy, but with real commitment and the development of respect, trust, and tenacity the partnership can flourish and be effective for the school, students, and community.

McGinty (2002) states that, schools should be seen as community assets and therefore as central to a communities learning and development and as such are best placed to build the whole communities capacity as a collaboration to fix educational disadvantage. Further to this, McGinty (2003) sees engagement as essential to allow community to influence the curriculum and schooling experiences of their children (Beresford et al., 2012; Price, 2012). A sound partnership ensures Aboriginal students can achieve the educational skills and knowledge that they and their communities require to thrive in light of the overall socio-economic conditions, which can lead to independent and self-actualised communities. Implicit in these partnerships, McGinty (2003) argues is:

an understanding that all the stakeholders require some development of their ability to communicate and work with other stakeholders. In order for a true

partnership to exist, all the players must achieve a higher degree of understanding of one another and, with it, a higher degree of respect for the skills, knowledge and underpinning value that each player contributes to the process. This process is known as community capacity building (CCB) (pp. 66–67).

This reinforces the MCEETYA “Cube Partnership” model (2005b) and Riley-Mundine’s (2007) stakeholders’ responsibilities requirements, whereby all stakeholders understand their roles and have the skills to undertake their tasks. In this view the school community gains cultural competence and is aware of the effects of previous historical practices and policies towards Aboriginal people. Subsequently, the Aboriginal community requires an awareness of school systems and the school processes to support their children.

Section Summary and Implications for the Present Investigation

This section presents what the literature has to say about the importance of engaging parents and community in schools for Aboriginal students’ academic success. This is predicated on the role schools and staff play in ensuring there is authentic respect, commitment, collaboration and accountability between these stakeholder groups to create sound academic outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The implications for this present investigation is; are the factors identified, important conditions for achieving sound academic outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The following section provides an overview of factors in schools which have impact on Aboriginal students’ academic outcomes.

Schooling Factors

Section Overview

A distinction needs to be made between leadership in Aboriginal education and Aboriginal leadership in education. Leadership in Aboriginal education is about better outcomes for Aboriginal students, as would be expected for all students regardless of social or cultural circumstances. Aboriginal leadership in education is ensuring Aboriginal people are leaders in the pursuit of improved outcomes with the schools; affirming Aboriginal identity throughout studies programs and cultural learning pedagogy (MCEETYA, 2006, p. 23; see also Price, 2012).

The following section provides an overview of leadership in Aboriginal education followed by Aboriginal leadership in education then discusses the role of the school within this environment.

Leadership in Aboriginal Education

MCEETYA (2006, p. 7) has concluded that a “strong, proactive and informed leadership at the school level is fundamental to establishing and maintaining a culture of learning that is inclusive of Indigenous students and enables their engagement and successful participation. Leaders in Aboriginal education are not there just to affirm good practice when they see it, but also to examine entrenched practices and attitudes that may be contributing to disparity in educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students” (p. 24). Clearly a major influence on Aboriginal students’ educational success is school leadership; that is, the leaders’ understanding of social, linguistic, and cultural context of learners is essential in supporting Aboriginal students to achieve sound academic outcomes (MCEETYA, 2006; see also DEEWR, 2011).

School executive and their leadership skills is the key ingredient to making changes in the school environment. This involves their ability to represent all participants within the stakeholder groups and to assist these groups to work together to achieve the visions of the community; and resolve their conflicts through working together rather than creating a vertical line of power

(McGinty, 2003, p. 74). Schwab (2001, p. xi) has noted that schools with successful programs had a clear vision for addressing the needs of Indigenous students. Additionally, the visions were local and context-specific, incorporating realistic assessment of resources and opportunities to meet those needs. Leadership was a clear factor in the success of the programs, at the administrative level and in the classroom (Beresford et al., 2012).

Aboriginal Leadership in Education

To ensure schools create a genuine partnership with Aboriginal community which has connection and embedded cultural knowledge requires Aboriginal leadership to be built-into the system, which in turn requires control by Aboriginal leaders and capacity building to allow constructive decisions to be made, based on these Aboriginal leaders' intimate knowledge of the system (DEEWR, 2011; MCEETYA, 2006; NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2010). This allows Aboriginal people to be included and valued within the system and assists in creating a social cohesion which benefits them as well as mainstream Australians, but also values their cultural values, beliefs, and attitudes (Beresford et al., 2012; McGinty, 2003; Price, 2012).

The Role of the School Environment

The important role of the school environment for all stakeholders cannot afford to be discounted as Klasen (as cited in McGinty, 2003) emphasises:

a differentiated school system can be a source of social exclusion, particularly if the system works largely on a hierarchical basis forcing the students with the least educational promise into a lower tier school system that can become exclusionary in its own right, apart from the impact on educational achievement it may have ... The differentiation itself can lead not only to poorer education in the bottom tier, but also to a less inclusive education process as children in the lower tier may feel less valued by society (p. 86).

It is this non-understanding or non-recognition of the stratification which can take place in the school environment, which may in effect create the barriers which lead to exclusion for Aboriginal students, which needs to be identified by the local school community. If this

stratification is not addressed what can transpire, as McGinty (2003) states is a situation in which “the children in the lower tier begin to believe that they are not smart enough to get well-paying jobs and, eventually, lose faith in themselves and the value of the school system” (p. 86). Herbert (2000, p. 133) argues this can also lead to the perception that Aboriginal students go to school to partake in established institutional practices developed to serve the society within which the school is embedded. Therefore Aboriginal parents and students may not be willing to become socially and culturally integrated into the school if they wrongly or rightly perceive their involvement is at the expense of their own culture. Schools may be seen to only be of value if willing to build on and respect the cultural integrity which comes with the students. This approach is evident in the NSW Department of Education *NSW Aboriginal Education Policy 1996–2000*, which states: “it is critical that schools are places where Aboriginal students feel a sense of belonging; Aboriginal students have the right to be Aboriginal and to express their own unique cultural identity.” (NSW DET, 1996, p. 6). As such schools must recognise this.

Has this changed? Rose (2012) seems to think not as educators have little exposure to Aboriginal insights and inadvertently replicate ignorance or teach illegitimate and ill-informed content. Rose calls this part of the “silent apartheid” taking place in education systems.

For Aboriginal students a major component for a sense of belonging in the school environment is the creation of a total school system with a broad school philosophy, sound structures and school wide systems which were inclusive and dealt with racism (Purdie et al., 2000, pp. 13–14; see also Price, 2012). The school climate needs to have proactive community engagement, promote positive outcomes, and be a nurturing environment for Aboriginal students and communities (Buckskin, 2012). The role of the school environment is to ensure not only a sound learning environment, but also a safe and culturally appropriate site which is seen to welcome and value Aboriginal students, their parents, and their communities. Hence the role of the school environment is considered an important foundation in creating sound educational outcomes for Aboriginal students (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2010).

Section Summary and Implications for the Present Investigation

Leadership in Aboriginal education and Aboriginal leadership in education are pivotal roles within schools to provide environments which progress safe and culturally appropriate spaces, allowing Aboriginal students to thrive and gain sound academic outcomes.

The present investigation will examine to what extent leadership in Aboriginal education and Aboriginal leadership is a condition in the school environment, is identified as an important factor by Aboriginal students and their stakeholders as impacting on Aboriginal students' ability to achieve sound academic outcomes.

In the following section will be an examination in the role of teachers in assisting Aboriginal students to achieve sound academic outcomes.

The Importance of Expert Teachers

Section Overview

Being a good teacher for Aboriginal students is discussed in this section to determine the key factors which need to be taken into consideration for teachers to ensure Aboriginal students gain sound academic outcomes. These factors are: What does it mean to be a good teacher in teaching for cultural inclusivity? How is being a good teacher reflected in quality teaching and the quality teaching framework? Additionally this section discusses how when teaching Aboriginal students teachers need to: take into consideration ethnocentric curriculum, how Aboriginal students best learn; gifted and talented approaches; including Aboriginal cultural knowledge; students' peers; and importantly, Aboriginal educators in schools.

Teachers, Teaching and Cultural Inclusivity

What comes first, the smart teacher or the smart student? In answering this question it must be remembered that teaching is a profession which is multi-dimensional, with the primary function being to support the student's personal academic growth (Beresford et al., 2012; Gambley, 2005; Herbert, 2012; Rose, 2012) and to facilitate change. This change inevitably

affects the student's intellectual potential, social standing, and self-worth. Therefore the teachers' understanding of how they contribute to the development of a vibrant learning community and their grasp of emotional intelligence and learning styles are essential in assisting the teachers to motivate and create self-efficacy within students. As Campbell (2000), comments, "Unfortunately, teachers are far more likely to be monolingual, monocultural, and culturally encapsulated than their students. Changing educational policies to acknowledge cultural diversity is relatively easy, but attempting to change teachers and teaching practices may be far more difficult" (p. 32) (see also Rose, 2012).

Ladwig (2007) provides an overview of the development of research in the quality of teaching and its effectiveness, commencing in the 1980s in response to a crisis in education in America for more educative, equitable, and authentic pedagogy to create student engagement, higher order thinking, and to reform curriculum. The focus was on authentic pedagogy and the question being asked was: "Does any of the reform improve student learning?" (p. 4). What followed was a testing of these models in the 1990s by Newmann and Associates (Ladwig, 2007), to see if setting teaching standards, classroom practice (instruction), and assessment practices do produce work by students that meet high standards of intellectual quality. Specifically, does authentic pedagogy lead to authentic student performance and does this have impact on and value beyond the school? The result was the creation of a summative scale of authentic tasks as global measures: depth of knowledge and understanding; substantive communication; student construction and their degree of higher order thinking; and connectedness to the world beyond school (Ladwig, 2007, p. 4).

The replication of Newmann and Associates research in Australia by Ladwig saw a widening of the research to include the effects of classroom practice, inclusive of social support for students, and its association with improved student performance (Hayes, Mills, Christie, & Lingard, 2006). A factor identified in Ladwig's study is that not all pedagogical practice is effective for different social groups. A model that was not seen to work is where the emphasis in the model relies on "deep intellectuality and the students' construction of knowledge" (Ladwig, 2007, p. 5). Meaning, a model which relied on teachers' abilities to work across and with students from various cultural backgrounds and not having the skills to identify these students'

differences in construction of knowledge. Much of the debate has been theoretical as no measures of classroom interaction have been incorporated into research.

Following on from Ladwig's research, was research undertaken by Berlak and Berlak which draws on earlier studies by Bourdieu and Passeron (Ladwig, 2007) with the theory of pedagogy as symbolic violence and how it related to educational inequality. This research focused on the qualities of teaching, theorised to improve learning for students from traditionally disadvantaged social backgrounds (Ladwig, 2007, p. 5), rather than on cultural disadvantage or difference, where educational inequality is seen as a result of the bias of the sociology of the curriculum, through the nature and quality of instruction and pedagogical relations. This may mean that teachers are often not trained to teach or prepare curricula for students who are culturally different and perhaps are best prepared to teach or prepare curricula for students from their own cultural background. Hence there is a need for additional and more appropriate training for these staff (Harrison & Worthington, 2008; Price, 2012; Rose, 2012).

The research of the late 1990's saw the *formulation of productive pedagogy* (Hayes, et al, 2006; Ladwig, 2007, p. 8) which sees a combining of authentic pedagogy, social support systems, and *pedagogical practices identified by equity literature* (Hayes, et al, 2006; Ladwig, 2007, p. 9) to create a model for classroom practice. This approach was mooted to provide quality teaching with improved pedagogical practice (Queensland Department of Education, Curriculum Innovation Branch, 2002).

Quality Teaching as an Effective Tool

The Quality Teaching Framework (QTF), adopted for use in NSW, is an adaptation of the Productive Pedagogies research. The QTF has three dimensions: intellectual quality; quality learning; and significance. Each dimension has six elements (see Figure 4.3 below), which are used to design and assess a teaching unit and the way it is delivered to students, to determine what it is teachers are really teaching, how are the students going to meet desired learning outcomes, and at what level will students' knowledge of the subject matter be measured.

	Intellectual quality	Quality learning environment	Significance
Elements	Deep knowledge	Explicit quality criteria	Background knowledge
	Deep understanding	Engagement	Cultural knowledge
	Problematic knowledge	High expectations	Knowledge integration
	Higher-order thinking	Social support	Inclusivity
	Metalanguage	Students' self-regulation	Connectedness
	Substantive communication	Student direction	Narrative

Table 1: The dimensions and elements of the NSW model of pedagogy

Figure 4.3 The Quality Teaching Framework Dimensions and Elements of the NSW Model of Pedagogy (Ladwig & King, 2003, p. 5)

Ladwig and King (2003) note that these dimensions and elements must be shown to be covered across all units of study for curriculum delivery to demonstrate that students have progressively gained sound academic outcomes. These dimensions and elements provide a useful tool for teachers so they can assess which areas have been addressed and those which still need attention. The QTF is a model for dealing with the core business of teaching (Ladwig, 2007) through both a provision of common language for teachers and a reflective tool for measuring authentic pedagogy. This allows teachers to assess their classroom practice/instruction and assess how this practice aligns with the overall student experiences. In other words it lets teachers individually and collectively analyse their current pedagogical practices and asks if their intentions in the classroom for students' academic and developmental growth match students' achievements and outcomes (Ladwig, 2007).

Gore and Ladwig (2004) further comment on the ethical aspects of the QTF in relating to teachers' expectations, knowledge of their subject, and the planning they undertake. They emphasise that the real issues are that teachers need to think more deeply about what their students learn; what they can achieve; and what they as teachers can do to affect this learning. These outcomes can be achieved through asking four basic questions: What do you want your students to learn? Why does that learning matter? What do you want your students to produce? How well do you expect them to do it? (p. 4). The QTF whilst publicised as a program for all students, does not specifically identify cultural diversity, such as teaching needs for Aboriginal

students. Yet it is argued (Riley & Genner, 2011) that using the QTF, the teacher may be able to identify what works best for Aboriginal students and more importantly why it does work.

Riley and Genner (2011) through the Bemel-Gardoo Project, which applies the QTF to embed Aboriginal cultural content, noted that there appears to be a demonstrated preference by students from culturally different backgrounds for particular sets of QT elements, used by teachers to support student outcomes. These include: inclusivity, student self-regulation, engagement, social support, deep knowledge, background knowledge linked with deep understanding, higher order thinking, substantive conversation, and explicit criteria. This is not to say that other elements, within the three dimensions, are not relevant but rather that the above listed elements appear to produce greater outcomes for Aboriginal students. Aligned to this, Riley and Genner (2011) state the need for a multi-dimensional approach to classroom practice, particularly the need to take into consideration students' different learning styles (Herbert, 2012). Ladwig (2007) also reports that there are two other significant elements which appear to have significance for Aboriginal students, but which are rarely demonstrated in classroom practice. These are active citizenship and group identities, and that often there is a greater emphasis on the "Socially Supportive Environment Dimension", in classrooms with Aboriginal students (Ladwig, 2007, p. 12). This means that, in the attempt to make Aboriginal students feel secure and comfortable in the school environment, there is often less emphasis and perhaps time devoted to achieving sound academic outcomes.

Where the research has shown that the dimension of intellectual quality is vital, classroom observation has shown that "high order thinking and depth were occasionally and unevenly part of the typical lesson, while metalanguage, substantive conversations and problematic knowledge were rare" (Ladwig, 2007, p. 12). In lay terms, there was a low level of intellectual demand in classrooms. This appears to be particularly relevant for Aboriginal students when you consider language and learning style preferences where there is an even greater need for knowledge construction and substantive communication which needs to be demonstrated through problematic knowledge and metalanguage with substantive conversation. Ladwig (2007) also noted it was rare for students to be presented with criteria for the expected standards through which the quality of their work would be assessed. This absence, when aligned with Aboriginal

students' needs to have a holistic view of, where they are headed, why they are doing the work, and what is intended to be achieved, limits their frame of reference where they have a clearer understanding of expectations and what they might be able to do. Hence, this issue often provides the catch 22 syndrome for teachers. Which is, the thought that intellectual quality is only for the smart or culturally attuned student, rather than being used as a tool to stimulate and engender the elements within the Quality Teaching dimensions of: deep knowledge; deep understanding; problematic knowledge; higher order thinking; meta-language; and substantive communication, for all students? Which leads us back to ask the question, which comes first, the smart teacher or the smart student? (Beresford et al., 2012; Herbert, 2012; Rose, 2012).

An assumed important strategy would therefore be to strengthen intellectual quality and significance of learning experiences for Aboriginal students. In essence it is also about shifting the power relationship from resting with the teacher, to creating a professional community with colleagues, students, and Aboriginal communities (Buckskin, 2012).

What is a Good Teacher?

Haberman (1991) discusses the role teachers are often forced into; he comments that most teachers enter the profession because they want to be “helpers, models, guides, stimulators and caring sources of encouragement” (p. 3) but often become “directive authoritarians in order to function” (p. 3) in schools. He states that they don't decide, “I want to be able to tell people what to do all day and then make them do it!” (p. 3), but rather are manipulated into thinking this is the definition of a good teacher. How are they manipulated into this thinking? Haberman believes this occurs through stealth, where first, students reward teachers with compliance or silence (as opposed to overt, covert, or tacit threats of non-compliance which can result in classroom disruption), with teacher directed control, because that is easier than students taking responsibility for their own learning; “it absolves them (students) of responsibility for learning and puts the burden on the teachers, who must be accountable for making them learn” (Haberman, 1991, p. 5). In many ways this is less risky for the students, where the expectations are set as, “Try and make me learn” as opposed to, “Let's see how well and how much you really can do” (p. 5). Then second, teacher competence is often defined by executive and parents through the compliance they have in the classroom, “not because their ‘deprived’,

‘disadvantaged’, ‘abused’, ‘low-income’ students are not learning.” (Haberman, 1991, p. 4). The result is that teacher competence is often aligned to and “synonymous with student control” (Haberman, 1991, p. 5).

The problem with this approach, as suggested by Haberman (1991) is that it can create a poverty of pedagogy. Therefore one must ask, is it quality teaching to impose a system or to establish trust through involving students in meaningful programs of study where control and discipline is a result of “good” teaching; or where student behaviour is a pre-requisite before teaching and learning can take place (see also Beresford et al., 2012).

Hattie’s (2003) study shows that teachers account for 30% of the major variance and influence in students’ achievements; teachers “can and usually do have positive effects, but must have exceptional effects” (p. 3) for their students. Hattie goes on to explain that schooling systems need to ensure the influence teachers have is optimised and that schools make sure attention is directed to supporting teachers to achieve higher quality teaching and higher student expectations. This is further supported by Hayes et al., (2006) who make clear that “Individual teachers have more impact on student outcomes than do whole-school effects; and particular classroom practices are linked to high-quality student performances” (p. 1). Similarly, Hayes et al. concluded that:

it was teachers and their pedagogies that made the greatest difference of all the in-school factors in terms of student outcomes. Complementary school re-culturing certainly contributes to this as does leadership focused on learning together with good systemic policies. If the desire is for the better student outcomes, support for teachers and their pedagogies ought to be at the centre of school culture and external funding and policy supports (2006, p. 15).

If this quality approach in working with teachers to assess their pedagogies demonstrates good practice for supporting mainstream students, it becomes essential in teaching Aboriginal students (Australian Institute of Teaching Standards and Leadership (AITSL), 2011).

Herbert's (2000, p. 131; see also Buckskin, 2012) research shows "that the teacher/student relationship plays a critical role in improving the quality of education for Aboriginal students". Farnshaw (1976; cited in Partington, Richer, Godfrey, Harslett, & Harrison, 1999) describes the ideal teacher of Aboriginal students as being:

warm, encouraging, demanding, stimulating, responsible and systematic; that he will have a positive attitude to his Aboriginal students, valuing them as people, respecting their culture, being free from racial prejudice, and having confidence in their ability to achieve the demanding but realistic goals set for them; that he will be knowledgeable not only about the subject he teaches, but also about Aboriginals, Aboriginal adolescents and Aboriginal culture (p. 2).

Purdie et al. (2000) based on their research, suggest a good teacher of Aboriginal students as being one who exhibits a value of Aboriginal people and their culture, and has an acceptance of Aboriginal English. They make realistic demands of students, and act in responsible, businesslike and systematic manners. They are stimulating, imaginative, and original, and are warm and supportive (p. 10) (see also Herbert, 2012). It is the balance of these skills and elements which produce sound pedagogical practices for Aboriginal students, aligned with the skills developed by teaching staff to appropriately assess students' abilities and learning needs. That is to say teachers must acquire skills which allow them to question what is affecting Aboriginal students' full interaction and participation in the classroom (Beresford et al., 2012; Moyle, 2004). They must be able to identify the factors affecting full participation, negating barriers to high academic outcomes by being able to create more appropriate pedagogical practice. Riley-Mundine (2007) advises that the issue this raises for teaching staff is the need to understand and recognise reasons for the student's non-interaction in the classroom, such as: is the issue for the student a cultural difference; a learning difficulty; or a behavioural problem? (see also Beresford et al., 2012; Price, 2012). In knowing this significant difference teachers can develop appropriate curriculum and pedagogical strategies

Ethnocentric Curriculum

There is a paradox in settler societies such as the United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003) as these nation states have resisted the authority of imperialist Europe but have simultaneously accommodated European ideology both culturally and within their community services, systems, and structures (p. 64). In these colonised countries, there is often a white supremacist ideology, based on the notion that European culture is seen as superior to all others (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). This superior world view continues to assault the languages, cultures, and lived worlds of Indigenous populations, while at the same time resistance to this process has established spaces for Indigenous self-determination (Beresford et al., 2012). As Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist (2003) state, this paradox is no more vivid than in education systems, where despite the rhetoric for multicultural pedagogy, practices within schools are dominated by the accepted privileges of whiteness (p. 64). Furthermore they espouse that the Eurocentrism of the North American and Australian curriculum as offered to Indigenous students is an important factor in understanding their lack of success in the educational systems as these Eurocentric curricula do not address Aboriginal students' educational needs (p. 67, see also Price 2012). The key issue, states Hewitt (2000), is that there is a:

lack of cultural awareness among the predominantly non-indigenous (sic) teaching profession (this) means that Aboriginal culture will continue to be devalued. Despite increasing recognition of the importance of acknowledging the cultural contribution students bring to the school, teachers still tend to blame children for their failure to adapt to the values of the dominant culture on which the school culture is based (p. 113).

This is further confirmed by Partington (2003) who notes that adaptation of teaching strategies to the particular needs of Indigenous students is more likely to bring about change in students' learning and retention than attempting to change the students' cultural and social backgrounds. What these authors (Buckskin, 2012; Hewitt, 2000; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003; Partington, 2003; Price, 2012; Riley & Genner, 2011) express is that if Aboriginal students are to achieve sound academic outcomes, then the education systems and the people who work in

the system need to understand the Eurocentric nature of the system, to provide appropriate educational delivery, curriculum and pedagogical approaches for Aboriginal students in Australia. The concern is that many teachers find themselves ill-prepared through lack of appropriate training and support in the development and implementation of pedagogical strategies which best suit Aboriginal students' learning needs (Beresford et al., 2012; Rose, 2012).

Aboriginal Students and Their Learning Styles

If we accept that all students are individuals, affected by a multitude of influences which affect their development both academically and socially, we then need to accept they have individual learning needs. The question then becomes how we can engage individual students in the learning process, taking into consideration their cultural backgrounds? (Price, 2012). There are a whole host of programs which provide information on how students learn and how this is linked to their different personalities, such as, multiple intelligence theories. For example, Finch (2005) identifies eight areas of intelligence and preferred learning styles, yet traditionally teachers concentrate on only two of these: verbal-linguistic and mathematical-logical. As such, teachers need to recognise the diverse learning styles of students and use appropriate strategies, such as, Ralph Pirozzo's 42 Grid Matrix to create a series of activities from which students can select, to suit individual learning styles (Coote, 2008). Another instrument is the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) (Myers & Briggs Foundation, 2014). for assessing student learning styles with four sets of preferences which result in 16 learning styles or types, where the learner is seen to be a combination of types, which provides the teacher with a reference to individual learning styles.

These models provide an indication of the divergent ranges of learning styles individuals may hold and which need to be taken into consideration when teaching students. In addition we also need to add the culturally preferred learning and teaching styles for Aboriginal students. Examples of some cultural factors which may play a role in an Aboriginal student's learning are:

Language difference: traditional language and Aboriginal English language use, with different sound, grammatical structures, and word meanings (Eades, 1993), what this means as

English as a Second Language (ESL) for Aboriginal students with English teaching in the classroom.

Oral traditions: the role of oral traditions and how this can be used to place greater emphasis on reading for knowledge or entertainment (Graham, 2005).

Learning styles: such as, observation, imitation, trial and error, repetition and persistence, group sharing, and development (Garvis, 2006) in teaching Aboriginal students.

Kinship roles and responsibilities: to understand the strength of Kinship in supporting learning rather than to single out a student as an individual (Riley-Mundine, 2007).

Yunkaporta (2009) discusses how teachers need to be aware of “8 Aboriginal pedagogies”: deconstruct/reconstruct, learning maps, Community links, symbols and images, non-verbal, land-links, story sharing, and non-linear. He speaks about these world views being complementary and that what is necessary is to find common ground between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal world views. In addition, Yunkaporta identifies that what is important in the teacher–student interaction for Aboriginal students is that teachers foster pride and confidence in intellectual capacity. Teachers need to also find common links between mainstream practice and Aboriginal ways, and assist Aboriginal students to understand aspects of mainstream content. It is important in Yunkaporta’s view to Indigenise the learning environment and curriculum content; this will inform approaches to Aboriginal cultural content; inform the structure of lessons, units and courses; increase the intellectual rigor of learning activities; inform understandings/innovations of systems and processes; and implicitly ground all teaching and learning in Aboriginal ways of knowing. Yunkaporta suggests that this awareness will inform behaviour management approaches for the teacher and change paradigms in and out of the classroom (p. 40).

Whilst there is still much work to be done in this field and we have not reached any final agreements, all these models indicate the need for careful identification of individual students’ learning and cultural needs, to ensure sound education gains. It is also important that teachers are able to identify other factors which may have impact on the students’ learning such as: health problems, learning difficulties, or behavioural problems. The strategies and tools for identifying

these and appropriate action are vital to Aboriginal students' classroom and school interactions (Beresford et al., 2012; Buckskin, 2012; Rose, 2012).

Gifted and Talented Aboriginal Students

Whilst Gagné's (1993) model of development suggests that 15% of all students within classrooms are gifted and talented, it is also recognised that gifted and talented (GAT) Aboriginal students remain the most disadvantaged and least identified (Garvis, 2006). Perhaps this means we need to question whether we are too narrow in what we perceive to be gifted and talented. Do we perhaps perceive this through an academic reference only? Of note is that often instruments for identifying talented and gifted students are dominated by characteristics which are unique to the dominant society, which often excludes culturally different students, such as Aboriginal children (Garvis, 2006; see also Rose, 2012).

Inclusive education is about providing all students, irrespective of their abilities; with quality educational opportunities. For Aboriginal students this means reliance on the school to be clear on the identification process it uses in recognising gifted and talented Aboriginal students and bolstering underachieving gifted and talented Aboriginal students. That is, schools need to consider: What criteria are used to identify gifted and talented Aboriginal students? How appropriate are the identification processes and tools for identifying gifted and talented Aboriginal students? Is the school confident that there are no under-achieving talented and gifted Aboriginal students in the school? What are factors contributing to gifted and talented Aboriginal students being under-achievers?

Unfortunately there is little research available that examines identifying gifted and talented Aboriginal students, their awareness of and participation in gifted and talented programs, or the impact of gifted and talented programs for Aboriginal students. These issues are further compounded by stereotypical views of Aboriginal students which influence whether Aboriginal students are targeted for gifted and talented programs; and supported and encouraged to develop those skills (Vialle, 2011).

Inclusion of Aboriginal Cultural Knowledge

Ladwig and King (2003) assert that curriculum knowledge in Australia has been constructed and framed within a set of dominant “Australian” cultural definitions, understandings and conventions, which operate to ascribe higher standing and power to the dominant culture than it does to non-dominant cultural knowledge’s and understandings (Amosa & Ladwig, 2004, p. 3). The NSW AECG and NSW DET, in the AER (2004) re-affirm the need for Aboriginal cultural inclusions to ensure engagement and identification with the school sector is available for Aboriginal students. Purdie et al. (2000) suggest that there are core issues which need to be strengthened by educational staff in the direct teaching of Aboriginal students, to ensure appropriate identification and program implementation:

In general, it appears that if an Indigenous child thinks about his or her cultural identity, there is pride attached to saying “I am black”, or “I am Aboriginal”, or “I am a Torres Strait Islander” and this pride derives mostly from family and Indigenous community influences rather than from influences within the school or broader Australian community. However, it does not appear that most Indigenous young people dwell on their identities; in some respects they do not perceive themselves to be different from non-Indigenous people—they listen to the same music, eat KFC, barrack for this football team or that, have future aspirations, and so on. But when pressed, many appear to think that other (non-Indigenous) people think they are different. This difference is often interpreted as being inferior (pp. 10–11).

Purdie et al. (2000) go on to identify four relevant dimensions of influence for Aboriginal students: culture contexts within society; family influence with decision making and self-expression; peers, from whom they see a reflection of themselves and either accept or reject that image; and school and work environments where they explore their futures options and value relationships, all of which are situational practices (p. 11). As such it is important to consider how Aboriginal students view themselves, their resilience, and their capacity for interaction with others and account for these views in classroom and school practices (Beresford et al., 2012).

Peers. Purdie et al. (2000, p. 13) state that: “the Indigenous students peer group influenced how Indigenous students viewed and felt about themselves at school”. There were mixed views about whether students were more likely to have positive self-identities as Indigenous people in schools with large numbers of Indigenous students or in those with small numbers. In general, the students spoke positively about having a sizeable group of Indigenous students with whom to identify in the school. Little research has been done on the influence of peers for Aboriginal students.

Aboriginal educators. Schwab (2001, p. x) suggests that the impact of Aboriginal educators on student self-esteem is almost incalculable and that the influence of Indigenous staff is a key factor whereby they are essentially brokers, who in the best circumstances facilitate connections between Indigenous students and what is often, at least initially, a foreign and unfamiliar institution. He states: “it is clear that Indigenous staff are essential to student engagement in their functions as: educators, translators, role models, and bridges between home and classroom. There is no clearer sign of respect for Indigenous culture than the presence of Indigenous staff” Schwab (2001, p. x).

Purdie et. al. (2000, p. 13) noted that having Aboriginal adults in the school was essential in assisting to promote positive identity for Aboriginal students, in that the students had someone they could relate to and whom they felt could understand them better. They also noted that students in schools without Aboriginal staff felt disadvantaged and abandoned (Beresford et al., 2012; Buckskin, 2012; Harrison, 2008).

Section Summary and Implications for the Present Investigation

Teachers require a multitude of additional skills to teach Aboriginal students, such as being culturally inclusive and using the QTF to improve teaching with Aboriginal students. Teachers need to understand what ethnocentric curriculum is and how to avoid using it. They need to understand Aboriginal students’ learning styles; what gifted and talented may mean for Aboriginal students and what is required to incorporate Aboriginal cultural knowledge. Teachers also need to take into consideration the role and support of Aboriginal students’ peer group and

how to best use Aboriginal educators to ensure sound academic outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The implication of these teaching factors as described above, for this present investigation, is to determine from Aboriginal students and their stakeholders, how many of these teaching factors are evident in teachers who are seen to be “good teachers” for Aboriginal students’ success.

Following is a summary of this chapter.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the research and reports which have been commissioned to determine Aboriginal student success as seen through the lenses of the “gap” between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students. The current key themes directing policy for Aboriginal education have arisen from the AER by the NSW AECG and the NSW DET (2004). Perceptions on what appears to have been working against Aboriginal students’ academic successes have been presented along with the big systemic issues in Aboriginal education.

This is followed by the research findings of various stakeholder groups in assisting Aboriginal students gaining sound academic outcomes, such as, parental engagement and schools’ adherence to using respect and commitment, collaboration and accountability to build Aboriginal communities engagement; the importance of leadership in Aboriginal education; and Aboriginal leaders being supported to create school environments that support sound academic outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The final conditions for seeding success revolve around teachers as being able to action cultural inclusion in their teaching, taking into account quality teaching tools to reflect on what they are teaching and what students actually gain from teaching; and that teachers also need to be aware of ethnocentrism in the curriculum they use. Teachers also need to take into consideration Aboriginal students’ learning styles; gifted and talented teaching for Aboriginal students; how cultural knowledge’s can be included in teaching; and the influence of peers and use of Aboriginal educators to support high academic outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The following chapter outlines the aims and research questions which have formed the research as reported on within this thesis.

CHAPTER 5

AIMS, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND THEIR RATIONALE

The present investigation critically analyses Aboriginal students and stakeholder perceptions of conditions of success for high ability Aboriginal primary school students' academic success in NSW primary schools, with the school being selected by the NSWDET via their analysis of NAPLAN tests results, identifying schools with high academic outcomes for Aboriginal students. It presents an in-depth study in two parts, the first part being with Aboriginal students (from Metropolitan and Regional NSW primary schools) and the second part is with key stakeholders involved with the Aboriginal students' education (parents, principals, teachers and Aboriginal education staff).

The purpose of this chapter is to present: the nature of the problem being addressed; overarching aims; a statement of the specific research questions; and the rationale for the research questions posed in the context of extant theory, research, and practice. Each research question has been numbered so that the aim it relates to within the study can be clearly identified. Similarly, the rationale is presented clearly under each question so that it too may be easily linked to its corresponding aim and research question.

Statement of the Problem

Much of the research in Aboriginal education has been to close the “gap” in educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. Generally research has been undertaken from a standpoint of looking at the gaps and determining what needs to be done to increase the performance of Aboriginal students to improve academic outcomes. The research has tended to focus on Aboriginal students as the deficit; be it intellectually or culturally unable to succeed academically within the school system (Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Gunstone, & Fanshawe, 2000; Riley-Mundine, 2007; Price, 2012; Rose, 2012). For example, research aimed at assisting to close the educational gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, such as

the Aboriginal Education Review (AER) (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) can perpetuate the stereotyping of Aboriginal students as being unable to perform at the same levels as their non-Aboriginal counterparts (see Chapter 4). Yet we do know that despite enormous barriers there are many Aboriginal students, who achieve successful academic outcomes which is clearly demonstrated in National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) tests and reported by the NSW Department of Education and Training and Department of Education and Communities in their annual reports (NSW DEC, 2010).

To date there is a lack of research focusing on positive outcomes which highlight success for Aboriginal students. Hattie (2003) in his research aimed at measuring student success has commented that it is important to have studies of success to use as a guide for building success. Unfortunately as noted, there is little research undertaken on success of or for Aboriginal students. There is therefore a need to determine what drives Aboriginal students to succeed (Vialle, 2011). It is therefore timely that the present investigation undertakes an in-depth study to investigate what Aboriginal primary school students themselves and key stakeholders, such as parents, teachers, principals and Aboriginal education staff believe are the conditions of successful academic outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Aims

The overarching aims were to contribute to significant conceptual advances in theory, research and practice by listening to the voices of Aboriginal students and stakeholders (parents, principals, teachers and Aboriginal education staff) to determine what do high ability Aboriginal primary school students perceive as the conditions that have contributed to their academic success? More specifically, the study aims to:

1. Identify personal attributes and skills which Aboriginal students and stakeholders believe assist Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes.
2. Discover the conditions Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider important in assisting Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes in their *school* environment.

3. Discover the conditions Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider important in assisting Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes in their *home* environment.
4. Determine the priority conditions for Aboriginal students in what they perceive assist them to achieve successful academic outcomes.

Research Questions and Rationale for the Research Questions

The research questions were formulated to help gain insights into conditions of success for Aboriginal students who have achieved high academic outcomes. Given that researchers have only recently begun to investigate this area, it was not possible to formulate hypotheses predicting the directionality of effects based on a body of previous literature. Rather, research questions were formulated to specifically address the aims of the study and to allow for in-depth analysis of a rich data set based on the perceptions of Aboriginal students and their stakeholders.

Research Question 1.1

What are the personal attributes and skills which Aboriginal students and stakeholders believe have assisted the Aboriginal students to achieve successful academic outcomes?

Rationale for Research Question 1.1. Whilst there is growing research that investigates conditions which are required in schools to support students, little has been done to investigate the specific needs of Aboriginal students, within these same environments. The AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) found a number of conditions which appeared to provide optimum support for Aboriginal students in the school/community environment, such as, the need to fortify Aboriginal students' identity. Purdie et al. (2000) comment that Aboriginal students in developing a positive identity need to see value in education and have a sense of belonging if they are to achieve (Munns, O'Rourke, & Bodkin-Andrews, 2013).

Other research has spoken about what holds Aboriginal students back from achieving academic success, being that they need to lose their cultural identity to succeed (Campbell, 2000). Chaffey (2001) speaks about Aboriginal students playing down their abilities due to expectations of low performance and they don't want to stand-out or "look bad" if they get work

wrong or be seen to stand out when they get work right (see also Munns, 2005). Fordham and Ogbu (1986) state students don't want to be seen as succeeding because of the fear of being seen to be acting "white" (see Chapter 4).

To date little research has been done to elucidate conditions of success as identified by Aboriginal students and stakeholders to determine the effect of these conditions, within the home and school environment for the success of the Aboriginal student. As Schwab (2001) notes, for too long policy makers and educational researchers have been drawn to "problems" and what's "wrong" rather than what seeds success. This research concentrates on, Aboriginal students who have been identified through their NAPLAN (NSW DEC, 2010) results as being one of the top 25% Aboriginal students.

Research Question 1.1 was posed in order to determine the personal attributes and skills which Aboriginal students and stakeholders believed created conditions of academic success for Aboriginal students.

Research Question 2.1

What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider being important conditions that assist Aboriginal students to achieve academic outcomes in their *school* environment?

Rationale for Research Question 2.1. There has been a small amount of research into conditions for Aboriginal students at the VET and higher education level; little has been done to investigate the needs of Aboriginal students at the primary school level. The AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) referred to the need to effect changes in schools to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students, such as: the need to engage with students, apply cultural knowledge in school, create partnerships with parents and Aboriginal community, challenge racism and advance leadership and accountability in schools (see Chapters 3 and 4). Munns et al. (2013) support these findings and state there is a need to have strong community relations, quality teaching (see also Rose, 2012) with embedded cultural content and with serious concentration on learning for Aboriginal students. Additionally the role and use of Aboriginal staff as Aboriginal leaders for education in the school is seen as an imperative (Purdie et. al.,

2000). Whilst these elements have been identified in research little has been done with Aboriginal students and their immediate stakeholders to verify these conditions.

In developing a list of themes which contribute to conditions of success for Aboriginal students, a further need is to determine how relevant these conditions are to the majority of students. That is, how relevant are the conditions to the number of students and stakeholders who participate in the research.

Hence, Research Question 2.1 seeks to discover first hand from Aboriginal students and their stakeholders, what they see as being the conditions which have best supported Aboriginal students' academic success in their *school* environment.

Research Question 3.1

What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider as being important conditions in assisting Aboriginal students to achieve sound academic outcomes in their *home* environment?

Rationale for Question 3.1. Partnership relationships and building community capacity to work with schools to best support sound academic outcomes for Aboriginal students has been a notable condition since the AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004). Friedel (1999) notes that increased parental engagement leads to improved educational outcomes for students, but that often parents are invited into school to benefit the school or when the school has a problem; and parents are judged when they don't support school expectations. Friedel further comments that often parental engagement is led by Aboriginal parents in hopes of changing the system to include their voices and for Aboriginal perspectives. The NSW AECG and NSW DET (2010) state equal partnerships are required based on respect, commitment, collaboration and accountability, to ensure improved educational outcomes are achieved for Aboriginal students.

Testing what Aboriginal students consider to be relevant conditions for their academic success in their home environment, firstly what conditions exist through home which support Aboriginal students; secondly to create a cross tabulation between the student, and their parents' perceptions and heightened knowledge of how they feel they add value to their child's life to ensure conditions of success; adds a further dimensions to the research. In addition, to discover

what the students consider to be relevant conditions their parents provide in supporting them to gain sound academic outcomes, for two reasons, firstly as the first teachers of their children the parents' influence is paramount to the student's success; secondly to create a cross tabulation with the student, the parents' perceptions and heightened knowledge of the school environment will add value to the survey.

Research Question 3.1 was posed to determine conditions Aboriginal students and stakeholders feel are the most important in assisting Aboriginal students to succeed from their home environment.

Research Question 4.1

What are the priority conditions which have contributed to success of Aboriginal students and how relevant are these?

Rationale for Research Question 4.1. Partnership and working together are highlighted as the core components to creating successful educational outcomes for Aboriginal students (Buckskin, 2012; Friedel, 1999; NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004; Purdie et. al, 2000). Prioritising where the focus should be in creating these support conditions is always the concern. As such in determining a school community environment which will ensure successful educational outcomes for Aboriginal students it is imperative to determine what these conditions are and whether they are common for Aboriginal students. In the photograph session with Aboriginal students this question was posed to determining what the conditions were, which ones add value to the conditions of success for Aboriginal students; and what appear to be the priority order for Aboriginal students for essential conditions that support their academic outcomes.

Therefore Research Question 4.1 was posed to determine what Aboriginal students consider are the priority order for conditions of their academic success.

Summary

The research problems addressed herein underscore the fact that there is very little pragmatic research in this area. Given this, the present research is significant and will make an important contribution to theory, research, and practice in the field of Aboriginal primary student success. This chapter presented the statement of the problem, aims, research questions and their rationale. The subsequent chapter describes the methodology that was designed to rigorously test the aims of the study and research questions posed.

CHAPTER 6

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to present the methodological approaches undertaken to answer the research questions as outlined in Chapter 5. Firstly, an overview of the rationale for the chosen methodology, being a qualitative approach with a multi-grounded influence is discussed. Secondly, the qualitative methods used in the research are presented. These included: stakeholder engagement, qualitative data collection through in-depth interviews using brainstorm focus sessions based upon photograph elicited sessions with students, and semi-structured interviews with other stakeholders. Thirdly, a discussion of the ethical considerations required to be addressed for this research is presented. Fourthly the research design, approach and methodology, data collection and coding for this investigation is presented. The fifth section presents the data record, authentication and analysis, and qualitative and quantitative data representation in the research. The final section provides profiles of students and parents engaged in the research.

Rationale for Chosen Methodology

Section Overview

This section presents the rationale for the chosen methodology in this research being qualitative with a multi-grounded influence. The importance of undertaking this research with children under 18 years; and issues for the researcher in undertaking this research, along with considerations for researchers' personal characteristics and relationship with participants is explained.

Qualitative Research with a Multi-Grounded Influence

A dominant approach to undertaking research is that it should be done using quantitative data to ensure that the researcher remains apolitical, emotionally distanced and unbiased (Griffin,

2004), to create a scientific approach to analysis of information gathered. When used in applied contexts this can be limiting and counterproductive (Griffin, 2004) in gaining knowledge that is relevant to the situation or the stakeholders involved. Qualitative research, particularly in education, offers the opportunity to focus on operations of social processes in depth. This approach is pertinent when frequently in research some people's experiences are taken more seriously than others, while others are often ignored in particular situations (Griffin, 2004, p. 6). Hence qualitative methods when seen in the context of what affects Aboriginal students' engagement with academic outcomes is particularly relevant as this method ensures the complexity of their engagement in education and their personal perspectives are recorded sensitively, and provides a more insightful and accurate reflection of the social processes they are involved in; which might otherwise be invisible in employing quantitative methods (Anderson, 2010). Hence, the qualitative approach employed in this research is deemed by Anderson (2010) to be reliable in relation to reproducibility and stability of information, as well as a valid methodology in being honest and genuine to ensure that the findings provide an accurate presentation of the particular phenomena under study (Anderson, 2010; see also Walter & Andersen, 2013).

An additional influence in the research was grounded theory which aims not to be influenced by a literature review of the research to be undertaken (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010; Lind & Goldkuhl, 2006), but rather requires research to be undertaken and used as a systematic and rigorous approach in qualitative research as a problem-solving tool to assess emerging problems and to provide timely recommendations for decisions (Bitsch, 2005). This methodology is particularly relevant when aiming to provide a description and interpretation of issues that have not been well researched; when generating or developing theory; when evaluating processes; or looking at possible future directions (Bitsch, 2005).

Grounded theory has been used widely in social sciences and particularly in educational research to provide differing perspectives and outlooks on issues. Grounded theory was first published by Glaser and Strauss in 1967 (as cited by Bitsch, 2005) and is a methodology to develop inductive theories through systemically gathered and analysed on-site collected data (Bitsch, 2005; Ke & Wenglensky, 2010; Lind & Goldkuhl, 2006). As Bitsch (2005) explains grounded theory "does not begin with a theory from which hypotheses are deducted, but with a

field of study or research question, and what is relevant to this question is allowed to emerge during the research” (p. 77). As such, grounded theory depends on many factors: the researcher’s personal and professional experiences, study sites, accessibility to research material, as well as analytical and data coding processes employed. What is seen as valid is the integration of complex knowledge into the research being undertaken, namely, it is important that the researcher have insight, to give meaning and understanding to the data collected, and that the analysis of the data is based on comparisons in respect of the commonalities and differences which serve to uncover and explain patterns and variations (Bitsch, 2005). The goal of grounded theory is to explain how an aspect of a social situation might work and that this theory emerges from and is connected to the reality in which the theory is developed (Ke & Wenglensky, 2010; Lind & Goldkuhl, 2006).

Open Coding

Open coding refers to identifying and developing categories and sub-categories, dependent on properties and dimensions of item categories. Sampling concentrates on the variations between categories. Axial coding looks at the relation between categories and sub-categories, including conditions of cause and effect and interactions (Bitsch, 2005). Selective coding integrates the categories and sub-categories by focusing on a central concept and including detail and density of the sample to fill in detail and clarify the research theory, concepts and characteristics. In the current research the data was formed into categories initially based upon student data, and these categories were cross-checked through interviews with key stakeholders: parents, teachers, principals, and Aboriginal staff in their schools for commonalities and differences.

It is important that in assessing the research that it be viewed as credible, for example is it trustworthy research which corresponds with reality, which is valid internally and externally, reliable and objective (Bitsch, 2005). It is also important that in the final analysis the data is seen to be transferable, dependable, and confirmable (Bitsch, 2005, p. 82). In the current research, it was seen as vital to seek out the multiple perspectives (Lauckner, Paterson, & Krupa, 2012; Lind & Goldkuhl, 2006) of those involved in academic success for Aboriginal students: the students themselves, key stakeholders such as their parents, teachers, principals and Aboriginal staff in

the selected schools. This was undertaken in order to gain different perspectives of shared experiences and enriched explanations.

Goldkuhl and Cronholm (2010) suggest that the basic foundations of grounded theory need to be further strengthened through a multi-grounded approach, initially introduced by Goldkuhl in 1993 and then further refined in 2004 (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010). The multi-grounded theory entails inclusion of a literature review to strengthen research by an activation of theories, to create a knowledge synthesis, and enable new theories to emerge from coding of new data. This is valuable as many researchers who work in their respective fields are drawing on years of experience and may find that particular components or participants have not been engaged fully in the research and as such deserve being approached in a foundational way to determine their perspectives in a new approach. This is particularly relevant in the current research as little is known about what enables Aboriginal students who have been gaining sound academic outcomes to succeed. Yet there is much to be learnt from Aboriginal students who are achieving sound outcomes, as a model for other Aboriginal students and their school-community environments to assist in improving academic outcomes for all Aboriginal students.

Research with Children

Research in the past has been done on children, rather than with or for children. Questions have also been raised as to whether research with children can provide reliable and valid data that contributes to research findings. However, research has found that qualitative interviews with children can provide valuable revelations not otherwise seen by adults that are rich, deep, and trustworthy, to assist in influencing policy, practice, and potential future research (Fargas-Malet, McSherry, Larkin, & Robinson, 2010; Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008). In issues that affect children directly, it is essential to engage with children as they provide different perceptions to their own contexts (Winstone, Huntington, Goldsack, Kyrrou, & Millward, 2014). Engaging with research is also an opportunity for children to be active participants in the research process (Winstone et al., 2014) and feel that they have some control in their life experiences with a sense of responsibility (Curtin, 2001; Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). Additionally the United Nations *Convention on the Rights of the Child* (1989) states that it is important that in activities that directly affect children, including research, children should be consulted, as the

best sources of information about children are children themselves (also see Curtin, 2001; Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Instone, 2002; Mayall, 2000; Winstone et al., 2014)

It is imperative that research with children meet child protection and ethical conditions for their safety, privacy and confidentiality (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010). Whilst approval for the child's involvement in the research is provided through the school principal and parents/caregivers it is also important to allow children the right to withdraw from the research if they wish.

In the research process, with children, it is important to establish familiarity, trust, and rapport (Aldgate & Bradley, 2004; Curtin, 2001; Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008) by visiting them in their own environment, such as their school—in a space that is quiet and free from disruption, but where the researcher and child are observable—and explain to the children about the research in plain language they understand. The latter is because research with children needs to take into account their varied social and linguistic competencies; as such research that may be designed and used with adults requires adaption for use with children (Curtin, 2001; Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Punch, 2002; Winstone et al., 2014). Hence consideration to use “Plain English” in talking with children is important (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010).

The Researcher

Apolitical research is a conundrum in itself, as all researchers come with a background that has influenced their lives and work careers. As such, it is pertinent that the researcher for this investigation, as an Aboriginal person, be engaged in research for and with Aboriginal people, as this cultural background is important in creating a rapport with participants, and is relevant in understanding educational perspectives of Aboriginal participants due to knowledge of historical, cultural and social impacts. This additionally means that the researcher must be unprejudiced and open minded to findings, whilst their knowledge base and experiences add wealth to the categories and dimensions which arise from the research. An uninformed researcher runs the “risk of being too naïve and even ignorant when entering the empirical field” (Goldkuhl & Cronholm, 2010. p. 190).

Personal characteristics. The researcher in qualitative research closely engages in the research process with participants and therefore cannot be completely unbiased (Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007). It is important when carrying out qualitative research that the researcher is: open-minded, flexible and responsive, patient, observant, a good listener demonstrated by attending fully to what the interviewee is saying, paraphrasing what the interviewee says, and reflecting back to the interviewee to clarify tone and emotional content. (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011a, p. 2). It is also important that the interviewer create rapport with interviewees, that is, it is vital to develop a positive relationship as an environment of safety in discussing personal information requires respect and trust between interviewer and interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

In the case of this research the researcher is an Aboriginal woman of Wiradjuri and Gamilaroi descent and a trained teacher who has specialised in Aboriginal education for over 30 years. She has worked in schools: primary and high school, Technical and Further Education, universities, and in the NSW State Department of Education. She has taught and developed curriculum and policy with regard to Aboriginal education and Aboriginal studies. As such she has had a personal and applied history in Aboriginal education across New South Wales, and in affecting changes in Aboriginal education nationally. She therefore has a personal interest in finding out what works best for Aboriginal children and communities to create greater support for Aboriginal students in education systems. At the time of the research the researcher is a senior lecturer and leader in an Aboriginal centre within the University of Sydney, a prominent university in Australia.

Relationship with participants. The research was shown as being important to the Aboriginal participants in that it would benefit Aboriginal students and communities in providing solutions for critical educational issues and would be giving something back to Aboriginal people. The researcher held cultural and Kinship understandings, knowledge of Aboriginal history, understandings of socio-economic conditions, and training as a teacher (Beaulieu, Figueira & Viri, 2005). Hence she was able to create a closer link with participants in the research, was able to identify with the views expressed in the research by Aboriginal people and has an understanding of those views from an Aboriginal viewpoint. It was also important in the

context of this research that the researcher was able to behave in culturally appropriate ways to Aboriginal interviewees, whilst being respectful, ethical, and flexible.

Section Summary

This section has presented the arguments for the chosen methodology for this research being qualitative with a multi-grounded influence and the importance of undertaking this research with children; and the personal and relationship considerations of the researcher in undertaking the research. The following section presents the qualitative methodology employed in the research.

Qualitative Methodology Employed

Section Overview

This section presents the qualitative methodology employed in this research. Firstly, it discusses the importance of stakeholder engagement and triangulation for validation and engagement in the research. Secondly, the use of in-depth interviews through the use with students of Brainstorm Focus Session and Photograph Elicited Sessions to open discussion and gain students' perceptions on conditions they feel support their academic outcomes; and thirdly, semi-structured interviews with parents, teachers, principals, and Aboriginal staff. The section ends with qualitative research record procedures.

Stakeholder Engagement and Triangulation

Aboriginal students' participation in education to gain sound academic outcomes is dependent on close and authentic collaboration between multiple stakeholders (Brown & Danaher, 2008), that is, principals, teachers, Aboriginal staff, parents, and Aboriginal students. Relationships between these parties are complex and are also individualistic, competitive, and collaborative with multiple explicit and implicit interests. Yet, in the shared interest of supporting Aboriginal students to achieve sound academic outcomes, we need to look at the synergies of support to inform which conditions best support Aboriginal students to achieve sound academic outcomes.

Freeman (1984) gave the term “stakeholder” its name and prominence as “any group or individuals who can affect or is affected by the achievement of an organization’s purpose” (p. 46) (see also Winn & Keller, 2001). The stakeholder approach considers the multiple person approach as the perspective from multiple accounts provides greater perception of the whole situation, and is as such drawing on case study traditions (Winn & Keller, 2001, p. 168). It is particularly relevant to engage with key stakeholders who have interaction with a particular issue being addressed, in having engagement through power, legitimacy, and/or urgency for particular situations (Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997; Winn & Keller, 2001). Hence in this research it was important to engage with: the school principal (power, legitimacy, and urgency), teachers (power and legitimacy), Aboriginal staff, parents, and students (legitimacy and urgency).

Qualitative research through data triangulation, that is engaging with different stakeholders who have a vested interest in particular programs, is used to gain findings which reflect the situation as seen by these stakeholders in their life circumstances (Guion, Diehl, & McDonald, 2011b). Hence gaining multiple perspectives helps to strengthen data collection and determine consistent emerging themes, those which are seen to be in agreement or divergent views.

Qualitative interviews with adult stakeholders, due to time constraints rely on the researchers’ ability to create trust and rapport with participants (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Punch, 2002): this was achieved through the researchers’ cultural and career background. That is, as an Aboriginal person and as a mother, the researcher was able to develop rapport with parents and Aboriginal staff in each school, as there was seen to be a common background with these stakeholders. In relation to teachers, principals, and Aboriginal staff, the researcher could also readily establish rapport as she was a trained teacher and had a reputable working career and history in Aboriginal education, which was identified and acknowledged by participants, giving validity and credibility to the researcher.

In-Depth Interviews Through Brainstorm Focus Session, Photograph Elicited Sessions, and Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth interviews. These are most appropriately used in situations which require depth of information from a small number of people with similar characteristics (Guion et al., 2011a);

the use of open ended questions assists in a discovery-oriented research allowing the researcher to explore respondents' perspectives and feelings on a particular subject. It also provides the interviewee more time to get to know the researcher, to form a bond, and create trust in information presented by the interviewee (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

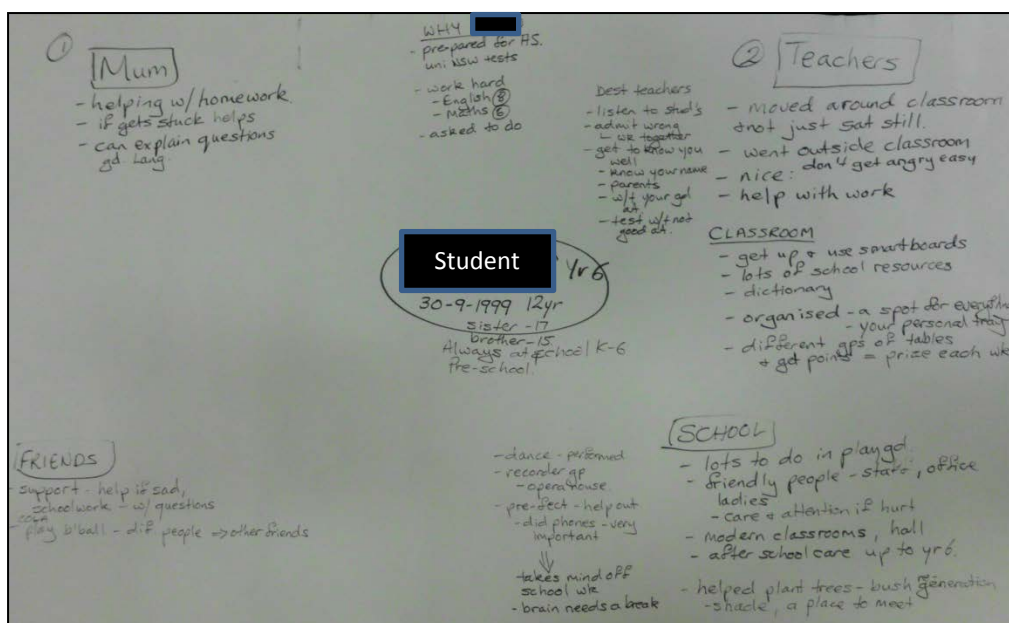
In planning the in-depth interview it is important that: the purpose of the interview is clear and is designed to elicit information with an interview guide to include key topics and questions to assist with data analysis following the interviews. It is important that in the beginning of the interview that introductions be made, an explanation of/or the purpose of the research be provided, and a plan to audio record and obtain interviewees' permission to be involved in the research be included (Guion et al., 2011a).

In-depth interviews may be carried out in a number of forms, such as: focus groups and semi-structured interviews aimed at assessing complex situations in which people are involved and where their views may not be recorded through quantitative methods; as such they provide new perspectives and knowledge (Colucci, 2007; Peek & Fothergill, 2009; Tong et al., 2007). In this process the researcher is seen to be more a moderator to record participants' personal experiences in relation to the topic being studied (Peek & Fothergill, 2009). Focus group techniques are particularly useful in research with ethnic minority groups, marginalised, stigmatised, or vulnerable individuals (Colucci, 2007; Peek & Fothergill, 2009) to create connections and give validity to the group's perceptions; it also provides an opportunity through interaction to answer questions in a more active way, that is where participants are asked to do something, allowing discussions to be more in-depth, productive, and enjoyable, and provides a different way to elicit answers and promote discussion (Colucci, 2007; Peek & Fothergill, 2009). It is important that the interview process used be aligned to the participants' age, background, culture, and gender.

These considerations were used to determine how this research would need to be carried out with primary aged Aboriginal students. The best methods after careful thought were to do the research via a brainstorm focus session and photograph elicited session—expanded on below—and with a semi-structured interview with all other stakeholders, the students' parents, teachers, principals and Aboriginal staff.

Brainstorm focus session. A semi-structured interview aimed to explore a specific set of issues by asking broad questions about the topic of interest (Tong et al., 2007). It is important that the focus session engage participants through an exercise or activity (Colucci, 2007; Peek & Fothergill, 2009) to ensure participants are focused on the topic, but also have time to be reflective. The latter allows comparative analysis to be more straightforward. It is also recommended that in recording the information that there be use of diagrams, thought bubbles, and large print to ensure students clearly see their views recorded (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010).

In this research, interaction was between the researcher and student in a one-on-one situation. In the brainstorm focus interview students' comments were recorded on large sheets of paper to record what the student was saying and became a unique record of discussions with each student. It also gave students time to think about their responses and become more comfortable with the researcher and to make the researcher less threatening (Colucci, 2007). This research commenced with a profile on the students to establish their age and personal status—easy questions and answers; followed by interview focus questions where the students discussed the conditions they considered important in supporting their achieving sound academic outcomes, each condition as mentioned was listed on large sheets of art paper as in a brainstorm session (the interview research questions and interview schedule, can be seen at Appendix 2). See brainstorm example from student MS1-S2 below.



Photograph elicited session. Photography is a way to record an individual's personal perspectives and when used in the interview process with young children, provides a non-confronting method and an opportunity to relate more quickly to the interviewer; that is, photographs allow students to de-personalise the situation by providing use of other materials to discuss personal thoughts and ideas.

The process of getting students to take photographs is particularly apt in recording students' social experiences (Smith, Gidlow, & Steel, 2012); they allow students to be more engaged in the research and to make the research engaging and thoughtful, demonstrating to the students the validity of their input, and creating a process whereby the student wants to be involved in the research (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Nesbitt, 2000; Punch, 2002; Smith et al., 2012). It is relevant in that in gaining information on what the student perceives, this process gives control to the student and drives the content of the data collected and increases their opportunity to express their own interpretation of their experiences (Smith et al., 2012). The photographs are used to explore students' social experiences and as stimuli to elicit discussion between the researcher and the student (Smith et al., 2012). The interview research questions and interview schedule can be seen at Appendix 2.

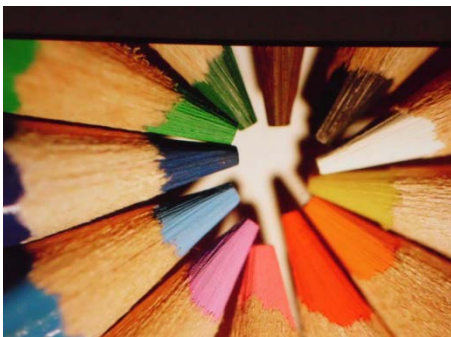
Ethical considerations with the photos taken, were where students took photos of other people and where those people had not given direct permission to the researcher for the use of their image in the research, that these people not be referred to by name, but rather by their position e.g. teacher, principal, parent, sibling, friend, etc.; and that to ensure the student's and other people's privacy and anonymity, it is essential that these photographs, identifying people, not be published (Smith et al., 2012).

In this research, students were given a digital camera to take home and asked to take up to ten digital photographs of items they considered demonstrated academic support for themselves. Students had between two to five days to take the photographs (Smith et al., 2012). In a follow-up interview, the students discussed each photograph (Fargas-Malet et al., 2010; Nesbitt, 2000; Punch, 2002; Smith et al., 2012) with the student explaining how the item photographed demonstrated provision of support in their gaining sound academic outcomes. Students were then asked to prioritise each of the photographs taken; from "1" demonstrating highest level of

support, through to “10” demonstrating lower levels of support. In the prioritisation process children had to select the picture of highest prioritisation; these photos were then placed (in a folder on a computer) into the priority order selected by the student, and with the student explaining the significance of the prioritisation position.

This component allowed students to further discuss their conditions for academic success and the reasons for choosing those items, to be reflective of their perspectives, and to explain why those items were relevant to them. These techniques were particularly useful in comparing all students’ perspectives, with type, order, and frequency of themes mentioned (Colucci, 2007; Darbyshire, MacDougall & Schiller, 2005; Grbich, 1999).

Feedback from the students was that they loved this task as it made them feel responsible and they had fun taking their photos. Example of photos taken, are as for MS2-S1, below:



i. Representing diversity of friends and stationery.



ii. Representing Aboriginal identity.

Semi-structured interviews. Semi-structured interviews aim to have the interview run as a conversation to allow for flexibility and follow-up on participants’ comments; this allows for in-depth questioning to clarify perspectives being explored and allows the interviewer to delve deeply into personal or social issues (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This requires the researcher to be an active listener and reflect on what the interviewee is saying (Guion et al., 2011a). Semi-structured interviews are organised around pre-determined open-ended questions and are pre-planned interviews, that is the time, date, and setting are pre-organised and usually

take between 30 minutes to several hours to complete (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). The interview research questions and interview schedule can be seen at Appendix 2.

Semi-structured interviews in this research (with parents, teachers, principals, and Aboriginal staff) were used to explore the participants' experiences and views. Participants were encouraged to talk about issues through open-ended questions in one-on-one interviews. Questions were re-worded to clarify the questions for the participants, or to explore other issues raised by the participant (Tong et al., 2007). Taped interviews were transcribed and in the analysis stage these were used in conjunction with the researcher's notes, and students' brainstorm focus sheets and photographs to cross-reference and check themes that arose.

Qualitative Recording Procedures

Interviews were recorded to ensure individual interview content was not lost and to ensure accuracy of interview content. The procedures used were as follows: (i) audio recordings and transcripts from the in-depth interview for the brainstorm focus session with students; (ii) each student's brainstorm focus sheet; (iii) photographs taken by students and used as discussion and focus for student thoughts and ideas; (iv) audio recordings of in-depth and semi-structured interviews and transcripts of photo discussion session with students; (v) audio recordings and transcripts from semi-structured interviews with stakeholder participants; and (vi) notes taken by the researcher during interviews.

Section Summary

This section has provided an outline of the methods employed, such as: stakeholder engagement and triangulation; in-depth interviews through brainstorm focus session, photograph elicited interviews and semi-structured interviews with multiple stakeholders. The following section discusses the ethical considerations of the research.

Ethical Issues

Section Overview

This section discusses the ethical issues in relation to this research such as, research with children under 18 and in schools; research with Aboriginal people; and participant information and consent.

Research and Ethics Context

The ethics process required careful consideration as the research involved interviews with primary school students less than 18 years of age, requiring parental consent; and the research specifically targeted Aboriginal students, their parents, and Aboriginal staff. This focus was essential and relevant for two reasons. Firstly, there is little research undertaken in assessing high academic performance with Aboriginal students. Secondly to gain qualitative evidence from primary sources—Aboriginal students, their parents, Aboriginal staff, and school staff—who all are stakeholders in achieving sound academic outcomes for Aboriginal students, is an important component of the research. This was identified as being essential to determine what the stakeholders saw as being important conditions which influenced sound academic outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The ethics process for this research necessitated the relevant research ethics associated with working with children under the age of 18 years, but also the ethics procedures required in research with Aboriginal communities. Ethics approval for the research was granted through the National Ethics Application Form (NEAF) via the University of Western Sydney, Human Research Ethics Committee Approval H8932 (see Appendix 3)

Please note that at the commencement of the research the state department of education was the NSW Department of Education and Training (NSW DET), due to a change of government during the research the department name changed to NSW Department of Education and Communities (NSW DEC), hence the change of department title is reflected throughout the research thesis.

Research with Children Under 18 Years and in Schools

Children under 18 years are seen as vulnerable, with parents or primary care-givers having decision-making authority over minors as presented in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (Australian Government, 2007), see also, the NSW Government, Working With Children Check (2014); and the “Participation: Count Me In” strategy through the NSW Commission for Children and Young People (2005). Given this research was to be undertaken in the school sector, it was required that a criminal history “Working With Children Check” was undertaken, and a “Child Protection Statement, Privacy and Confidentiality” form was signed by the researcher, with both being completed through the University of Western Sydney (UWS). In addition, approval was required through the NSW Department of Education and Communities, via their State Education Research Application Process (SERAP) ethics approval process, granted through SERAP Ethics Approval number 2008215 (see Appendix 4) prior to the research being undertaken.

All interviews were to be held on school grounds with students, principals, teachers, Aboriginal educators, and parents for their personal safety, privacy, and comfort, although one parent asked for the interview to be held at her house due to child minding issues. There were no invasive procedures or known risks of the study. The burden in this study was the consumption of time and attention only. It was the researcher’s obligation to protect participants from potential risk of harm and to adequately ensure the safety of all of the participants. Principals, teachers, parents, guardians, and the children were informed via a letter of introduction and information on the research. Information on the research was also provided to the NSW Department of Education and Communities, Aboriginal Education and Training Directorate and the NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group.

The integrity of the research was of utmost importance, bearing in mind the educational and psychological outcomes of the study as well as the welfare of the participants and the schools. To ensure that participants benefit from the research, a generic feedback of the outcomes will be given to the school, following the thesis submission.

It is unlikely that this research placed the participants in any risk of physical or psychological harm. The research tasks were designed to be developmentally appropriate for

young children and were based on previous research held with young children (Marsh, Craven, & Debus, 1998); additionally the researcher is a trained teacher with experience in working with children and within Aboriginal communities. Prior to the focus group session with the children, and the interviews with their parents and educational staff, the researcher explained orally that their participation was voluntary and if they did not wish to participate, or wished to withdraw at any stage from the research, no penalty would be incurred.

Research with Aboriginal People

When undertaking research, either across cultures or within a minority culture, it is critical that researchers recognise the power dynamic which is embedded in the relationship with their subjects. Researchers are in receipt of privileged information. They may interpret it within an overt theoretical framework, but also in terms of a covert ideological framework, they have the power to distort, to make visible, to overlook, to exaggerate, and to draw conclusions, based not on factual data, but on assumptions, hidden value judgements, and often downright misunderstandings. They have the potential to extend knowledge or perpetuate ignorance (Smith, 1999, p. 176).

Research with Aboriginal people was an essential component of the research; as such guidelines for ethical research with Aboriginal people was referenced as per the '*Values and Ethics Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research*' (NHMRC, 2003) and the '*Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies*' (AIATSIS, 2012); to gain participant information directly from Aboriginal students, their parents, and relevant Aboriginal staff in the schools. According to formal ethical guidelines these people were approached in the first instance by the school principal to determine if they were agreeable to be involved in the research. Once this agreement was given, the school organised times with the Aboriginal students, their parents, and Aboriginal staff for interviews to be carried out with the researcher. Note that not every student's parents were available for interviews, but all parents gave permission for students to be involved in the research and each student was given the opportunity to withdraw if they felt uncomfortable being a part of the research.

Research Participant's Information and Consent

In alignment with the procedures outlined through the ethics processes and in working in schools through the NSW DEC, a letter of introduction was sent to the school principals, outlining the research and seeking consent to undertake the research in their schools. Once approval was gained, letters for the parents and teachers seeking their engagement with the research were sent to the principal, so that the principal could send the letters to the parents and teachers. When agreement for participation in the research was confirmed with teachers and parents, the researcher negotiated dates and times to be at the school, through the principal. The principal organised the parents and teachers as per the agreed dates for research to be undertaken at the school. As such the researcher did not know who had agreed to the interviews until arrival at the school, this gave participants time to withdraw from the research if they did not wish to continue. On arrival at each school and at the commencement of each interview session, participants over 18 years were asked to complete a consent form for the interview. The researcher provided consent forms for children to the principal; these were collated by the principal and provided to the researcher, prior to research interviews being held with the student (see Appendix 5).

Section Summary

This section has provided an overview of the ethical issues in this research with consideration to research with children under 18 and in schools, research with Aboriginal people, and information and consent for participants with this research. The following section provides an overview of the research design for the research.

The Research Design

Section Overview

This section discusses the approach and methodology, data collection procedure and data coding issues within the research design.

Approach and Methodology

In broad terms, the research comprised two complimentary components, based on an iterative approach of collecting data through a series of interviews to reflect upon and note emerging themes (Grbich, 1999). The first component involved selection of participants. The NSW DET upon accepting the SERAP submission for the research to be undertaken in their schools directed the researcher to their internal Research and Statistics Unit. This unit analysed the NSW DET data across all NSW schools to identify schools with high performing Aboriginal students. This was done by assessing Aboriginal students' growth from Year 3 to Year 5 based on their NAPLAN test results. The NSW DET selected schools with Aboriginal students placed in the top 10% of growth scores from Year 3 to Year 5 NAPLAN literacy. The list of identified schools was given to the researcher, who then approached these schools to be involved in the research. On acceptance to being involved in the research, schools then identified Aboriginal students who grew from band 3 or above and were placed in the top 25% of growth scores in their schools, as potential participants for the study. This procedure yielded Aboriginal students who achieved in the top 25% growth scores of Aboriginal primary students in NSW based on growth in literacy scores from Year 3 to Year 5 and who at the time of the research were in Year 6. This sample of top performing Year 6 Aboriginal students from seven schools comprised both Metropolitan ($n=3$) and Regional ($n=4$) school areas. (See Appendix 6, for student and parent profiles).

The second component of the research involved undertaking semi-structured interviews with multiple-stakeholders to elucidate their perceptions of conditions which supported academic success for Aboriginal students. Open-ended questions were used with the school principal, teachers who taught these Aboriginal students in either Years 3, 4, and/or 5, parents and Aboriginal staff in the schools. There were a total of $N=129$ participants interviewed for this research (see Table 6.1), being $n=34$ students ($n=9$ Metropolitan and $n=25$ Regional Aboriginal students), $n=26$ parents, $n=20$ teachers, $n=7$ principals and $n=8$ Aboriginal staff. This list of participant numbers at each school is set out in Table 6.1 as follows.

Table 6.1. Overview of Participant Interviews

SCHOOL	STUDENTS	PARENTS	TEACHERS	PRINCIPALS	ABORIGINAL STAFF
METROPOLITAN SCHOOL 1	2	2	2	1	0
METROPOLITAN SCHOOL 2	1	1	3	1	0
METROPOLITAN SCHOOL 3	6	6	3	1	0
REGIONAL SCHOOL 1	7	6	3	1	2
REGIONAL SCHOOL 2	6	4	3	1	1
REGIONAL SCHOOL 3	5	4	3	1	2
REGIONAL SCHOOL 4	7	3	3	1	3
TOTAL = People Interviewed 95 *129 participant interviews held, as did: - 2 interviews per student - 1 joint parent's (2) interview	34	26	20	7	8

Data was analysed in the context of the two components of the study. Part 1 examined what the conditions of success were for Aboriginal Year 6 students in Metropolitan and Regional schools from the perspectives of Aboriginal students. Part 2 examined what the conditions of success were for Aboriginal Year 6 students in Metropolitan and Regional schools from the perspectives of multiple stakeholders. Finally a cross-analysis of findings was undertaken to determine the perceived conditions of success for Aboriginal students.

Data Collection Procedures

Overview. The researcher was provided with a number of schools, by the then NSW DET who demonstrated growth (see previous discussion) for Aboriginal students as based on the NAPLAN test results from Year 3 to Year 5, 2011. The researcher then approached principals on the list of schools provided by NSW DET, who had Aboriginal students in the top 10%; due to low Aboriginal student numbers in each school Principals were asked to identify other Aboriginal students who were placed in the top 25% of their NAPLAN results for Year 5, that could be invited to participate in the research. This widened the research field through provision of a greater number of students and stakeholders in a contained group of schools. Seven schools agreed to take part in the research: three Metropolitan and four Regional schools. Two of the Regional schools were in reasonable proximity of each other which made it convenient for the

researcher to assess these schools at the same time. The research information was gathered through an intense series of six weeks, with duration of one week being allocated for each school, except in the case of two regional schools who were in the same locale and the research at these two schools was carried out in one week.

Data was collected using 40–60 minute semi-structured interviews with all participants. The interview questions (see Chapter 5) contained open ended questions to allow participants an opportunity to elucidate those factors which contribute to schooling success and educational outcomes for Aboriginal students (Hattie, 2003; NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004). Interviewing multiple-stakeholders also provided a rich source of narrative data. Narrative data assists in articulating the richness of the data and encapsulating its complexity, allowing the story to be told from a holistic point of view (Mooney, 2011). It enables the perceptions to be examined from a historical and event-driven basis.

Student procedures. The school principal, following NSW DEC ethical procedures, approached the students' parents for permission to be involved in the research. Interview times were established by the school principal with Aboriginal students and separately with their parents. Upon meeting with the students, in the first instance an introduction was given by the interviewer who introduced herself, providing her name, where she was from, and what she was doing now. Secondly, the researcher then explained to the student why they were asked to participate in the research, highlighting their good results in the NAPLAN tests and that this indicated they were doing well academically. This explanation was provided to let the students know that they were being asked to be involved in this research because they were identified as good/successful students, and that their opinions were considered important for the research. An additional explanation was given on how the session would run and that their answers would be written onto a sheet of art paper so they could see what was being written. Students were also asked for their permission to record the session. Students were also advised that this was a voluntary activity and they could withdraw at any time.

Two approaches were used with the students to gain an overview of what they considered supported them in gaining sound academic outcomes. The first was a Brainstorm Focus Session where the students were asked a series of open ended questions (see Chapter 5) and their

responses were recorded on a sheet of art paper as in a brainstorm session. Secondly, students were also asked to take photographs with a digital camera provided by the researcher over two to five days prior to the researcher's next visit. Students were asked to take up to 10 photographs of objects or people that symbolised what had helped them gain good academic results. On the researcher's second visit with students, students were asked to explain the relevance of each photograph and what it meant to them. In this follow-up session students were then asked to prioritise the photos in order of highest priority 1–10, and why they considered the item or condition they prioritised to be more important than the other items. Hence this procedure allowed students time to reflect on the conditions they considered important and served as an activity that would engage students in the research and allow students to control their input into the research.

Procedures for parents, teachers, principals, and Aboriginal staff. The school principal, following ethical procedures as set by the NSW DEC, approached the parents, teachers and any Aboriginal staff in the schools for their permission to be involved in the research. Upon their agreement, their names were provided to the researcher and interview times were set-up through the school principal.

The teachers engaged in the research were selected and approached by the school principal to be involved in the research. The selected teachers were identified as good teachers with Aboriginal students and had taught one or more of the high achieving Aboriginal students in either Year 3, 4, or 5. Both parents were invited to be involved in the research; in all but one case (where both parents came to the interview) only one parent opted to be interviewed.

Upon meeting with the interview participants, in the first instance an introduction was given by the interviewer who introduced herself, providing her name, where she was from and what she was doing now in her career. Secondly, the researcher then explained to the participants why they were asked to participate in the research, highlighting that the research was examining the conditions of success for Aboriginal students who had gained sound academic results as evidenced by NAPLAN results. This explanation was provided to let the participants know that they were being asked to be involved in this research to identify why they thought these particular Aboriginal students had achieved sound academic outcomes. An additional

explanation was given on how the session would run and that the researcher would take notes. Participants were asked for their permission to record the session. Participants were also advised that this was a voluntary activity and they could withdraw at any time. Semi-structured interviews (see Chapter 5) were employed to gain an overview of what stakeholders considered supported Aboriginal students in gaining sound academic outcomes.

Data Coding

School codes. Codes were assigned to each participating school (see Table 6.2). Schools were identified by location in Metropolitan and Regional areas. Research was carried out in $n=3$ schools in the Metropolitan area and $n=4$ schools in Regional areas, with two of these Regional schools—Regional School 2 (RS2) and Regional School 3 (RS3)—being in the same location.

Table 6.2. School Coding Scheme

Metropolitan Schools	Regional Schools
MS1 – Metropolitan School 1	RS1 – Regional School 1
MS2 – Metropolitan School 2	RS2 – Regional School 2
MS3 – Metropolitan School 3	RS3 – Regional School 3
	RS4 – Regional School 4

Student codes. Codes were assigned to each participating student (see Table 6.3). Student codes are identified as “S” followed by a unique number allocated to identify each student interviewed in each school (i.e., S1 (Student 1) through to S7 (Student 7)); each student code was then attached to a school code (as above). For example Metropolitan School 3 (MS3) Student 5 (S5) is coded as MS3-S5 and Regional School 4 (RS4) Student 3 (S3) is coded as RS4-S3. A total of 34 Aboriginal students were approached to take part in the research; of these students 10 were in Year 5 and 24 were in Year 6. The Year 5 students engaged in the research were selected by their school through the same selection process used to identify the Year 6 students, as they had recently completed their NAPLAN tests and the schools had the students’ results; were invited to be in the research by the school due to either small numbers of Year 6 students in the school, as with MS3 and RS1; or as with RS4, the Year 6 students were unavailable at the time of the research. All 34 students interviewed identified as being Aboriginal. Table 6.3 provides an overview of the students and their year group in each school visited for this research.

Table 6.3. Aboriginal Student Participants

SCHOOL	School Code	Year 5	Year 6	Total No. Students
Metropolitan School 1	MS1	-	2	2
Metropolitan School 2	MS2	-	1	1
Metropolitan School 3	MS3	1	5	6
Regional School 1	RS1	4	3	7
Regional School 2	RS2	-	6	6
Regional School 3	RS3	5	-	5
Regional School 4	RS4	-	7	7
TOTAL		10	24	34

Parent codes. The parents are identified as “P” and with a number allocated to identify the number of parents interviewed in each school, as such they are numbered P1 (Parent 1) through to P7 (Parent 7); each parent is then attached to a school code (as above). For example Metropolitan School 3 (MS3) Parent 5 (P5) is coded as MS3-P5; or Regional School 4 (RS4) Parent 3 (S3) is coded as RS4-P3. Note that each parent code is aligned to the code given to their child interviewed in the research, for example: MS3-P3 is the parent of MS3-S3, to allow direct correlation between each student and their parent, as required.

Teacher codes. The teachers are identified as “T” and with a number allocated to identify the number of teachers interviewed in each school, as such they are numbered T1 (Teacher 1) through to T7 (Teacher 7); each teacher is then attached to a school code (as above). For example Metropolitan School 3 (MS3) Teacher 5 (T5) is coded as MS3-T5; or Regional School 4 (RS4) - Teacher 3 (T3) is coded as RS4-T3.

Principal codes. The principals are identified as “PR”; each principal is then attached to a school code (as above). For example Metropolitan School 3 (MS3) Principal is coded as MS3-PR; or Regional School 4 (RS4) Principal is coded as RS4-PR.

Aboriginal staff codes. The Aboriginal staff are identified as “AS” and with a number allocated to identify the number of Aboriginal staff interviewed in each school, as such they are numbered AS1 (Aboriginal Staff 1) through to AS7 (Aboriginal Staff 7); each of the Aboriginal staff is then attached to a school code (as above). For example Metropolitan School 3 (MS3)

Aboriginal Staff 5 (AS5) is coded as MS3-AS5; or Regional School 4 (RS4) Aboriginal Staff 3 (AS3) is coded as RS4-AS3.

Section Summary

This section has presented an overview of the research design outlining the approach and methodology taken, the data collection procedures and data coding. The following section provides information on the data analysis for this research.

Data Analysis

Section Overview

This section presents the data analysis processes in the research including: recording the data information, data authentication, data analysis, and qualitative and quantitative data representation for this research.

Qualitative data analysis requires a great deal of contemplation because the writer is interpreting the perspectives of their participants; as such, no idea or message can be seen to be too little. It is not about quantity, but is rather a thoughtful response to causal relationships, unintended effects, and variations within systems (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The researcher is making meaning between relationships and practice. In this research the approach taken has been to present similarities in experiences to build a conscious reflection of what works (Grbich, 1999) as conditions of success for Aboriginal students' academic outcomes.

Data Record

The data recording was completed in a tiered approach. Firstly, the researcher kept notes throughout each in-depth interview with Aboriginal students and their parents, teachers, principals and Aboriginal staff. The note taking with the students in the Brainstorm Focus Session was on large sheets of art paper and a record of what students said in the photograph elicited interviews were also recorded in note form by the researcher. When students were prioritising their themes using the photographs, each photograph was saved in the priority order indicated by the student. Secondly, all interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim

by a transcription service that provided an audio script noting: date, time, and length of interviews.

Data Authentication

Four sources of data were used to cross-reference and interpret participants' views, these were: (1) the researcher's field notes which produced a written record by the researcher of key issues being raised by participants at the time of the interview; (2) students' brainstorm focus sheets as a unique record of each student's first interview session; (3) the student's digital record of photographs; and (4) the interview recording and verbatim transcription of each interview. Transcriptions of interviews were read by the researcher, with researcher's field notes from interviews, and student's brainstorm focus sheets to check for accuracy and to correct transcription texts for misinterpretation of words and spelling; or mumbled words and phrases.

Data Analysis

Preliminary analysis. The data analysis required a series of stages to ensure validity of the data and to cross-reference emerging themes (Grbich, 1999; Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008). The first stage involved in the field analysis whilst the interviews were fresh in the researcher's mind. This was undertaken through the researcher's interview notes which provided an initial analysis of the themes being raised by the research participants. The analysis of the students' data was additionally through: each student's brainstorm focus sheet to cross check the themes emerging from students at the time of their first interview; the field notes taken during the student's photograph elicited interview were used to cross-reference themes; and additionally the researcher used the digital interview recording with participants to check key themes raised by participants.

Reflective, comprehensive, and inclusive analysis. The second stage involved organising the data, and a complete analysis of the interview transcripts. The data analysis was a comprehensive process through each participant group's interview: first students, and then their parents, teachers, principals, and Aboriginal staff. This was done to ensure tracking of particular themes for commonalities and differences within each participant group.

Thematic analysis. The process of theme analysis involved generating categories, themes, and patterns of themes between participants (Grbich, 1999; Minichiello et al., 2008). Each interview was read through by the researcher for themed comments. This manual search was essential to ensure nuances in speech or language difference, where Aboriginal English was used, were interpreted correctly for themes and issues raised. Themes, through narratives, were in the first instance highlighted on hard copy of the interviews, then an electronic template was created for each participant group and the identified quotes were placed in the template with the participants' code in the left column, the quote in the centre column, and in the right column the theme which arose from the participant quote. At the end of each participant series of interviews, the template was sorted by themes. This created a set of common (large numbers of participants referring to the same theme) and divergent themes (a small number of participants mentioning themes). The emerging conditions and their themes were then able to be measured within and across participant groups (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994) to create a triangulation (Wiersma & Jurs, 2009) to see what overlap was occurring; this strengthened the reliability of the data. From this analysis a refining process was able to be undertaken to place similar or common themed issues together and to determine the overarching conditions regarded as essential through to minor for Aboriginal students gaining academic success.

Editing and narrative selection. In writing the report the narratives within the interviews which highlighted the pertinent condition and themes were once again used to draw out the more descriptive and relevant quotes as exemplars (Grbich, 1999). This was done to demonstrate the meaning and ensure accuracy of the emerging conditions of success and the themes within these conditions; it was also important to maintain the voice of the participants within the report.

Qualitative and Quantitative Data Representation

To strengthen the validity of the research findings in the final analysis stage, the conditions and themes from the qualitative research were used to create quantitative data, which is used in the research findings. This forms a richer understanding of the conditions and themes raised by participants through data integration.

Section Summary

This section has presented details of the data analysis employed in this research, being: the data record, data authentication, data analysis, and use of quantitative and qualitative reporting to strengthen data. Following is the chapter summary.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the research methodology employed in this investigation. This included an overview of: the research design, a description of participants, instrumentation, and procedures used in the research to ensure appropriate processes were used to gather data to address the aims and research questions as outlined in Chapter 5.

The first section of this chapter presented the arguments for the chosen methodology for this research being qualitative with a multi-grounded influence and the importance of undertaking this research with children; and as such the personal and relationship considerations of the researcher in undertaking the research. This was followed by a section which provided an outline of the methods employed, such as: stakeholder engagement and triangulation; in-depth interviews through brainstorm focus session, photograph elicited interviews, and semi-structured interviews with multiple stakeholders. Ethical issues were discussed in the next section, with consideration to research with children under 18 and in school, research with Aboriginal people, and participants' information and consent with the research. The next section presented an overview of the research design outlining the approach and methodology taken, the data collection procedures and data coding. The section which followed presented information on the data analysis with the data record, authentication, analysis, and use of quantitative and qualitative reporting to strengthen the validity of the findings. The final section provided a profile on the students and families involved in this research.

The following two chapters present the research findings for Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students (Chapter 7) and stakeholders groups (Chapter 8).

CHAPTER 7

RESEARCH RESULTS: METROPOLITAN AND REGIONAL ABORIGINAL STUDENTS' CONDITIONS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

This chapter presents the findings as they relate to each of the aims and associated research questions: (1) Identify personal attributes and skills which Aboriginal students and stakeholders believe assist Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes; (2) Discover the conditions Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider important in assisting Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes in their *school* environment; (3) Discover the conditions Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider important in assisting Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes in their *home* environment; and (4) Determine the priority conditions for Aboriginal students in what they perceive assist them to achieve successful academic outcomes (see Chapter 5). Each research question is addressed sequentially, with a brief outline of the intention behind each question. Second, students' responses are categorised into the conditions they considered supported their high academic outcomes and presented in table form, indicating how many students mentioned each of these conditions. Each condition, themes and sub-themes are presented using quotes from Metropolitan and Regional students interviewed for this research to illuminate their perceptions of the type/s of conditions they believe they need to excel.

Results Research Question 1: Personal Conditions of Success

Overview

Research Question 1.1 posed: What are the personal attributes and skills which Aboriginal students and stakeholders believe have assisted Aboriginal students to achieve successful academic outcomes? (see Chapter 5). Students were asked to identify what they believed were the personal attributes and skills which aided them to achieve sound academic outcomes. In analysing the students' responses thirteen key conditions emerged and these are presented as a column graph in Figure 7.1.

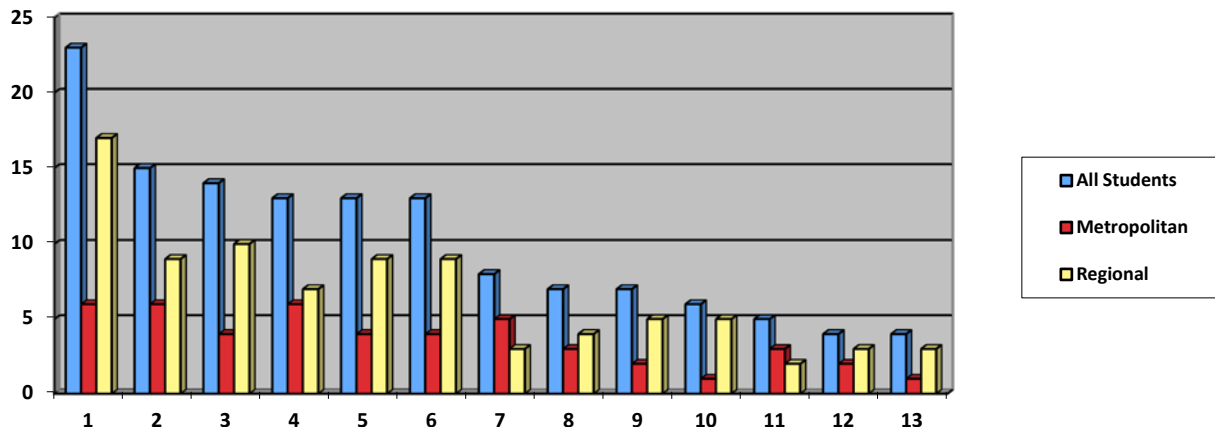


Figure 7.1 Students' Personal Attributes and Skills

Conditions:

	All Students	Metropolitan Students	Regional Students
1 - Being a good reader	23	6	17
2 - Be good in at least one school subject	15	6	9
3 - Good concentration	14	4	10
4 - Knowing how to listen to teacher	13	6	7
5 - Do my school work	13	4	9
6 - Knowing personal strengths	13	4	9
7 - Good listener	8	5	3
8 - Confidence	7	3	4
9 - Being an independent worker	7	2	5
10 - Future goals	6	1	5
11 - Good English language skills	5	3	2
12 - Resilience	4	2	3
13 - Mentally and physically active	4	1	3

The conditions raised by Metropolitan and Regional students when asked what they felt contributed to their high academic outcomes are below.

Personal Condition 1: Being a Good Reader

The most frequently cited theme by $n=23$ of participants clearly identified that these students considered that they were good readers, as RS2-S1 commented:

I have always been a pretty good reader ... when you read, it makes you more confident.

Being able to read was an impetus to greater learning as with RS3-S3:

It makes me read bigger words;

and with RS2-S3 who identified,

helps me because it's got really hard words.

For these students being good at reading had the most influence and significant impact on them doing well at school. This theme is illustrated by the following comments:

it helps in everything. ... in your writing, in your words, you know which words to use. In my public speaking, my debating ... I can always write down something. Reading, I know the words again. I can just read off the top of my head or even having a simple conversation, I just can (MS2-S1).

For these students reading was cited as a key to their academic success in many different subjects as with MS1-S1:

reading it helped me with other things [in school].

With RS1-S3 who saw reading as instrumental in their learning:

I always read ... It helps my education grow bigger.

Hence, a key to doing well academically mentioned by $n=33$ students was the ability to read well.

Personal Condition 2: Be Good In At Least One School Subject

Students $n=15$ felt that if they were good in one subject, this encouraged them to do well in other subjects. RS1-S3 felt they learnt how to persevere, when they learnt music:

It takes practice. ... you learn heaps and then you practice. You have to practice, practice, to get up. If you stop practicing, you go down (RS1-S3).

Knowing what subjects you are good at was important:

I'm just naturally good at maths. My whole family's good at maths. ... I'm the best mathematician in the school (RS4-S4).

Being able to identify what you were good at helped you progress into other areas, as identified by RS3-S3:

I went to T [next town] to read a book ... Cause I was terrific in reading books ... I had to read it out on the stage.

It is interesting that these students were able to acknowledge that they were good in one academic area. For these students this demonstrated how good skills in one area could allow them to transfer these skills to another area of learning and this helped them to attempt other academic work. RS1-S6 explained:

I reckon after you do something and you win or something, the school respects you and that makes you boost your confidence a bit more so you get—I reckon you do better in schoolwork.

Personal Condition 3: Good Concentration

Aboriginal students $n=14$ primarily spoke about their ability to concentrate as being a key personal attribute/skill in supporting their academic outcomes. Students claimed that good concentration was essential in working out what the teacher was talking about:

One time—I didn't get this thing in the class. But then at home I kept on thinking about it and I got really excited when I finally got it. ... I just kept on telling my sister and my cousin about it (RS4-S3).

Just like my thinking ... Concentrate, like when other people are talking [in class], block them out (RS4-S1).

Students also suggested that concentration was a key to remembering the work:

When I learn something that's really interesting it sticks to my mind (MS3-S3).

while for another student it was being able to focus:

I cope well if I focus a lot on what I'm doing and not look around the room (RS1-S5).

Similarly, another student emphasised that concentration was important to understand the basic concepts and then move onto more interesting, complex and challenging work, as with MS3-S6:

when there's something, even though it's boring, I try and listen because we might need it sometimes. I sort of try and learn as much as I can. ... if I don't like something, I just sort of put that aside and just think, just keep going.

Hence, the ability to concentrate was seen as important to allow students to focus on work to create improved understanding and learn more.

Personal Condition 4: Knowing How To Listen To the Teacher

Understanding the significance of listening was identified by $n=13$ students as a necessity for achieving well amongst their cohort. It allowed them to appreciate the importance of/or to recognise that knowing how to listen to the teacher helped their understanding of what was being taught. As demonstrated by the following students:

Listening to the teacher and concentrating, trying to block out other noises. ... tell my friends to be quiet while I'm listening (RS1-S1).

I listen what they're like—when they're explaining on the board, I listen (RS4-S6).

I sit at my desk. ... Don't talk and just watch her [teacher]. ... Watch the board (MS3-S5).

I listen and watch the teacher (MS3-S4).

listen to the teacher cause they know what to do (RS1-S2).

Students who felt they knew how to listen to the teachers felt they performed much better than their peers.

Personal Condition 5: Do My School Work

An attribute for some students $n=13$ was the importance of completing their school work. For students this meant they had the ability to get work done as demonstrated in the following comments:

I just like just as soon as they say put your hand up or something, just do it and then just get it over and done with (RS1-S2).

The quicker you do your work the quicker you finish (RS3-S1).

So if I'm by myself, I can just get all I need to get done and I don't need to discuss it with anyone else (MS3-S6).

Knowing what basic work was required to be done and completing the work in a timely manner helped students gain foundational skills for succeeding at school.

Personal Condition 6: Knowing Personal Strengths

For students $n=13$ knowing what they were good at was an important attribute to acknowledge, such as with MS3-S3. Knowing your strength, in this case swimming, which represented both personal strengths and weaknesses, was important as the following comment explains:

It represents that not everything's just at school and it's not all about maths and everything; it's also strength.

RS1-S5 echoes this view:

I'm the one who controls my life and that I know what I can do and what I can't do.

For MS2-S1 knowing you can do the work was important:

do something really fluently and easily.

For other students, such as RS4-S3, it was a range of strengths that was important:

I have. ... persistence in some things. ... I think I have a little organisation. ... I think I'm good at getting along [with other people].

For other students it was personal strengths in more practical ways, such as with organisational skills:

I basically just always have organisation, so I always have at least a pen to bring, so I don't have to borrow heaps of pens and pencils and stuff off my teacher (RS2-S6).

persistence, confidence ... organised ... being able to get along with other people (RS4-S6).

I am good at organisation (RS4-S1).

Some students felt their sporting abilities helped them to do well in academic fields:

sports that I enjoy playing and they help me with school, because I like keeping fit. Then that helps with my education because I feel good about myself and then just take that into school and I do, I reckon, better work. (RS1-S6).

Other students felt they learnt from their ability to watch others, such as with RS1-S2:

'Cause I can learn by seeing people do things to it. Like I can see them doing things and then I learn something from it.

Students' self-awareness of their personal strengths, such as being organised or persistent, getting on with other people or just knowing you are able to do certain tasks well, was a key condition to achieving sound academic outcomes.

Personal Condition 7: Being a Good Listener

A condition $n=8$ students identified as essential was being a good listener:

I listen. (MS3-S2).

I always listen to the teacher (RS1-53).

Likewise:

if someone's talking to me I don't listen—I can block people out. ... I'm good at listening (MS3-S4).

Students felt that being a good listener helped their focus. These students felt that many of their peers did not possess this skill and that you needed it to get the work done.

Personal Condition 8: Confidence

Students $n=7$ saw being confident was important to their success:

I think confidence would have to be part of it because if you're—if you want to go and achieve things you can't be shy because no one's going to notice you. They'll notice you as a shy person and they don't want a shy person to represent them (MS3-S3).

Some students understood how they had acquired confidence:

I started Mathletics last year ... that's helped me because I feel more confidence with my numbers now and I think it's made me a better student (RS1-S6).

Students felt if you were confident you would attempt things even if you were not sure you could do them. RS3-S5 explains:

because I try stuff, I'm scared at first. Say if I was jumping off a cliff, I'd be scared at first, but I would do it. ... try something first. If I don't like it, I won't do it again. ... I guess [I] feel a little bit disappointed. But then I fix it up.

For many students confidence was a key to attempting work and working through issues. Students felt there was little benefit in being shy as you needed confidence to facilitate success.

Personal Condition 9: Being An Independent Worker

Students $n=7$ identified being an independent learner as a condition, as explained by MS3-S6:

Well I'm sort of independent. If I need help, of course I would ask but I'm independent and I like working by myself. I think I work better rather than with others. I mean, I love working with other people but I just sort of focus more when I'm by myself.

Students also felt being independent was demonstrated in understanding the work and getting work completed

I do it independently because when we had Mr P, everyone in our class was just being silly and they weren't getting their work done. Every time I was like the first—I was done in a few minutes and they were still going on and then I was giving like heaps and heaps of work and they were still doing that [original] work (RS1-S2).

For others it was being able to work out how to do the work themselves as RS2-S3 explains:

I like working on my own because people don't tell me what's right and what's wrong so I can actually work it out myself.

Students felt that even though they liked to work with other students in groups to stimulate their thoughts and ideas, they also needed to work on their own and enjoyed the opportunity to focus on what they wanted to pursue.

Personal Condition 10: Future Goals

Students $n=6$ saw goal setting as important, and identified where they wanted to be in the future, such as with MS2-S1:

I've got a big strive. I really want to be top of the class a lot. ... Personally, I think I was kind of born with it.

Alternatively, with other students it was identifying what you needed to study at school to gain improved skills for careers:

I want to be a builder when I grow up. ... So I've got to be good at maths. ... I wanted to be a builder since like, I was two years old (RS4-S4).

To be a mechanic or engineer or something (RS3-S3).

I want to be a vet when I'm older (MS3-S3).

In this context, students were able to identify a goal, and this helped them to understand what they aspired to and want to achieve in their lives; and they also needed to understand what skills they needed to get the type of careers they aimed for in the future.

Personal Condition 11: Good English Language Skills

A few students $n=5$ specifically identified that they had good English language skills and good literacy skills, which they recognised supported their academic success:

I've got quite a wide vocabulary. When I'm just writing, I can always think of better words. I'm good at this ... I'm good at making other people's stories better (MS2-S1).

Good English language skills led to being good in literacy areas, such as demonstrated by RS3-S2:

Handwriting ... to know how to write big words ... literacy ... We do our spelling knowledge and then we do sentences, literary readings.

MS3-S4 identified that:

I'm good at handwriting. ... and art ... and [I] write stories—narratives and literature.

Students felt their understanding of the English language was pivotal to their doing well academically. These students spoke of being good at speaking English, they had a good vocabulary, and they knew how to use English and that this was an important reason why they did well academically. This also revealed the students' awareness of their parents' lack of English skills and why their parents had perhaps not achieved sound academic results in the past.

Personal Condition 12: Resilience

For students $n=5$ resilience was about how you got back into your school work after a failure, with one student being able to identify that their well-being, as stated by MS2-S1 was linked directly to their ability to cope emotionally with setbacks:

I've got quite a high EQ [emotional] ... I learnt how to deal with emotional stuff before intelligence. ... Because you need emotional to help you with intelligence. Even though intelligence might be able to like, okay, I can get out of this. But that's really emotional. ... emotional intelligence is like being able to say, okay, I'm going to do this, then that. Now I'll have a break. Then if that goes wrong, I know how to bounce back.

Building resilience was important as for RS3-S4:

I think it's just as important to know what you're good at as knowing what you need help with. ... [you need] confidence, resilience.

RS1-S5 commented:

I also encourage myself to have a try again and it's not good to give up and just say, this is too hard, I'm going to give up right now.

Resilience was a key issue, particularly with the Regional students as they had school focus programs which emphasised resilience as a requirement for working with others and completing challenges in school. This condition, as mentioned by these students, was their strong internal resilience, which helped them focus on and complete their school work after a setback.

Personal Condition 13: Mentally and Physically Active

A few students $n=4$ perceived that to achieve academic success it was important to be mentally actively involved in your school work, to be working hard and doing lots of different things:

Doing lots of things, I think that helps as well because it keeps my mind active and I don't get lazy (MS2-S1).

Another way to boost their confidence in their own skills was for a student to be physically active:

It keeps you fit and stuff so you feel good about yourself (RS1-S6).

For these students being active both mentally and physically meant they were always looking for something to do and it was this interest which helped them to see any assigned classwork as valuable. This helped these students see academic work as fun and as such, they did well academically.

Section Summary

This section introduced the conditions of personal attributes and skills Aboriginal students felt they possessed to assist them in gaining sound academic outcomes. These were that they were a good reader; that they felt they were good in at least one school subject and that this gave

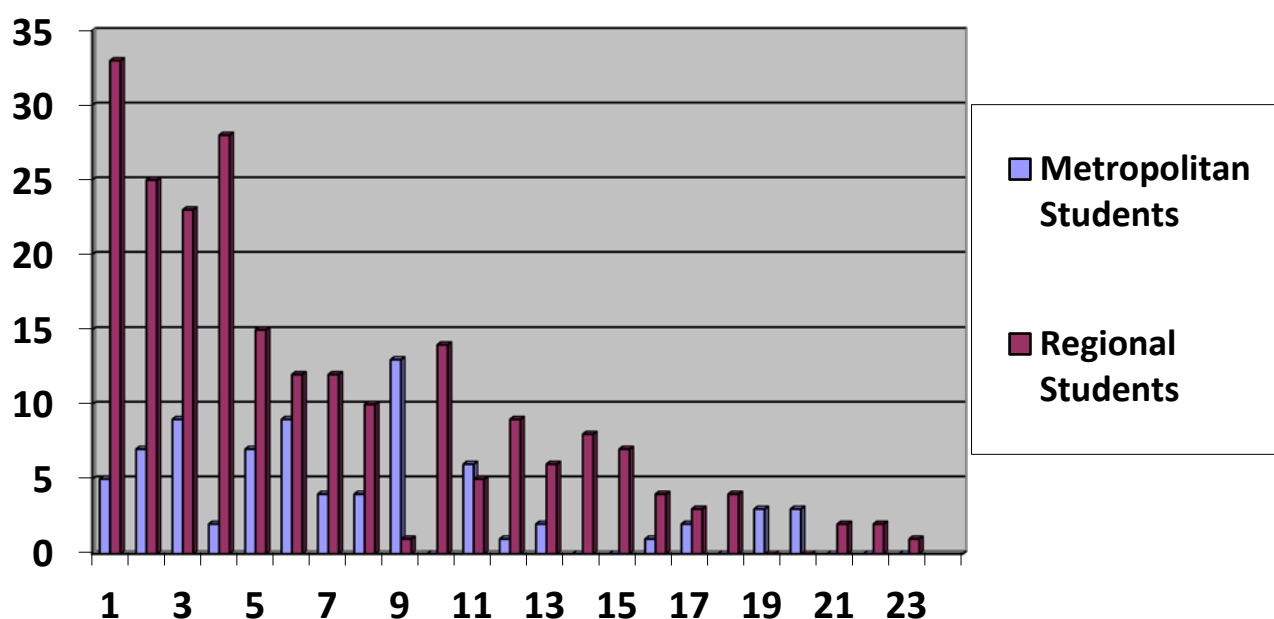
them confidence in other academic areas. Students felt they needed to be able to set goals to inspire them to achieve in academic endeavours and that would help them to meet their career goals. Students felt they had good concentration skills and knew how to listen to their teacher. Some students mentioned that to do well they just had to do their school work. Students also felt they were good in other non-academic areas which supported their academic outcomes. Students, who felt they were good listeners, felt they had the confidence to make mistakes and to still succeed. Whilst students mentioned how they like working in groups and to work with friends, they felt they were independent workers and enjoyed working on their own to get their work done. Students also felt their understanding of the English language was why they understood work set; and that they had resilience when they made mistakes. Finally, students felt that keeping mentally and physically active assisted them to see school work as enjoyable.

The next section introduces conditions in the school environment that supports Aboriginal students' academic outcomes.

Results Research Question 2: Schooling Conditions of Success

Overview

Research Question 2.1 posed: What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider being important conditions that assist Aboriginal students to achieve academic outcomes in their *school* environment? (see Chapter 5). This question was posed to determine what Aboriginal students perceive as conditions which surround them and that contribute to their gaining academic success within the school environment. This is disaggregated as conditions cited by Metropolitan and Regional students in the column graph in Figure 7.2.



Note Key:

	Metropolitan Students	Regional Students	All Students
1 - School support program	5	33	37
2 - Friends	7	25	32
3 - Teacher	9	23	32
4 - School	2	28	30
5 - Technology	7	15	22
6 - Parent	9	12	21
7 - Library/Books	4	12	16

8 - Self	4	10	14
9 - Equipment	13	1	14
10 - Curriculum	0	14	14
11 - Extended family	6	5	11
12 - Tutor	1	9	10
13 - Aboriginality	2	6	8
14 - Class mates	0	8	8
15 - Aboriginal staff	0	7	7
16 - Out of school activity	1	4	5
17 - Health	2	3	5
18 - Helping others	0	4	4
19 - Future goals	3	0	3
20 - Positive & organised	3	0	3
21 - Principal	0	2	2
22 - Safety	0	2	2
23 - Transport	0	1	1

Figure 7.2 School Conditions Aboriginal Students Consider Supports Them to Achieve Sound Academic Outcomes

In analysing this data there are eight key school characteristics mentioned as conditions by all the Aboriginal students that they felt contributed to their successful academic outcomes within the school environment, they are listed below.

School Condition 1: Good Teachers

When asked “what supported them at school?” the overwhelming number of comments from the $n=34$ Aboriginal students interviewed responded by identifying the teacher. Teachers were seen to be the cornerstone of learning for these students; and also students identified the need to recognise the value of your teacher, as stated by MS3-S3:

not everybody has a classroom teacher and it's like—some people don't go to school and that—you've got to think of it as a—what is it—advantage. ... Like, they're there to help you, and that's their job, and they're not just teaching you, they're teaching everybody else, so you get to see what everybody else thinks of what you're learning.

MS3-S4 stresses the importance of teachers:

because the teachers helps you when you need help and they're the ones that teach everything.

Or as with RS1-S2:

'Cause she teaches me every day at school and I learn new things off her.

RS2-S1 stated that:

they help you with education. They help you learn different things.

These students saw teachers as being instrumental in their learning. When students were asked: “What do you consider is a good teacher?”, three key themes emerged in relation to characteristics of good teachers: the teacher’s personality; teaching style (pedagogy); and the classroom environment created by the teacher.

Theme 1.1: Teacher’s personality. The key issue raised and cited by all the students, was their personal relationship with teachers, as a significant influence and encouragement for engagement in and to complete work, as with comment from MS3-S3:

I think having a good relationship with the teachers really helps a lot because if you don't have a good relationship with them ... you're going to get distracted and you're not going to learn much.

This personal relationship was viewed through six sub-themes, these were:

Teacher rapport with students. The Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students considered that the teacher’s personality had a lot to do with students achieving sound academic outcomes. This was seen as demonstrating to students how to interact with others as MS2-S1 expressed:

you need a good teacher who can help you and is not always like just angry. ... because he's or she's the person who's teaching you, like not just your intelligence, but values as well. That kind of builds up your whole life, because it depends if you had an angry teacher who just (well) always made people really independent and you wouldn't like to talk to anyone. When you got out of school you'd be a bit of an unsociable person.

Good teachers show they are nice by the way they speak to students, such as:

the way they talk. They talk nice and ... [so] you can understand. They show they're nice because their tone is quieter (MS3-S2); and

they speak in a mannerly voice. ... That they speak calm and all that (RS2-S2);

or as a lack of anger:

They're nice. They're not like angry all the time (RS3-S5).

This was reinforced by RS4-S4:

Like they speak nicely and not angrily. Even when they're angry, they don't speak angrily.

According to RS1-S7 and RS1-S6, teachers have flexible attitudes towards students:

They're easy going and they're not so uptight about everything (RS1-S7).

they show you an easier way around stuff, ... and helps you with stuff and is nice and always listens to you (RS1-S6).

For students it was important that the teacher provided emotional support:

Well if you've fallen over or you may have hurt yourself or you're feeling down or something—maybe put downs or something—well they'll tell you that—they'll have a chat with you and then make sure that everything's okay and they're not going to yell at the other student that did it to you because you're going to feel bad; you don't want to go and 'dob' and then make them in trouble. You want the teacher to talk it out with you (MS3-S3).

MS1-S1 identified how important it was for students to feel they could rely on teachers for support:

If you need someone to talk to they'll say you can talk to me (MS1-S1).

Teachers' rapport with students was a key condition for students to feel supported by and engaged with their teacher.

Teacher reinforcement. For students, reinforcement that they were valued and respected was also linked to teachers knowing their students, so that they knew when to encourage students. MS3-S6 expressed this as:

They're always encouraging us to learn more and more and more.

Or it can be in how the teachers recognise work well done and encourage students, as MS3-S3 states:

If you're learning and then if you behave in a good way they reward you and they're not just rewarding you for every little thing you do but they tell you that you're doing well. They tell you how much you've improved and looking at your reports you see how much you've improved.

Or as with RS2-S1:

Well, the teachers are very positive and everything. ... if you don't think you can do it they always tell you put your head up and you can do it and everything. ... All the teachers give out awards.

And as explained by RS2-S3:

My teacher because he explains it really good. ... Well, he makes it fun and he talks to you about it. If you get something wrong he asks you which question you got wrong and he explains it to you. ... [good communicator] He talks. He is really funny at times and, yeah, he's just an awesome teacher.

Teacher reinforcement of their encouragement of students and constantly checking students' understanding of the work was seen as a contributor to achieving sound academic outcomes.

Having a sense of humour. Additionally many students emphasised that good teachers tried to be happy and humorous. With comments such as:

Yeah they're always happy and they're always laughing—like having jokes around. ... They're kind. ... Well they're always happy with you and you hardly ever get in trouble—well I don't (MS3-S4).

And that it was important to know that teachers also don't take personal offense at jokes:

Like sometimes if you say—muck around and say something dumb like—Miss D doesn't really care if it's about her. One time D [classmate] said to her, Miss D who done your hair, I'd get your money back. ... She's strict but she can take a joke (RS3-S1).

Or as supported by RS2-S6:

Mrs W, because she's like really funny and silly at the same time, because when she gets up people in our class, it's not like mucking around getting up them. It's really funny. ... whenever someone tells a joke in our class like my friend T ... Mrs W will just crack up laughing. She's not a cop, basically. ... Because they show no emotion on the job. ... one day, T told a joke. It was so funny that it made her cry. ... sometimes, T, he says jokes about her, but that are not too offensive but they're funny. She just laughs

This same student went on to further state it was also about how the teacher controls their own emotions with:

they can snap from a happy mood to an angry mood in seconds and snap back.

Teachers' sense of humour, both their own and the ability to take a joke was seen as a requirement in having a personal relationship with Aboriginal students.

Honesty and trustworthy. Honesty and being able to trust teachers were essential requirements in developing personal relationships with Aboriginal students. As with comment from RS1-S5:

[the teacher] doesn't kind of just say yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, I'll do something about it, when they actually won't do something about it. So we actually need someone who will actually do something about if something's happened bad in the playground or something like that. ... They do something about it. ... I would say that the best teacher would possibly have to be someone or a teacher that listens to you and helps you.

Honesty when demonstrated by teachers, in admitting when they were wrong, was valued:

They admit that they're wrong sometimes. ... like if you know that they're wrong and they admit they're wrong, ... you don't think that it's wrong as well (MS1-S2).

For Aboriginal students, teachers being honest and trustworthy with them were key components of having a sound inter-relationship.

Trust and respect students. Students felt a sound relationship with their teacher was shown by the teachers' ability to be trustful and respectful of students. This was shown when the teachers allowed students to be themselves and not what the teacher thought the student should be. This expressed by MS3-S6 about one good teacher:

I really like going to Mr Y's maths groups because I'm always learning something there. ... He's just fun. He's not grumpy or anything. ... he lets us be ourselves and he makes sure that each and every person is just fine and they're happy. He includes everyone and everything and understands everyone.

This teacher trusted the student's ability to handle a particularly difficult situation:

This dude he went 'schiz' and that, and then the teacher made me go after him and settle him down and that. Then I just looked after him because he was really upset and just looked after him (RS1-S6).

Teachers were also respectful of students when, as commented by RS3-S2:

They're nice, respectful. ... They help you.

For RS3-S3:

They make it better ... And that they trust you.

Sometimes this was demonstrated in the teachers' communication, as with MS1-S1 who said that good teachers:

know how to talk to you;

And for MS3-S3 they know how to listen:

I think a good teacher is a teacher who wants to listen to what you have to say; not all about what they're trying to teach you.

Students felt that respect from the teacher was vital for learning to take place.

Know students and families. Students also felt that good teachers knew the student personally and this helped the teacher to work better with students, as with RS1-S6:

They just understand you and stuff. ... they know my personality and attitude and that. ... they know about me ... I think they really know everything.

MS1-S2 also stated that:

they get to know you well. ... like who you are, and like know your parents, and what you do usually, and what you're good at.

For students the teacher knowing them and their parents personally had a positive impact on their engagement with the learning and the school.

For Aboriginal students who were achieving sound academic outcomes it was the positive relationships with their teachers, which was encouraged by the personality of their teachers and how they interacted with the student that was pivotal to their achieving sound academic outcomes.

Theme 1.2: Teacher's pedagogy. Aligned to the teacher's personality was the way the teacher taught the students to assist them to gain sound academic outcomes. These consisted of the following eight methods being employed by teachers:

Direct instruction. The key issue in the teacher's pedagogical approaches was the use of systematic instructions through providing direct instruction and support.

They come to your desk, and tell you, and do questions, like the first question and then you do it by yourself (MS3-S5).

Yeah they explain work to you more and teach you better. ... I got better at writing stories and that. ... I got better at spelling and stuff (MS3-S1).

They explain things like really well. They just like help and like do stuff. ... If you're like in trouble or something, you just go and ask them and they'll just say like here's how you do it or something like that. ... they just explain things really well. ... like simple ways (RS1-S2).

first, they will go over it, but when someone doesn't get it, they'll explain it a bit more. ... breaks it down ... just kept on helping me (RS2-S4).

Good teachers work actively with students to help them understand the work, as with MS3-S6:

I think mostly every day, and every single time there we're learning something new, or going over something. He makes sure that every single person knows how to do it and gets it right. If they don't understand he takes them down on the floor and then goes through it again and again and again. He has got a lot of patience and it's good.

Direct instruction helped the students understand how to work to a higher standard.

Intimate knowledge of the students' strengths and weaknesses. Students also emphasised that a good teacher knew the students strengths and weaknesses:

A good teacher has to understand the class and know what they're capable of and understand how we ... are as individuals ... what we are good and bad at (MS3-S6).

and:

what you're good at ... and like test you with what you're not so good at (MS1-S2).

Or in finding students' strengths and using that to draw students out and assisting them to do better academically as with RS1-S4:

He draws really good and he was giving me tips how to draw because he reckons I'm an artist as well. He gave me tips on how to draw people because I don't know how to draw people, but I know how to draw horses really well ... so he taught me and taught me about how to draw. He made me happy and he made everything easier for me.

Or as with RS2-S6:

Well you get to learn different things about them [students] and then you get to teach them different things.

Students commented that it was the teacher's knowledge of the student, understanding their individual strengths and weaknesses, that helped the teacher, teach students well.

Providing help. Students considered a good teacher was one who provided assistance and could identify when a student needed help:

Because if you do need help he'll come to you straight away (MS3-S4).

By teachers properly engaging and monitoring students it helped because:

If you get stuck on a question they'll help you. ... they explain it better in my language (MS1-S1); and:

Help them a little more if they're struggling (RS4-S5).

And for RS4-S4 it was the teacher sharing their time across whole class:

spend time with everyone, not just one, and help people if they're stuck.

For students it was both that teachers would help when asked and also know the students well enough to know when students required help.

Actively listening. Students also felt that good teachers would actively listen to them. This was often stated simply as teachers listen to the students (MS1-S2):

I think a good teacher is someone that really listens to you and doesn't yell at you for no reason (MS3-S6).

And as explained by MS3-S3:

I think a good teacher is a teacher who wants to listen to what you have to say; not all about what they're trying to teach you.

And by RS1-S4:

If I put my hand up, they can come over and ask me what's wrong. I tell them and they will help me work it out.

A key issue for students was that teachers need to listen to students and make students feel that their comments or inquiries are relevant and important.

Mastery of subject matter. Students also felt that a good teacher knew their subject matter well and was a good communicator, as with MS3-S2:

They know what they're doing. ... They know their subject.

Teachers' subject knowledge, that is teachers who were exceptionally skilled in a particular subject as opposed to simply teaching a subject, helped students to gain a better understanding of the work they had to do and this helped them love the subject and want to excel. This is illustrated by MS3-S3:

Well to tell you the truth maths was never, ever going to be one of my best subjects and I always would moan; I was like oh, maths. But I actually really like it now. ... last year I had a teacher called Mr X—that's his star subject. We would do so much maths and he would get you to like it. ... I guess doing so much of it and making it—breaking it down, making it easier. ... Now this year that I've got Mr Y—I love having maths. ... Yeah good at communicating ... if you don't understand it he'll help you and he'll show you how simple it is.

Students felt that a teacher who knew their subject well, was more likely to be a good communicator and taught better as a result of their love of the subject, as with RS1-S1:

She's good with HSIE. She explains things well.

And it was the teacher being passionate about particular disciplines of study that led the students to enjoy the subject such as RS4-S2, who learned to love history because of the teacher:

Good teachers that teach you history. ... well, it's the teacher who teaches history. ... My Year Three [teacher] taught me all about the First Fleet.

Teachers' knowledge of their subject was not just about students' learning knowledge but also about students' ability to enjoy learning the content within the subject.

Making learning fun. Students believed that a good teacher knew how to make learning fun and changed teaching routines. As explained by RS2-S6:

it's just being able to teach students and also make it fun at the same time.

For students this was about not being bored:

Mr Y because when we're doing maths he makes it fun as well as learning. So we're not like bored and things like that (MS3-S4).

Or about changing teaching routines, such as:

make learning fun ... instead of like sitting down and answering just questions, we got up and like did this stuff around the classroom, and went outside and did stuff (MS1-S1).

Every afternoon, [the teacher] would do different kinds of experiments and things ... she tries to make it fun. ... when we're doing our work we listen to music on our new SMART Boards, so that's fun. ... You have the same topic but you're not talking about things that you talked about two weeks ago (RS2-S5).

My science teacher, Mr H, he lets us do experiments and stuff, and we have a garden—a beautiful garden down the front, and there's one in the infants' too. He lets us work on—we work on those, the Year Five and Sixers (RS2-S6).

Students spoke of the importance of fun and variety of teaching in motivating them to learn. Working outside and with students from other grades to create new learning situations was also important.

Challenge students. These high achieving students spoke about teachers who challenged them and expected higher learning, as with MS3-S6:

the teacher would ask if this was too easy for us. Then we'd do something else; we're not always having to do the easy stuff even if we've already learnt it. ... They're all open things that we can do so there's never something that, you go do this, you go do this. It's sort of open and everyone can learn as much as they like.

And with:

I got better at maths when I was in his maths group. He does like harder things (RS1-S3).

Sometimes challenging work was through extension classes for specific subject areas such as maths or literacy, as mentioned by RS1-S6:

like extension [classes]. I like them ... it's not just easy work, you're getting a bit challenged and you learn more stuff.

Challenging the students in different ways in the classroom made students feel they could do the work well whilst ensuring they developed a greater depth of knowledge.

Good discipline. Students thought that good teachers knew how to control their classroom, and for students this meant the classroom was a place in which they could learn, as commented by RS2-S3:

I like when they're angry because they 'get up' people that need to be chastised and stuff and I like a quiet classroom. ... because it lets me concentrate.

And that a good teacher knew when to discipline students:

like knows when to discipline, but is fun. ... But they're still like not too firm and they still do things that we would like (RS4-S3).

Or teachers give explicit instructions and clear expectations about behaviour to control discipline in the classroom:

if you accidentally talk they give you a warning instead of some other teachers just get up you straight away (RS1-S6).

RS3-S1 explained the process in their class:

Miss D has this warning list thing where the first warning she'll give you a verbal warning, second warning you're going blue, but it takes her a while. Say if you call out in class or something and then she'll just say don't call out, and if you call out again she'll just say a next colour and that's like blue, and blue's nothing. Then if you get next colour again you go onto green, and you have to stay in with her for 10 minutes at recess or lunch. Then you just sit there ... and purple's 20 minutes, and after that you just go down to Miss H [principal].

For students this meant they knew what would happen if they misbehaved, but also that they valued the clarity of the boundary and in the teacher's approaches.

For these high achieving Aboriginal students the teacher's pedagogical approach was a significant factor in engaging and promoting higher learning. The teacher's pedagogical approach required the teacher to have depth of knowledge of the subject being taught; that a good teacher provided direct instruction, that they made learning fun, whilst challenging students. Additionally good teachers know students' strengths and weaknesses, provide help as

required and are active listeners of students, and have good disciplinary approaches which are clear and explicit for students.

Theme 1.3: Teacher's classroom environment. The teacher's organisation of their classroom space was considered by Aboriginal students as relevant in supporting their sound academic outcomes. These included eight sub-themes:

Flexible learning spaces. The key characteristics for a good classroom environment were demonstrated by the way in which the teacher changed the classroom where the tables, seats, and displays were not static and could be rearranged to suit different purposes or teaching. For example:

because we've changed the seats, the tables every week. ... you can meet new friends (MS1-S1).

Mr H keeps moving the desks so we sit in different groups and places in the classroom (RS2-S3).

I like the way you sit. Like I usually like at the front and we get to pick our own seats (RS1-S3).

Students felt this changing of room design and placement of tables made the learning interesting as they had opportunities to work with other students. Some also indicated how the various approaches worked to demonstrate how different configurations for seating and desks were productive depending upon the task.

Colourful inviting classrooms. For some students the classroom felt inviting if it was colourful and had wide spaces so students can move around freely:

There was heaps of artwork around it and everything. ... It was bright and colourful (RS2-S1).

Yeah we've got artworks on the walls. ... It's not like really crowded or anything (MS3-S1).

they're big, like they're wide, plenty of space (MS1-S1).

That we have space around the classroom to walk and talk (RS4-S7).

Students felt making the classroom inviting made it a place where they wanted to learn.

Organised spaces. That the students knew where things were kept in the classroom and they had notice of what was going to be done for the day or week's work:

I like how that it is good and organised. ... That—well, we always know what we've got to do. ... on the whiteboard, we always have what we're going to do today in the classroom. ... I like some things that can help me in the classroom. Like we've got timetables sheets, because when we get stuck, we can just go and get them (RS4-S3).

it's pretty organised ... a spot for everything ... you have like your tray—like your stuff, your personalised stuff (MS2-S1).

An organised classroom helped the students feel less stressed as they knew where things were and what they were meant to be doing.

Resources. Many students felt support was shown to them when the classroom contained the resources they required for every day class work, such as pens, dictionaries and calculators; and they had easy access to interactive technology resources such as, smartboards and computers. They felt the presence of the technology equipment improved their learning, as explained by the following comments:

we can get up and use the smartboards, ... there's a lot of resources, like if you don't have your own pens, or pencils, or textas, they're the teacher's, and like we can use dictionaries and that (MS1-S2).

The interactive whiteboard we have. They're good in the classroom. Then there's five computers in each room (RS1-S3).

the whiteboard—because this is how I learn. Mr L will write something on the board or he'll explain it on the board. ... and if you're having more trouble he'll come over and explain it in the book. ... we're not just copying on the board, but sometimes the projector will go onto the board and that's how we get our source of information (MS3-S3).

Smartboards are real good for especially little kids playing games. They're easier. So you don't just have to use a mouse. They're touch screen as well (RS4-S4).

Students felt that general resources and technology effectively aided their education.

Inclusive teaching practices. Students commented that good teachers included everyone in the classroom:

They encourage all students (RS4-S3).

She always listens to everyone, not just one person (RS4-S4).

As with MS3-S6 students take this inclusion personally:

Well she makes every single one of us feel happy and equal. There's no—oh you come with me, every single time for a job or something, she's always spreading it around and making sure that everyone has the equal chance to do things.

Students felt this inclusive practice made everyone feel valued.

School Condition 2: Reading Competence

The majority of students $n=33$ commented that they thought one of the main reasons they did well at school was that they were good readers. The question was then asked, “When do you think you became a good reader?”. The responses from $n=34$ students interviewed were (see Figure 7.3, below): $n=4$ students felt they had reading competence before they started school; $n=3$ students felt they became competent readers in Kindergarten; $n=5$ students felt they could read well by Year 1; $n=4$ students felt they read well by Year 2; $n=12$ students felt they read well by Year 3; $n=5$ students by Year 4; and $n=1$ student felt they read well by Year 5. This meant of the $N=34$ students, $n=12$ students felt they had reading competence by Year 1; and $n=28$ felt they were competent by Year 3. The $n=6$ students who felt they became competent readers in Year 4 and Year 5 spoke of special programs that helped them become competent readers, by the end of Year 5.

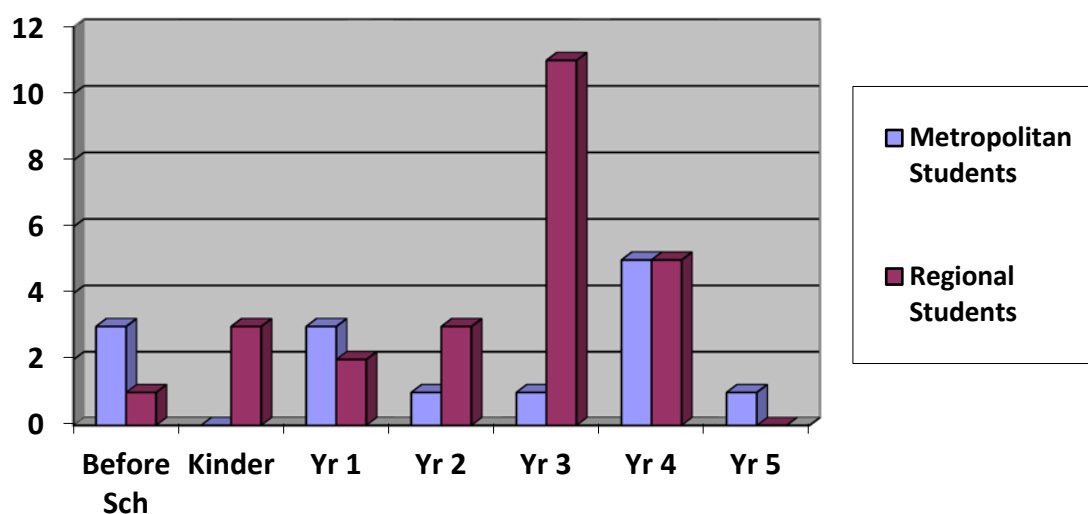


Figure 7.3 Aboriginal Students' Achieved Reading Competence at School

Theme 2.1: Reading competence by grade. The responses from the Aboriginal students were very clear and they felt they were well aware of when and how they had gained reading competence. With these students, being a good reader began before they started school and was refined during Kindergarten:

I started reading ... when I was five years old, in Kindergarten, I started reading, like learning more to do with books ... I think I really learned when I got into Kindergarten.
(MS1-S2)

and:

Kindergarten, I think (RS4-S7).

Students who felt they could read well by Year 1, stated that:

in Year 1, I was the highest reader in my class. ... Then by Year 3, I started reading medium chapter books (MS3-S6).

For other students it was in Year 2 that they gained reading competence and for the majority of students it was by Year 3:

I probably became a good reader in Year 2 or 3. ... I remember in Year 2, we used to read, and Year 3, we used to read. ... We always had groups. I went onto the second-highest group or the last group. But then I went up and up (RS1-S3).

Probably Year 3, because I didn't talk much in Year 2 and 1. ... Because I was shy (RS3-S4).

about Year 3 ... So you can read the school newsletter, know what's going on (RS1-S1).

Some students felt they read well by Year 4:

From Year 4 ... I have always been a pretty good reader but that is when it has gotten better (RS2-S1).

And one student who felt they read well by Year 5:

At the start of the year [Year 5] I started reading. ... I don't know. I just started to like it. ... My friend L, she liked reading. I think that's why I started liking reading. ... I'm like how could you like reading it's so boring and stuff like that. Yeah but then I started liking reading. ... my grandma liked reading so ... Like whenever I'm reading she's just literally staring at me and just saying I love watching you read. ... Then she shows my mum the book and goes like, look how much she's read today and stuff like that (MS3-S1).

Theme 2.2: Reading competence through help. Often the students spoke about reading competence in relation to the help they received from different sources, such as:

I'd have to say around Year three. ... Because my Year Three and Four teacher ... they taught me all different reading strategies and stuff (RS2-S6).

For one student a tutor in Year 4 was crucial:

because I got help doing reading at school ... with a tutor, especially bought in to help with reading (MS1-S1).

Or through family support, one student:

became a good reader in Year 2. ... My Nan buys me heaps and heaps of books (RS2-S5).

School programs such as:

Probably I started getting good in I think it was Year 3 or Year 4 when the school had a MULTILIT program running (RS3-S1).

Or on a personal level students could recognise how their own efforts helped to improve their reading competence:

in kindergarten ... you always used to read a book and then we get over 100 nights we get big stepper. ... I was the first one to get the 100 night reading (RS3-S3).

Theme 2.3: Reading competence for academic success. For all these students reading was the foundational skill they identified as a key to their doing well at school, for example:

because I got help with reading it helped me with other things [in school] (MS1-S1).

Students also mentioned the direct correlation of being a good reader to helping them do well in their school work:

I think I like concentrated more because I started reading (MS3-S1).

Or with RS3-S3 who saw the progression of their reading as the basis of becoming good academically in school:

I just kept on; entering challenges and that put me up higher levels ... Like book reading ... We used to have in kindergarten ... you always used to read a book and then we get over 100 nights we get big stepper. ... Yeah and then I got up to Year 2 and I was reading books.

.Students saw the link between reading competence and doing well at school:

Because it helps you be more confident in yourself when you read, it makes you more confident (RS2-S1).

Reading competence was the second most important condition mentioned by students interviewed about what effectively contributed to their high academic success.

School Condition 3: School Infrastructure

The third area students identified as a condition of success were directly related to the school itself: the school infrastructure; and the school attitude towards and approaches to families and students. These two distinct themes are discussed in the following section.

Theme 3.1: School facilities. For Aboriginal students the infrastructure issues revolved around the school being a place the students liked to come and showed the whole school as being a centre of learning:

Because everyone at school and the new buildings, and the play equipment, and the playground, and the sports storeroom, and the hall, it helps when you're learning. Like you can go outside and do some sports and you can go into the hall and do like dancing or stuff like that, and all the classrooms they've got new buildings and everything. That helps with the like learning (MS1-S2).

last year they put the playground equipment in there, and they're starting to get new sports equipment ... It's good to have stuff like that in the school (RS4-S6).

School facilities were seen in reference to:

Playground. Having a good playground was seen as a major theme in the school for Regional Aboriginal students, and was a minor issue for Metropolitan students that the school playground produces a welcoming school environment. The students often had personal connections to the gardens produced for shade and shelter which made the school inviting, such as:

we helped plant trees around the area ... a bush regeneration project ... I think in Year Two we went up near the bush ... and we planted some trees as well ... Now the trees are grown and student can see them. ... they give lots of shade in the playground ... in Kindergarten, Year one and Year Two we used to sit under the trees for lunch (MS1-S2).

For students the use of the playground had multiple purposes. The first purpose was to learn how to be social:

Yeah, because you don't need to be alone. ... you do need to be social for your education, just in case—like if you're a bank accountant, you need to talk to the guests and that (RS4-S2).

Because it can help you make friends (RS2-S2).

Therefore the playground is used as a place to meet with friends:

where we eat and I talk with my friends and have fun, where we eat for recess. ... me and my friends, we usually sit there (RS2-S6).

where me and my friends play cards. ... We play cards and play handball and that (RS4-S1).

The playground provides outlets for students when upset:

Basketball it's like kind of my second favourite sport and when I just get angry I just go there ... and I just cool down at the basketball court (RS4-S5).

The playground. ... Because we can go out there to calm down and everything. ... and we play there at lunch and recess (RS4-S1).

The playground allows for skills development in areas such as sporting skills or working with other children:

Basketball Courts ... Because that's where I do my sports ... I learn more skills (RS3-S3).

That the playground has sufficient space to play in and room for different purposes and age groups:

play cricket ... actually space to walk around in (MS2-S1).

I really like the playground. It's just sometimes I like just some peace and quiet out there (RS4-S3).

the lunch area at playground two is good as well. ... They're right next to each of them. It's close. Everyone can go in playground two and the COLA area. But big kids can't go in playground one and little kids can't go in playground three (RS1-S3).

That there is an undercover area in the playground:

it has a big undercover area for playing and meeting with friends ... where we all get together (MS1-S1).

The undercover area was particularly relevant for the Regional students as shelter from the heat and rain, such as comments, with regard to the “COLA” area:

It's like a big thing where kids sit for lunch. There's like the skipping ropes, the hula-hoops and you can play all those and then there's the bell. Then there's the silver seats. That's where you sit when you have no hat. ... the lunch area at playground two is good as well. ... They're right next to each of them. It's close. Everyone can go in playground two and the COLA area. ... Then there's like a garden ... Then there's like an area of trees where you're allowed to play in sometimes if the teachers let you. Then there's like a path that you can go up into playground two (RS1-S3).

The playground was prominent feature of a good school for students as the chance to be with friends and to develop skills outside the classroom.

Purpose built buildings. Having modern and purpose built buildings made the Regional students feel that their learning was considered important and was a key motivator to attend the school, with comments such as:

they've got modern buildings; modern classrooms, and the hall. They built new classrooms. ... They're big and you get new Smart Boards and everything. ... they just built a new hall. ... Well, it's bigger and when we need to have an assembly it's all there (RS2-S1).

School Hall, like how much room it is and the stage and the stairs and the toilets and the back thing. That's where we play our musical instruments (RS1-S3).

Modern and purpose built space which allowed for community gatherings, group performances and assisted students to separate learning spaces was a general issue for Regional students.

School library. The school library was a key issue place for students' learning and pleasure:

if we're like learning something, there's like heaps of books and everything. ... if you like researching you can go and look ... every Tuesday we have RFF (research and reading), then on Wednesday we have borrowing, where we can take books home (MS1-S2).

like going to the library ... I love doing literacy ... and spelling ... I like how we always get to read books (RS1-S1).

I usually go to the library and run around, get every book, more or less every book, and read it at home (RS4-S2).

The technology in the library helped complete work tasks:

If you're doing something at school and you just go into it and it's got all different topics and you can look up a certain bit of information and they help you if you're good at reading. ... It's got a Smart Board ... Because it's a new technology thing and instead of just writing on a chalk board (RS2-S1).

The library is an important place to meet other kids:

We've just done up our library and I think that the reading corner is actually really, really good because I take my interest groups there and we get to—all the little kindergartens get to read books and they paint and everything. ... You take little kids out and you teach them different things. ... Because you get to interact with little kids (RS2-S5).

Multiple school activities. The students mentioned the range of activities available at their schools that added incentives to engage with the school. Often this was in relation to academic opportunities:

There is heaps of opportunities to do things. Every afternoon you go to a different teacher in the primary. So one day you will go to art. They next day you would go to Ag with Mr H and do all the gardens and everything for the farm. Then you would go to HSIE with Mrs W (RS2-S1).

These students saw key activities were in the many sporting opportunities through their school:

I think that they have a lot of good things to offer like some of the other schools don't do PSSA sport where you get to go out and play sport and represent the school. You do have

try-outs for it but a good thing about this school is that if you don't get in we also have this 'School for Sport' thing where you get to do all the sports except you go across the road to P Park and you do that. So you're not—even if you're not chosen to go and represent the school in their sport you're still doing something (MS3-S3).

All the equipment and stuff and the stuff they do for sport, it's really fun (RS1-S1).

Offering a range of activities recognises the different interests of students and demonstrates a desire to motivate them to do well.

It's well organised and they've got everything down pat. ... Well they've got all—like a lot of good things set up, like excursions and NAIDOC Days and things. ... they have good equipment (RS1-S7).

Well, we're all doing a different thing. We're doing drumming, and then we're doing our ribbon twirling, and then we're doing heaps of other stuff (RS1-S4).

I think the good things about this school is that they actually have an Aboriginal flag and they do stuff on NAIDOC Day, with the Aboriginal kids and not only with the Aboriginal kids, but the non-Aboriginal kids too (RS1-S5).

Recognition of the different ways of engaging that contribute to academic engagement and success was important:

Yes, so I'm never bored. There's always something for us to do, whatever season or anything. Because our school is always doing something, we're busy and we're just achieving for the best and that there's all opportunities open for us to go and take them. ... We literally never have a week where it's just school, school, school. There's always something (MS3-S6).

Being able to participate in a range of school organised activities was seen as a key engagement strategy for students.

Technology. Having access to technology, which may not be available through students' homes, was a key factor students mentioned in assisting their academic outcomes. Such as with having access to computers and smart boards at school:

you can just come in at lunchtime and you just play on the computers. ... for your projects and your history and stuff. ... cause they upgraded the computer room more (RS4-S5).

if I am having problems finding stuff, like if I'm researching about stuff, I can go on the internet and use the computers at school instead of having to go home and fight my brother and sister off the computer (MS1-S2).

Using the computer for research because it helps me when, if I can't think of something off the top of my brain, and I need some help. Then a computer's an easy way to find something, because it's got a resource in it, which is Internet, which has basically everything (MS3-S3).

making videos on the computer, learning how to use them—every Monday we have computers after recess, and we half an hour Maths on the computers and then half an hour free time ... The Smart Boards. When we went down to the Smart Board room Miss D helped, she was showing us parts of the body (RS3-S1).

Access to technology was important for research, particularly when easy access to one at home was not possible. Technology gave students an advantage in research and knowledge which produced higher quality work, thus allowing students to achieve higher results at school.

Theme 3.2: School attitude and approaches. Students felt that the general attitudes and approaches taken at the school towards Aboriginal students and other students had a direct impact on their achieving sound academic outcomes.

Elders invited to the school. Aboriginal Elders in schools was raised as an issue for Regional students while Metropolitan students seemed to regularly attend cultural events. The significance being that Regional students had direct access to Elders in the school for language and cultural learning, as with:

language and culture at school is important, like with all the Aboriginal kids. So like we get together and Auntie G, all the Aboriginal elders that are like here—because Auntie G, she brings Uncle F over and L, she's Aboriginal. ... We're doing this thing where we're painting on this piece of paper thing and then we're drawing our totem onto it (RS1-S5).

you learn about new culture and everything. ... Because you learn things that you never learnt before (RS2-S5).

There's this group. I had to go there because I was Aboriginal. They talked and we did painting and it was cool. These Aboriginal people came in. They showed most of—nearly everyone. They danced and got most of the Aboriginal people up and danced. It was cool (RS3-S5).

Because you need to learn some things like how to make boomerangs (RS4-S2).

Having Elders in the school facilitated an immediate link for the student between school, community and culture:

I know that this school's more fun and stuff because they actually let Aboriginals into the school to teach (RS1-S4).

cause he's my other teacher ... he lets you do lots of fun things ... talking to him for like Aboriginal (cultural things) and he is close to my family (RS3-S3).

The cultural identity of an Aboriginal student within the school community was strengthened when there was presence of Aboriginal Elders in the schools.

Pride in and encouragement of Aboriginal students. Students mentioned they felt the school had pride in the Aboriginal students:

It makes you feel good because people say that they get teased but it's hard to believe because this school treats you so good and they don't treat you any differently like oh well, you're Aboriginal so you get to do this. ... They don't treat you any differently and being chosen for something it's—you don't make it a big deal upon yourself and boast about it. ... Yeah I think it is important ... A positive thing. ... say I'm chosen for this and the other children who aren't Aboriginal they can't be because they're not Aboriginal. So they don't point you out and say oh, you're better than them. You're the same and even though—I've been chosen for a lot of things being Aboriginal and I'm not treated differently because it's an honour and you get told oh, you did a good job in this except it's not like they don't make the other children feel bad because they didn't. ... everybody has something to offer one of your things is that you're Aboriginal, they make you feel good that you're

Aboriginal—Except they don't make the [other] students feel bad because they weren't (MS3-S3).

An Aboriginal family often selected a school because of its reputation and positive attitude towards Aboriginal parents and students.

came to this school because it had a good reputation with Aboriginal students, this is the only school that's actually involved with Aboriginals and stuff. All the other schools, they don't really care if you're Aboriginal or not. ... because most schools that mum's tried to put me in, people won't let the Aboriginals come into the school, so they wouldn't let me go in. Then, mum couldn't find me any other schools. The W [past] School, they only wanted me there for a short period of time because they didn't know what to do with Aboriginals because they reckon it cost too much money to get stuff to get the Aboriginals into. I was there for a couple of months and then I moved again. ... because it's like all the kids were being mean; they were being really racist. ... [this school] really, really different because I know of actually some other kids that are like me and stuff; kids that are Aboriginal (RS1-S4).

It's just like, people come to our town and they like this school. This school, it puts on a lot of things and it takes people around town and they make sure we be good and everything, so all around town, they think we are a good school and everything. It's just—yes, it's a really good school (RS2-S6).

Recognition of students' Aboriginality was also seen as providing students with a positive image of themselves and this assisted them to do better at school, as with MS2-S1:

a really good teacher I had in Year three and Four. Before that, I wasn't actually involved as an Aboriginal student. She found out and forced me to do it and she helped me a lot. By actually recognising my Aboriginality. She made me do things, just think out of the box. ... I knew I was Aboriginal. I'm very proud about being Aboriginal. But before that I wasn't even enrolled as an Aboriginal student. No-one really knew that I was Aboriginal. I kind of just kept it to myself. ... Whenever I—even though it may not be my only background, it's the background I say, if someone says what's your background? I say

Aboriginal ... It's really important. When that happened [teacher recognising student's Aboriginality] there was no-one in the whole school. That's why I was quiet.

The positive attitude towards Aboriginal people at the school, the recognition and inclusion of Aboriginal students contributed to these students feeling valued and that they had something to offer the school community.

No bullying, no racism. Students identified the importance of an effective “no bullying and no racism ethos” across the school and the evidence that this ethos was genuinely observed across the school community.

Yeah I didn't really like the (previous) school. I got bullied there a bit ... [Now at this school] I like it. Yeah it's good (MS3-S1).

It's maybe because at other schools, I used to get teased and I never had much friends but now I've got friends. I've got lots of friends, and they help me and stuff (RS1-S4).

No bullying, don't have to worry about that in this school (RS3-S1).

At H [previous school] I got bullied a lot. ... At H I got bullied every day. They actually waited out the front for me. [At this school] Strong policy against bullying. ... [at this school] Happier and safer (RS4-S2).

The no bullying ethos made the students feel safer and that they could concentrate on learning. RS3-S2 moved from one school to another in Year 3:

I didn't like it there. ... The teachers, the principal, the kids there. ... Nasty and that. I couldn't get a lot of work and that done there. When I come here, I got heaps done. ... It's easier [at current school] ... The work, maths and all that. ... Learning more. ... The way they run their classrooms and the teachers. ... It's good, yeah (RS3-S2).

Students did mention that they had racism issues in the past, which unsettled students and distracted them from study and educational opportunities, but these were now addressed by the school, as with, RS1-S6:

There were a couple of incidents before when I was—a couple of years ago but it's all good now. ... Well I didn't really like it because it made me feel down, made me feel upset.

So I just would tell mum and then she would come up to the school and do something about it. ... usually I just look after myself and I know how to ... I'm good at settling them out and stuff like that but usually I get really angry when they say stuff about that [racism].

Students felt that with clearly stated no bullying and no racism policies and practices; they could then concentrate on their studies.

Supportive school staff. Aboriginal students mentioned that what contributed to a positive school environment was the school staff:

I like how everyone in the school helps each other (RS1-S1).

there's lots of friendly people around to help you. ... the staff; like the office ladies ... Like if you fall over, people will usually come and help you (MS1-S2).

the Principal and the office ladies are nice ... and the canteen ladies they're really nice (RS4-S1).

it's got good people in it (RS4-S3).

Friendly office staff that treated students well was important:

Say if I have lost my dollar for the bus, they'll give it to me. L [front office staff], I don't think she's Aboriginal but she's really, really nice. ... some people, I don't like asking, these people don't judge you (RS3-S5).

All school staff were important in making the school a safe, friendly and inviting place; and the practice of cultivating the school as a site with no bullying and no racism allowed students to study and achieve sound academic results.

School behavioural themes. School codes for behaviour were particularly relevant and mentioned consistently by Regional students whose school had established behavioural themes as a guide for creating an environment for working and learning with one another. Students valued the clearly defined rules for behaviour.

at the front of the school there's the 'You Can Do It' flags; there's resilience, there's getting along, there's persistence and everything. ... they help you through school, like getting along—to be good at school you have to get along with lots of people. Persistence

helps you through things and everything. ... You have to be confident with yourself and everything. ... All your friends and everyone in your school—your peers. ... Because you have to get along with people through school to have a better education (RS2-S1).

our keys, which I think it's organisation, resilience, getting along ... Because they teach us to be adults and stuff. ... the keys are what we need to know to be able to do things in high school (and for personal development to become a better person) because organisation is so that we can always bring our stuff; resilience is that, if we get bullied and stuff, we just don't pay attention and stuff, which is really good in high school; then there's getting along, which is really good, because then you can get along with everyone (RS2-S6).

'You Can Do It' sign. ... it's got organisation and resilience and everything and I look at that, because they've got them all around the school and I look at that every day and it reminds me. ... To get organised and don't get too angry or anything (RS4-S1).

It helps, like, people to be confident and have persistence. ... Teaches people how to work together ... if you don't trust the other person, you won't be able to get along with them. ... Welcome new people to our school. ... Have pride in who you are and your work. ... you have to have all those things to be a good person (RS4-S6).

Having key guides for personal interaction and behaviour which everyone understood and which also led to students having guidance for personal development was seen as a key motivator for Aboriginal students in Regional schools. These were not in evidence in Metropolitan schools.

School Condition 4: Aboriginal Students Representing Their School

One of the key conditions Aboriginal students felt supported them in gaining sound academic outcomes was that they had opportunities to represent their school.

Theme 4.1: Like to represent school. Students commented that they liked to represent their school as, they liked being able to assist the school.

Like to help. Students felt being able to assist the school made them feel that they were able to contribute something to the school:

because I'm a prefect, sometimes we get to help out; like Miss X [principal] took the office ladies out for morning tea one time, and me and my friend we had to help do the phone in the office and everything (MS1-S2);

or you get recognition in the school:

you also get invited to go and represent the school in ANZAC assemblies and you just do a lot of jobs around the school and help out with some of the students ... I love it (MS3-S3);

and it's about creating a history within the school and feeling that you are contributing something back to the school, such as:

we helped plant trees around the area (MS1-S2).

For these students it was important to give back to the school and feel what they had to offer was worthy.

Aboriginal representation. Some students felt helping the school provided them with opportunities to represent Aboriginal people and in doing so strengthen and take pride in their Aboriginality. The presentation was in different forms, as with students below it was in cultural ceremonies:

I have to do the 'Welcome to Country' thing and Aunty G [Aboriginal Education Officer] helped ... I have to do it for special occasions and stuff. She gave me the disc and I had to learn about it and she gave me words and stuff so I was good. ... [felt valued and respected to do the 'Welcome'] I think the teachers wanted me to do it ... because we did it last year on presentation day and I'll probably do it this presentation day. That was the first time I did it and I think we did it because shows respect to everyone, like this is Dunghutti land and that stuff (RS1-S6).

Aunt S [Aboriginal Education Officer at school] took me to the ... new challenge respite centre ... the mayor, and couple of other people were there. Because the challenge respite is for people with disability, they can go there on the weekends and that, and their mum and dad just drop them, or their carers, and they just stay there for weekends. The mayor was unveiling one of the—a plaque there, and I went up there and did the 'Welcome to Country' (RS3-S1).

Aboriginal student gatherings, such as:

we got to go to the Parliament House—and we got to do speeches there. ... Yeah and we got to listen to—I think she’s an Aboriginal minister Linda Burney. She came and she spoke to us and every Monday we would go out to the Parliament House—me and a few other Aboriginal students ... We got to speak about things that happen, speak about speeches and go—learn more about public speaking and I felt like that was a bit of an honour (MS3-S3).

These opportunities for representation made the students feel that their Aboriginality was valued, that their cultural background was an asset and made them want to be involved in the school activities.

Felt valued. The students felt that representing the school made them feel valued personally:

We get invited to a lot of openings which makes you feel really good because if you think about it you were picked as that position by your friends and the teachers in the school. So we got to go to like a school opening. It was in the city and it was massive and everyone came ... so many inspiring people came like Jessica Watson ... and you got to ask a few questions (MS3-S3).

I did a little speech ... selected for Remembrance Day (RS3-S2).

Students gained pride in representing their school and felt they were giving back to the school through that representation.

Valued learning. The students valued the additional learning they received from representing their school:

I actually did ... Aboriginal public speaking program at Parliament House. ... I went very well on that. I came top of the class. They asked me if I wanted to speak at the Deadly Awards. ... I spoke in front of 800 people ... a lady ... saw me at the thing [Parliament House] and said wow you are really an amazing speaker. I actually came second in public speaking for my school as well. ... from that I got a scholarship, because I’m pretty

enthusiastic and I've got a bit of an attitude kind of. So I got a scholarship to ATYP (Australian Theatre for Young People), as well. ... In public speaking and debating, I came fifth in the state out of 530 (MS2-S1).

Because I reckon I'd be good because I'm in my school uniform and that, going up there and doing 'Welcome to Country' representing the school (RS3-S1).

One of the key conditions students felt supported them in gaining sound academic outcomes was that they had the opportunity to represent their school. This had a direct impact on how they saw themselves, providing a boost to do better in their school work. The students spoke about being in a variety of roles within the school and outside the school, and the type of roles they performed in representing their schools. The value students gained in representing their schools meant they felt what they personally had to offer as an Aboriginal person was considered to be worthwhile and in turn made them want to give more back to their school.

Theme 4.2: Representation and roles within the school. A representational role within the school was important to self-esteem and gave greater depth to students through the roles they fulfilled.

School leadership. Metropolitan and Regional students were in a number of leadership positions, such as: Vice-Captains, Prefects, Student Representative Council, School Captains, and Sports Captains. In one Metropolitan school, MS3, the top three key positions were filled by Aboriginal students. These students held the positions in high esteem and felt they added value to their participation in the school:

yeah house captain ... I've been on the SRC for two years and a school prefect for Year 6 (MS1-S1).

Captaincy Board. ... For my vice captaincy. ... Because you need a captain and vice-captain to help out the little kids in Kindergarten and the infants (RS4-S4).

I'm a house captain (RS2-S4).

Roles carried out as part of the representation positions were,

I'm a school leader. Vice-captain. I have to set the assembly up (MS3-S2).

Run assemblies and help little kids find their way around the school and help the little kid—like if I can't do something, go and help another class out. Like when I had my ankle in cast and I couldn't do sport, so I went and helped out the infants (RS4-S4).

I'm on the SRC (Student Representative Council). Well, you organise things. You help organise things. ... every Monday we have an assembly. We have to set up for that, go up before the assembly starts and set up (RS4-S3).

Other areas of engagement were being a library monitor:

Library monitor ... helping to put books away and helping the kids at lunchtime find books and read to them (MS3-S5).

I'm a library monitor. ... when you have little infant people come in, you have to show them what to do so they understand computers (RS2-S4).

Students took opportunities to be in a number of groups within the school. Such as:

I'm in the dance group, and the Quarter group. The dance group went off to Blacktown Music Festival and Blacktown Westpoint shops, and they performed; and the Quarter Group went to the Opera House and performed (MS1-S2).

I've been in Capers [dancing group] (RS4-S3).

Last year and the three years before, I done choir (RS3-S4).

well the school—they ask me and my band—they ask us to do a lot of things, like play at Willow Fairs and our Year 6 farewell and the end of year concert. ... It's a bit hard sometimes but it's worth it ... It makes me feel like I'm good at playing and like we don't suck. ... I'm involved in the school band ... I play drums ... but I'm a guitarist more than a drummer. ... music is my favourite (RS1-S7).

“Buddy Program” where Year 5 students have the opportunity to assist Preschoolers and Kindergarten children get oriented and have friends at school when they start:

I've got a Buddy, and her name's P and she's really fun. She pulls on your arm and tries to push you over ... you're meant to make them happy and get into the school properly so

they know what to do, where they're meant to go. ... She comes from Preschool all the time, yeah, and I can't wait to see her again (RS1-S4).

Clearly the students in leadership roles also created other opportunities to represent their school which in turn made the students feel more valued and more confident when pursuing learning activities.

Sporting events. Students participated in and played numerous sports within the school, such as:

I usually participate in lots of sports. ... I'm in about six of them [school photos of representation] because I've made heaps of sports and I'm a leader of our school (RS1-S6).

sports, soccer netball. Cross country and I came first out of the Year 6's and Year 5's. ... I usually go to zone each year (RS1-S2).

I play all different sports in school. I play soccer, cricket, netball, touch footy, swimming (RS2-S1).

I play rugby and cricket (MS3-S2).

Students felt these opportunities to represent their school helped them personally and identified them as a person with something worthwhile to offer others in the school.

Theme 4.3: Representation and roles outside the school. The majority areas in which Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students represented the school outside the school were in:

Multiple sports. These students represented their schools at multiple sporting events for regional and state levels, throughout the year, as with:

I represent it [school] in sport ... I went to state for swimming, I went to state for athletics and ended up coming fifth. ... I did tennis, cricket, soccer, Oztag (RS2-S4).

I represent in sport for the school ... netball and AFL and athletics. I make it to regional's in athletics each year. ... Also swimming ... normally just zone is my highest level (MS3-S3).

Well sport, a lot of sport. This year I made the state in three things. Rugby league, union and cricket (RS1-S6).

Community events. Students spoke about the many areas in which they represented the school, such as:

the Quarter Group went to the Opera House and performed (MS1-S2).

picked in the talented dancing squad ... with two other girls from this school and a few girls from different schools (MS3-S3).

There was this chess tournament on. ... me and a couple of my friends went over there to play over in Werris Creek ... If you win there you ... you move on ... So we went to Tamworth and we came runners up ... it was good (RS3-S1).

All representation opportunities were valued by the students and made them feel valued in the school.

School Condition 5: Importance of Friends

In asking students what they believed supported them to do well academically at school; the vast majority mentioned the importance of friends, as presented in Figure 7.4, below. Students considered it was important to have friends at school $n=32$; that friends help with school work $n=32$; and friends provide emotional support $n=31$.

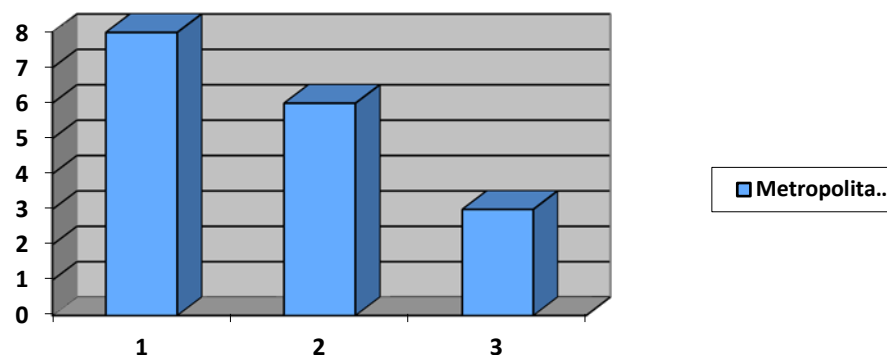


Figure 7.4 Importance of Friends at School for Aboriginal Students

Themes:

	All Students
1 - Important to have friends	32
2 - Friends help with school work	32
3 - Friends provide emotional support	31

Theme 5.1: Important to have friends at school. Students relayed the very important place of friends at school in supporting them to achieve sound academic outcomes; the key focus was on what they thought was a friend at school. That is, that it's important to have people at school who know you well and are trustworthy, as with RS1-S6:

my friends because I've got a lot of friends. That's really it. I just feel—because everyone knows me and everything ... They be nice and say if we get in trouble because we're talking ... they'll say it was also me, just so I don't get all the blame. They're trustworthy and stuff.

So you have company:

So you have company and someone to play with and someone to talk to when you need to (MS3-S5).

Yeah. When we're out in the playground, they keep me company. ... Yeah, when I'm upset. ... At school sometimes I just get really upset and my friends keep me company and make me happy (RS1-S1).

And that you needed to have friends at school to help you relax:

They help me because ... after different periods, like morning, like recess and lunch, they make me relax and have fun and everything. Because without friends, I'd just be miserable. ... so then my mind is all relaxed and I'm not thinking about anything for the next session, so I can just store my mind with heaps of questions again. All my friends are the best friends I could ever have (RS2-S6).

For Metropolitan students social contact with friends was a direct correlation to their having sound academic achievements in that friends helped them academically and they worked with friends with different skills. For Regional students they saw friends for emotional support in

that friends were important to have someone to play with you, to play with you out of school, and that you should have friends across the whole school, not simply in your classroom group.

Theme 5.2: Friends help with school work. The students felt that friends helped with school work:

If we're doing group work then, yeah, of course they're there to help us out because we're a team (MS3-S6).

Friends supported each other by helping to understand school work:

help you ... they explain things if you get stuck (MS1-S1).

They explain things well. If you're doing something wrong they'll just say like this is how you do it properly and they'll just tell you in a nice way (RS1-S2).

If like—spelling or something or accelerated literacy I think it is—AL. Like if we're cutting or pasting and highlight and stuff sometimes they will help me. Say if I don't know where we're up to in the reading or don't know what to write down or something they'll tell me (RS3-S1).

Friends provide positive encouragement:

having a best friend because we always need that bit of encouragement, and it will—they'll always be there to help you through your way. Like I said, E's who I go to. She's my go to person for public speaking, for speaking in front of an audience, because that's one of the things that she's—that's her strongest ... E's—she's not as strong at running. I would help E at running and we both help each other academically (MS3-S3).

It was also clear that friendship was also about helping friends:

All my friends are here ... get to play sports with all of them ... And they trust me (RS3-S3).

I help them with their work. P is smarter than me and she helps me and I help her (MS3-S4).

Well sometimes they help me in work sometimes, when I ask them to help and they'll help me with some stuff. ... Say they'll help me with my maths, because I'm not good at maths.

Like K, she's in extension maths and extension literacy. ... She's in a different class for maths. So she'll help me during like break times with maths homework (RS1-S1).

he's smart, he's funny and he helps you out kind of sometimes. ... I help him sometimes (RS4-S5).

A key issue for Regional students in having friends at school was that they helped the student understand their school work. This also meant they had to support their friends, and with best friends students felt they influenced one another to do better. Additionally Regional students mentioned their closest friends were at their school, and their best friends were Aboriginal as well.

Theme 5.3: Friends provide emotional support. Students commented that friends are there for emotional support:

Because they're there to support you all the time and to have friends, I think it's good. If I see someone on the playground that are just crying, then I can't walk past them because it's just, like, imagine how you would feel. ... So you want to help (MS3-S6).

And that friends should be:

helping you if you're like sad or something (MS1-S2).

Friends' emotional support helped students have balanced emotions as well:

The only thing that put me off [old] school, why I had to move was this girl called B. She was bullying me all the time. She used to call me mean names and get my friends to not play with me, and I used to be walking around the playground. I used to be really bad when I was little but I got better. ... I used to be silly in [old] school because sometimes, if I was being naughty, they used to get a ruler and they used to smack my hand. ... I just tried to show off because I had no friends (RS1-S4).

Emotional support was demonstrated by supporting you if in trouble, being nice to the student, by getting to know one another and supporting one another. Friends also provide stability so students feel secure and can cope with school work.

For all these Aboriginal student's friends were pivotal in giving academic and emotional support to gain sound academic outcomes.

School Condition 6: Aboriginal Staff

In reference to Aboriginal staff, it was Regional students who spoke about teachers who were also Aboriginal and spoke about staff that were in identified Aboriginal positions and appointed to those schools to support high Aboriginal student numbers in the schools.

Theme 6.1: Aboriginal teachers. Students noted Aboriginal teachers in the school who helped them as Aboriginal students and made comments that the Aboriginal Teachers were good teachers, knew their teaching subjects, and provided Aboriginal cultural support,

Miss P. She is also an Aboriginal person in the school. She's a teacher. She's my class teacher, 5/6B. I think it's very important that she's in there because she helps me with everything. ... Because I reckon that it's good to have her there because, when you need to ask her something, like when's the concert, what do you need for this and stuff like that, you always can go to her. You can always go for advice, like Miss P, like Auntie G. [Aboriginal Education Officer]. Because she's like Auntie G and you can talk to her about the Aboriginal kind of stuff and where you're from. You can also, because she's a teacher, you can ask her, I'm stuck on this. Can you help me with it and stuff like that? (RS1-S5).

Aboriginal teachers were seen to have a cultural advantage over other teachers, for Aboriginal students.

Theme 6.2: Aboriginal education staff. Regional students highlighted Aboriginal staff in schools as key support.

Aboriginal staff were seen as people students can connect to in the school on a personal, family, and cultural level:

Having relations in the school to help you, because they know you and you know them (RS4-S7).

Big D [Teacher's Aide Special] ... Whenever I'm stuck, he gets in there and helps me. He's got the never say die attitude. ... Just to have someone that you can relate to. ... Auntie S

[Aboriginal Education Officer] ... Aunty S's been here for a long time. She's my real aunty, but here everyone just calls her Aunty. She means a lot to me (RS3-S4).

General school work. Aboriginal staff fulfilled educational requirements particularly in foundational skills of English language and literacy.

Aunty G [Teacher's Aide Special] ... she's teaching me how to read, and she's done really, really nice stuff. She's funny and we always walk round the school with each other. We always have to go to the library to get some books and then we read. Sometimes she doesn't want me to go back to class, so she gets another book (RS1-S4).

She's probably one of the best substitute teachers in the school (RS3-S4).

Cultural education. Students felt that Aboriginal staff kept them connected to their cultural education.

cause he's my other teacher ... he lets you do lots of fun things ... talking to him for like Aboriginal (cultural things) and he is close to my family (RS3-S3).

Because Auntie G's [Teacher's Aide Special] an Aboriginal and she helps us go through stages of learning Aboriginal language, which I'll be doing next year, and helps me with all Aboriginal stuff and learn about our culture. With NAIDOC Day, she helped us learn the dance. She got Uncle R to come and teach us how to paint Aboriginal art. ... She's really funny and she's really nice. She always keeps me company. I can go to her if I have something wrong. ... She knows my mum and brother and sister (RS1-S1).

Auntie G [Teacher's Aide Special] because she helps me with finding out the Aboriginal stuff, like my Totems and where I'm from and how you say this kind of stuff, like where I'm from in the language. ... Because she is nice and she says that every Aboriginal child is her babies and she never, ever gives up on us. ... I think it's good to have an Aboriginal Elder at the school because you can always go to her if you're stuck on something, with like all the other ones. They help you solve the problem (RS1-S5).

Attendance at Aboriginal cultural events. The students felt they had someone in the school who could make sure they got to attend cultural events which kept them in contact with Aboriginal community activities.

They help you with things like, we went to Vibe Alive, the Aboriginal festival, and they took us there. We've been to a couple of other things with Aboriginal cultures in it. It was very good at Vibe Alive, because you got to learn about the Aboriginal things that you can do, you got to learn how to make an Aboriginal fire with the thing. Sometimes you can't get jobs because you're an Aboriginal but there's heaps that you can do. It tells you about that and you do Aboriginal paintings (RS2-S5).

Helps students with problems. When students have family or personal problems they feel they have someone in the school who they can talk to and will understand the problems.

They help me a lot and I do jobs with them. ... Like if I've got a problem, they come and ask me what happened (RS4-S1).

He lets you come to his room and talk. ... Because you can just go in there and just calm down when you're a bit angry (RS4-S5).

Like if you don't have any good shoes to wear she's got some in the wardrobe or any good clothes she gives you clothes and that. ... Yes, and if you don't have any lunch Aunt S [Aboriginal Education Officer] will make you a sandwich (RS3-S1).

Because he usually helps students when they need help and if you don't want to do an elective you can go with him and do sport and stuff, and just bond with him. ... he knows mum (RS4-S2).

Because like when I've had a problem at home and I don't come to school too happy I can go in his room and he can talk to me about it (RS4-S1).

Aboriginal staff provides stability at school for Aboriginal students both academically and culturally. The sense of connection to community and cultural safety through the Aboriginal staff was invaluable; and having an Aboriginal Elder in the school demonstrated to the Aboriginal students that education was held in high esteem, thus providing impetus to gain sound academic

results. Additionally for students to be able to gain cultural knowledge at school helped them see a connection between school and their communities.

School Condition 7: Recognition of Aboriginal Culture

The importance of recognition of Aboriginal culture in schools was to create pride in the school environment for Aboriginal people and their culture. As demonstrated by the following comments.

To show that the cultural—that we're a cultural school (RS3-S1).

people need to know that we're proud to be Aboriginal ... kids should learn about it and stuff. ... you feel proud to be here ... but it's not good when sometimes people don't like you just because you're Aboriginal, they're being racist but really no-one really is racist at our school ... Pride for culture. ... Because you've got to be proud for who you are and if you feel proud and there's other things in the school that represent you, your culture, you'll be more comfortable in school and I reckon you'll do better work (RS1-S6).

This recognition was seen both physically in the school and through cultural events.

Theme 7.1: Physical recognition. Students felt they were recognised in the school through physical signs, such as:

The Aboriginal flag, Australian and the Torres Strait Islands. ... I think that that's really special because it's all up there and every day. It's there and it's just there to represent the Aboriginal and the Australian and the Torres Strait Islands and everything's together. Always up there. ... Yes and it's just up there together and it's all equal. Because the Aboriginal flag and the Torres Strait Island flag, we all link in together, so it's not different. ... Having the flag in the school ... Because it just represents who we are. They're up there every day, representing us every day and all of them are up there, so we're all - it's just like our whole school's there because ... Some schools only have the Australian flag (MS3-S6).

Australian Flag and Aboriginal Flag at school, to have recognition of Aboriginal people in the school (RS4-S6).

when we're walking up the stairs to our class, there's a thing that's like [a mural]—it must have been there ages ago. Because when I first got to school there, it's like a thing that I think says Australian and Aboriginal. ... it represents me to be proud of my culture. ... they've got other paintings around the school with different people's Totems. I think there's the praying mantis, goanna and all of those, and snakes and stuff. So yeah, it makes you feel more comfortable in the school (RS1-S6).

Aboriginal tools they're in the library and I like looking at them, learning about the culture. ... important to have Aboriginal culture in school, to learn our culture and makes me feel proud (RS1-S1).

Theme 7.2: Aboriginal events in the school. Students spoke of the positive impact having Aboriginal events in the school had for them. The most prominent event was National Aboriginal Week events or NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Islanders Day Observance Committee) events.

On NAIDOC Day, we do heaps of stuff. We do Aboriginal art. We have a NAIDOC night, where we do an Aboriginal dance. ... Because people recognise Aboriginals as the owner of this land. It makes me feel like I'm wanted, like wanted on this land (RS1-S1).

on Aboriginal Day we actually all got to paint things ... (important) Yeah, if you want to know about the history of your heritage (RS4-S2).

This cultural recognition made the students feel included and valued in the school.

School Condition 8: Curriculum and Aboriginal Studies

For students there were different approaches taken by the school which boosted their engagement and academic outcomes. Then there were targeted academic support programs and how and where Aboriginal studies were included in the curriculum.

Theme 8.1: School programs. Each school had different approaches and methods for students' inclusion; students mentioned these as being relevant to their academic success, such as:

School farm. RS2 had a school farm which was very effective in engaging students in the school, as with the following comments:

Because I love having fun with my teacher because he is the one that does the garden and the animals and stuff. We have just got three new calves and, I think, three new lambs. ... Because it teaches heaps of people how to be sensible around animals ... and control themselves. My brother now works with the animals and stuff and he has gone all really nice at home and stuff. I don't know why but he has (RS2-S3).

Because it helps you learn about farm animals and what they do and what they need to eat and all that. ... because it's fun and they're new. ... School garden helps you learn how to grow plants and food. ... and you can get dirty. ... you can learn more things than you can ... being taught in class (RS2-S2).

You get eggs from chickens and then you get to go and cook them at the—either up in the staff room or at breakfast club. ... you get to see them as little chickens and they breed ... just by watching and learning. ... Most of these animals that are grown here are either injured or they don't have a mother or anything. So we get to learn how to feed them and how to treat their sores or anything (RS2-S5).

Book on Aboriginal identity. MS3 has a project which was used to engage the Aboriginal students and which allowed them to discuss what being Aboriginal meant to them; students' comments demonstrated the effectiveness of this program.

Well you could just tell everyone in the group your feelings about being Aboriginal. ... because everyone is Aboriginal there and you can just let it all out (MS3-S4).

we were writing a book and drew pictures and wrote a story of how we feel about being Aboriginal and what we don't like how people say you don't look Aboriginal or stuff like that. It's good and they make sure that we are—like everyone knows. We have days where we would get up on stage ... I think it was Sorry Day where we were in assemblies. It's good (MS3-S6).

Boys only class. School RS3 created a boys only class, which included a number of the high achieving Aboriginal students. They loved this class, not only for their academic success, but for camaraderie with class mates.

You just got all boys in your class and you know everyone. ... Year 4, Year 5, and Year 6. ... Just nothing to be ashamed of anything. ... one of the boys might say, singing like a girl or something and say one of the famous acts. ... been in the class since Year 4 (RS3-S1).

they let us do sport ... we get out for 'Rewards Day' ... There's no girls in there. ... All my friends are in there (RS3-S3).

Theme 8.2: Identified academic support programs. These identified support programs were more prevalent in Regional schools.

QuickSmart is a program of maths, all the times, division and multiplication and all that kind of stuff. ... Yeah. I love it. I think it's really great (RS1-S5).

Quick Smart ... Well, because it makes me better at maths and smarter at everything (RS1-S4).

Quick Smart. ... Well, it has helped me a lot in my maths. Like, I've gotten better (RS2-S4).

Theme 8.3: Aboriginal Studies. Students made comment on the importance for inclusion of Aboriginal Studies in the curriculum, through statements such as:

Because I think kids should learn the Aboriginal ways (RS2-S2).

I think that everyone should get a chance to know that the Aboriginal kids or the Aboriginal people were the first people to walk on this earth. So I think everyone needs to know and do stuff like that (RS1-S5).

helps you interact ... with class mates ... with your history ... a different way to learn (RS2-S5).

Aboriginal Studies was seen as important for Aboriginal students and was seen in the following.

Incorporating Aboriginal perspectives. The curriculum, that is what and how the Aboriginal perspectives were being taught was a key area mentioned, as this often triggered their drive or need to do better, such as:

I think it came up to me when we started learning about the First fleet. There was this teacher who was saying, putting Captain Cook and Arthur Phillip as good people. I stood up and said, it's wrong. They're villains. Yeah. That's when it kind of started. ... when they were talking about that stuff, I'm like, no ... Yeah. It just really came from there (MS2-S1).

Well we've had a lot of Aboriginal things like we've done this Aboriginal art and I think we've done this Aboriginal thing with an Aboriginal teacher and we're in a book with Aboriginal students from other schools. ... It's about being Aboriginal. ... So Aboriginal kids can learn more about their culture (MS3-S4).

Embedding cultural content. For many students it was important to have lessons on Aboriginal culture included in the curriculum, as commented on by students:

Because you learn things that you never learnt before. You might think it's easy to make a fire out of sticks but then when you actually do it, you learn this is actually hard and you learn how they would do it and you eat foods that Aboriginals would eat back then. It's pretty cool (RS2-S5).

Because you need to learn some things like how to make boomerangs (RS4-S2).

Aboriginal art in the school (RS3-S2).

Aboriginal Studies in the curriculum was important for Aboriginal students in connecting to their culture which assisted in achieving sound academic outcomes.

Section Summary

The section presented the school conditions Aboriginals highlighted as providing them with academic success. This covered eight conditions and themes within. The first condition was “Good Teachers” and that this was dependent on the teacher’s personality, pedagogy and classroom environment. The second condition was “Reading Competence” emphasising when the students felt they had reading competence and what they felt contributed to their gaining

competence. Condition three “School Infrastructure” introduced issues surrounding school facilities, and school attitudes and approaches towards Aboriginal students and community. Condition four “Aboriginal Students Representing Their School” looked at why Aboriginal students liked to represent their schools and the roles they performed in representing their school both within and outside the school. Condition five “Importance of Friends” considered why it was important to Aboriginal students to have friends at school, in gaining sound academic outcomes, and for emotional support. Condition six “Aboriginal Staff” was recognition by Aboriginal students of the value of Aboriginal staff and how they helped students in their cultural identity, gaining academic outcomes, and if students have problems. Condition seven “Recognition of Aboriginal Culture” presented the value of the school’s inclusivity of Aboriginal culture for Aboriginal students and how this was done in schools both in physical presence and through Aboriginal events. Condition eight “Curriculum and Aboriginal Studies” highlighted some of the programs introduced by schools to engage students, academic programs mentioned by students which supported them at school, and Aboriginal Studies inclusion through perspectives and embedding cultural content.

The following section presents conditions in the home environment which support Aboriginal students’ academic outcomes.

Results Research Question 3: Home Conditions of Success

Overview

Research Question 3.1 posed: What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider as being important conditions in assisting Aboriginal students to achieve sound academic outcomes in their *home* environment? (See Chapter 5) This question was posed to determine what Aboriginal students perceive as conditions which surround them and which contribute to their gaining academic success within their home environment. The frequency that different home environment characteristics were mentioned as key conditions by Aboriginal students is presented as a column graph in Figure 7.5 below.

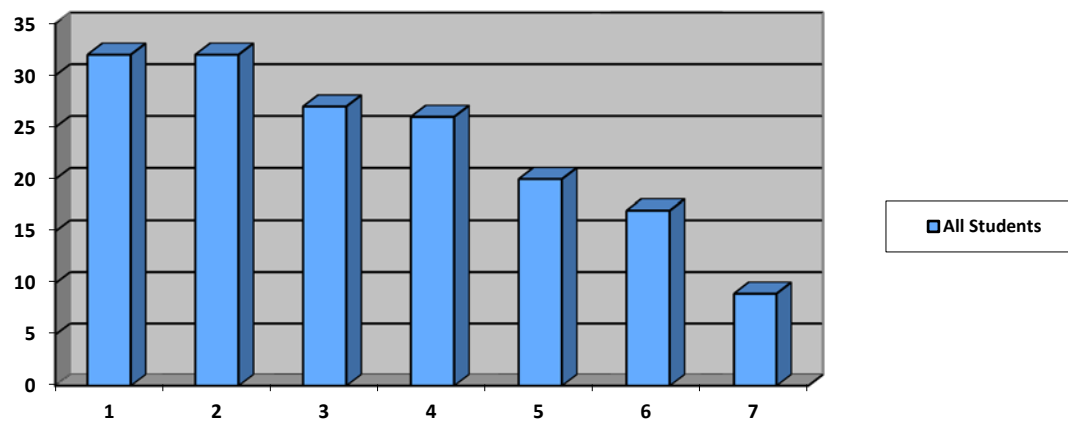


Figure 7.5 Home Conditions for Aboriginal Students' Academic Success

Conditions:

	All Students
1 - Parents	32
2 - Homework	32
3 - Extended family & friends	27
4 - Sports & hobbies	26
5 - Resources at home	20
6 - Environment & animals	17
7 - Tutorial support	9

The conditions mentioned by the students as supporting them to gain sound academic outcomes within the home environment are categorised into seven areas. Firstly how $n=32$ students viewed how their parents supported them. Secondly, how $n=32$ students considered how homework supported students to gain sound academic outcomes at school. Thirdly, $n=27$ students mentioned the role played by extended family and friends in assisting students gain sound academic outcomes. Fourth, how sports outside of school assisted $n=26$ students gain sound academic outcomes. Fifth, how resources at home as identified by $n=20$ Aboriginal students assisted them to gain sound academic outcomes. Sixth, how the environment and animals contributed to $n=17$ students' academic outcomes. And the final seventh condition, being tutorial support out of school which supported academic outcomes for $n=9$ students. These conditions are expanded as below.

Home Condition 1: Parents

A key condition for academic support for $n=32$ students was the role their parents played in supporting their sound academic outcomes, through emotional and personal support, school support, high expectations and cultural and language activities.

Theme 1.1: Emotional and personal support. For students, parents' provision of emotional and personal support was a key to their gaining sound academic success; the emphasis was on support to grow up as a responsible person:

my mum and step-dad, because they make sure that I do my chores so that I can grow up, but then again, they make sure that I always have my homework done. They also make sure that I have a go myself to remember to get my homework done and everything ... They teach me, like, chores. They teach me all the responsibilities to become an adult, and stuff, and how to become mature and do the right thing and everything like that (RS2-S6).

Mum, because she's just there for me for all the time. She tells me everything and I tell her everything. We're really close. Of course we fight a lot, we can get grumpy and stressed. ... Yes, she's a really good mum. She's not that strict or she doesn't let me do whatever I want. She's really good and she makes sure that I'm safe. Me and my brothers are her first

priority and that's good. ... Yes and she makes sure that we're happy with everything (MS3-S6).

They help students with problems which may have arisen through school:

They help me. ... They support me and if I like—say I have a bad day or something they're not angry they're still very supportive (RS1-S6).

she kind of teaches me everything really. ... she helps me with my homework ... she helps with school work ... helps to become a better person (MS3-S1).

when I'm home and I'm frustrated with homework or something or mum, I go out and play with Boss [dog] ... he protects us. ... he's loyal to us and looks after us all the time. ... So it feels like we're, so we know that we're safe. ... That helps me at school as well (RS4-S4).

When I've had a problem at school, they can play games, like cricket, with me, which will settle me down (RS4-S1).

For students parental support is essential in helping them do well academically at school.

Theme 1.2: School support. A second key issue was how parents assist with school and academic support, as encouragement, being actively involved with students' learning at every stage, or paying for activities for school, as shown in the following comments:

If I'm stuck they—sometimes I just give up and go to my room and think about the questions, but Mum says, no, come on. You come do it and I'll help you (RS3-S4).

my family, and it shows that they're always there to help me when I need help, whether it comes in with tests and exams or homework. Or maybe it's just a random question that I feel like I need to find out, then I can always have them to go to (MS3-S3).

He [Dad] used to teach me basically everything. We would practice doing everything, like swimming, running, all sports, school work, and everything. He was just teaching me constantly, constantly. He's really good and he's really patient. ... Yes. Every night we used to read a big chapter book and I always wanted him to come and read. Then he used to read and then when I got better, I used to read it. ... he was my first teacher (MS3-S6).

Theme 1.3: High expectations. Students felt parents demonstrated their high expectations in their support and recognition of students' achievements.

when I get a good mark on a test or she rewards me as well. ... not like rewarding me but just like maybe being really happy for me (MS2-S1).

My first teacher is my dad ... He's really smart ... and since we were little ... my dad used to help me with everything. We had a whiteboard, a massive white board and I could do massive additions at the age of seven. ... Spelling and basically everything ... My dad thinks I'm really smart and so does my mum (MS3-S6).

Theme 1.4: Cultural and language activities. Regional students spoke about cultural and language activities done through home which they considered assisted in strengthening their identity which supported them at school.

Pop helped me learn all 'Welcome to Country' ... Pop taught me how to say it properly in just two weeks I think it was ... I would sit down at the kitchen table and read it. ... and say it in Gamilaroi (RS3-S1).

She lives next door to my nan. ... and we do stuff like the Totems and where you're from and how you say stuff in Dunghutti (RS1-S5).

For these high achieving students parental support was a key condition to doing well at school.

Home Condition 2: Homework

The majority of students $n=32$ spoke about completion for homework as a key to successful academic outcomes. For these students they generally acknowledged that they took responsibility for completing their own homework, as with:

Sometimes I get asked but sometimes I just go and do it (MS3-S4).

Theme 2.1: Parents model work. Students also acknowledged the role undertaken by their parents to model the work required to be completed for school, such as the following comments demonstrate:

Well, like my mum helping me with homework. ... Like if I get stuck on a question, she'll like explain it. ... usually after I get that question, if I have more questions I can do them more easily, how she explained it (MS1-S2).

My mum's always helped me so much with my homework. ... She can tell me—sometimes I'm a bit negative. ... She'll make quite a fun way to do stuff. ... Whenever I'm done, she helps a lot. She tries to think of something good for us to do (MS2-S1).

My dad. He helps me a lot with that kind of stuff. He says that the longer way, if you know how to do the longer way, it's a good way. If you also know how to do the easier way, it's a very good way. ... So he demonstrates it for me and then I do it (RS1-S5).

they make sure that I always have my homework done. They also make sure that I have a go at myself to remember to get my homework done and everything ... - my Dad—If I have problem—he'll explain the question. He'll read it to me, then he'll think about it himself ... he'll explain to me—a way you can figure it out (RS2-S6).

When I was doing my homework, she would explain it, and if I didn't get it, she would explain it more, and she would give me spelling tests every night. ... That got me 100 per cent in every one (RS2-S4).

Theme 2.2: Homework space. Whilst many students had their own homework space they admitted that they most often worked at the kitchen table or lounge room for the company and easy access to their parents.

Sit at kitchen table (MS1-S2).

We sit in the kitchen (RS1-S2).

my office [Father's office area] at home. Sometimes I work there. ... sometimes when I work, it's a good place to do things. ... I feel like it's in the right place to be doing something with work and that (RS4-S3).

Home Condition 3: Extended Family

Students $n=27$ spoke of expectations and the support they received from extended family to do well at school. As with comments that follow:

Yeah I think it's important that you have support wherever you go. Like if my mum and dad aren't home and if my mum's out somewhere and I'm with my dad and I have to go somewhere, I can always call someone; my aunty or my pop (MS3-S6).

I have my Nan, my granddad, my aunties, my uncles, cousins, all that kind of stuff to help me (RS1-S5).

live with Nan and Pop ... They make me go to school all the time and they're helping me with my homework ... they come up for special things, like the school eisteddfod. They'll go down to the town hall and watch things like that. ... They came up at the start of the year to see—because Mrs W needed to talk about how I was going ... Because they get to know your level at school, they get to see your school books and everything. They get to see the animals and everything we work with (RS2-S5).

My auntie is a teacher at P High School [local High School] ... Yes. She helps me in homework and that, if I get stuck (RS4-S4).

My brother he helps me a lot ... helps sort out projects and work ... he helps me do basically everything (MS3-S2).

Nan and Pop they help me a lot with homework and other assignments and they buy me things like stationery for school ... without those things and their help I wouldn't be able to, you know, be very good ... my cousin she gives me lots of advice ... and helps with school work ... sometimes she lets me use her laptop to go on the net to search things ... She also tells me a lot of things, shares me her knowledge of things (RS1-S7).

A key condition in Aboriginal students' sound academic outcomes was the engagement of extended family in high expectations and assisting with school work.

Home Condition 4: Sports and Hobbies

Students spoke about the large variety of out of school activities they were engaged in which they said helped with personal development and doing better at school, as with RS1-S6:

sports that I enjoy playing and they help me with school, because I like keeping fit. Then that helps with my education because I feel good about myself and then just take that into school and I do, I reckon, better work. Because I like feeling fit. Then you feel happy and you take that to school and go good in work I reckon.

Or activities that help students calm down after as day at school:

I come home and ride my bike because it calms me down and stuff. ... as soon as I get home it's the first thing I do (RS1-S7).

The large range of sports and hobbies students were engaged in:

I also play out of school and OZTAG. ... I do netball. I used to do touch. I do horse riding, I run my dog every day and I go swimming with my dad. My dad also taught me how to swim so we practice. ... I'm doing dancing. ... contemporary, jazz and hip hop. ... I like being social and I always have to do something. (MS3-S6).

I go in skate comps. ... I went to the state for scooters. ... In Sydney ... came fourth in the state. ... Wednesday night comps. ... Saturday morning sports ... softball, skateboard, roller-blading, football, soccer (RS4-S4).

I do tennis every Tuesday morning, Thursday morning and Thursday afternoon. ... I do soccer in the winter, and I also do comp for tennis (RS2-S4).

Mum and Dad have helped me a lot with my sport and getting me into a lot of rep sides ... soon I'll be playing in the Australian side for Oztag and rep sides for netball and everything. ... We do surfing ... you do need to know how to swim because if you're in the surf and it's dangerous ... it's good for—yes, it's good for your health, and it's good to know how to swim (MS3-S3).

For students the range of activities they were engaged in out of school assisted with learning new skills, team work, and making friends with other people out of school.

Home Condition 5: Environment and Animals

Students spoke of their interaction with animals and going into the environment as assisting them to gain skills which helped them at school, such as:

I do horse riding. I've got my own horse. ... have to care for her ... having a horse is also an advantage because myself and my best friend, we both want to be having something to do with horses and animals. ... having an animal—helps a lot when it comes to when you want to work with animals, because you're always going to have someone near you that also has another animal similar. You will learn a lot from that if you want to get education out of it and if you want to have a job when you're older—and having a horse is definitely an advantage. So, I can learn—see, if she's sore or got something wrong with her I'll know that when I'm older—that I'll know when they're sore or they're limping. ... I know when a horse is going to do something, I've picked up on all the things that she will do before she's going to do something (MS3-S3).

'Cause it helps me learn, like I'm seeing things through pictures and things like that. ... spending time with animals, I do horse riding. ... it's at my Nan's house and 'cause she's [horse] sort of like Nan's, and she's [Nan] sort of like gives it to me. We go up the bush, we go to the rainforest (RS1-S2).

We watch whales and then we go down to the beach ... We go for a swim at the pools and stuff (RS1-S5).

Activities with animals and going into the bush assisted the students learn about themselves within the environment and animals which helped provide confidence in school.

Home Condition 6: Resources At Home

Students commented on the range of resources they had at home which they believed assisted them with their academic outcomes.

Theme 6.1: Books at home. Students also mentioned that they read a lot having their own library of books at home.

Not that many. Probably about 20 (RS1-S1).

Cause it's got more of a source than like watching movies and everything and it gives you more information than nearly everything (RS1-S2).

bookcase of books ... some of them can help for research and some I just like reading ... I just go somewhere in the house and just read (RS4-S3).

read one book a night (MS2-S1).

Books, because it helps me with reading and spelling (MS3-S1).

Books, because it also helps me with my research. ... It gives me great ideas for writing (MS3-S5).

Theme 6.2: Equipment at home. Students have access to a range of equipment available at home which they felt assist them in their academic outcomes, such as:

I have a whiteboard, because I have always had a whiteboard my whole life and that's how I learnt. If you write something on a whiteboard, I find—I can do it in my head, but it's just I find it easier to write down. ... I've learnt so many things on a whiteboard (MS3-S6).

calculator ... helps me with my maths and that (MS1-S1).

Calculator because if I'm doing maths and I've finished I can just make sure it's correct (MS3-S4).

printer ... I think it helps me with some things, because when I did my speech last year for SRC, I used this to print out my speech (RS4-S3).

TV, from news and stuff, to learn what things go on and good programs for kids. Like it teaches you good habits at school and stuff (RS1-S3).

And of course computers, whilst not owned by all students, most students had access to one at home which they shared with other family members:

I've got my own computer. Nan's got two computers and pop's got one. Nan's got a laptop and K [cousin] got a laptop (RS3-S1).

my computer because it helps me when, if I can't think of something off the top of my brain, and I need some help. Then a computer's an easy way to find something, because it's got internet, which has basically everything. ... the computer as a tool to research (MS3-S3).

Computer, because it helps me research and helps me do work (MS3-S5).

For these students having ready access to resources at home made it easier to complete school work and study.

Home Condition 7: Tutorial Support

Tutorial support was available to $n=9$ students outside the school environment either as a personal tutor organised through their parents or through an after school centre as exemplified in the comments below:

when I was in year three, I had troubles with school ... Yes, really big troubles, and I went to this person called Jim in Sydney, and he really helped me a lot over spelling and maths and everything (RS2-S4).

other P High teachers that help me as well. On weekends, I go up there and get them to help me. ... If it's [homework] really, really hard and no-one can figure it out, they'll help (RS4-S4).

Homework Centre Tutors, Tuesday and Thursday after school—They help me to—if I have homework, they help me to do my homework, and if I don't have homework, then they give me sheets and they have heaps of homework sheets and stuff (RS2-S6).

For students who required additional support due to learning issues or in understanding work the availability of tutors outside of school was essential to improve understandings to increase academic outcomes at school.

Section Summary

This section introduced the home environment conditions students considered supported them to gain sound academic outcomes. There were seven conditions raised. The first was how parents supported students. The second looked at how homework was supported through the

home environment to assist students in their academic outcomes. The third condition was the influence of extended family in assisting students in gaining sound academic outcomes. The fourth condition was how students felt sports and hobbies improved their skills which assisted them to do better at school. The fifth condition raised was the influence of the environment and animals in giving students additional skills which supported their academic outcomes. The sixth condition was the availability of a variety of resources at home which students commented supported their academic outcomes. The seventh condition was tutorial support outside the school which supported improving students' academic outcomes.

The following section outlines the prioritisation of conditions for Metropolitan and Regional students.

Results Research Question 4: Priority Conditions of Success

Overview

Research Question 4.1 posed: What are the priority conditions which have contributed to success of Aboriginal students and how relevant are these? (See Chapter 5). Analysis of this research question was based on data generated from $n=9$ Metropolitan and $n=25$ Regional Aboriginal students' conditions of academic success—photographic themes priority orders. After discussing each condition as represented in the students' photos in detail the students were then asked to prioritise the conditions from 1 to 10. The process of prioritising the photos/themes they represented provided another opportunity to refine the student's thinking and be clear on the value and importance the student saw each condition they listed in assisting them to achieve sound academic outcomes.

Metropolitan Aboriginal Students' Priority Conditions

For $n=9$ Metropolitan students the top four priority conditions (see Table 7.1 and Figure 7.6 below) were: parents, teachers, extended family and friends. These were followed by Aboriginality, technology, health, library and future goals; followed by equipment, self, being positive and organised, the school and tutorial support.

Table 7.1 Aboriginal Students' Conditions of Academic Success—Metropolitan Students' Priority Orders

PRIORITY 1	PRIORITY 2	PRIORITY 3	PRIORITY 4	PRIORITY 5	PRIORITY 6	PRIORITY 7	PRIORITY 8	PRIORITY 9
P-5 T-3 EF-1	P-3 T-2 EF-2 F-2	P-2 T-1 EF-1 F-1 A-1 H-1 L-1 FG-1	TC-2 F-1 EF-1 A-1 L-1 FG-1 S-1 P/O-1	E-4 T-2 F-1 S-1 TC-1	SP-2 TC-2 T-1 EF-1 F-1 S-1 E-1	E-5 L-1 TC-1 P/O-1 SCH-1	SP-3 F-1 TC-1 TUT-1 P/O-1 E-1	E-2 SCH-1 FG-1 L-1

Key:

P- Parent
T - Teacher
EF- Extended family
F - Friends

A - Aboriginality
H - Health
L - Library/Books
FG - Future goals

S - Self
P/O - Positive & organised
TC - Technology
E - Equipment

SP - School support program
SCH - School
TUT - Tutor

The following Figure 7.6 demonstrates Metropolitan Aboriginal students' priority conditions as a bar graph.

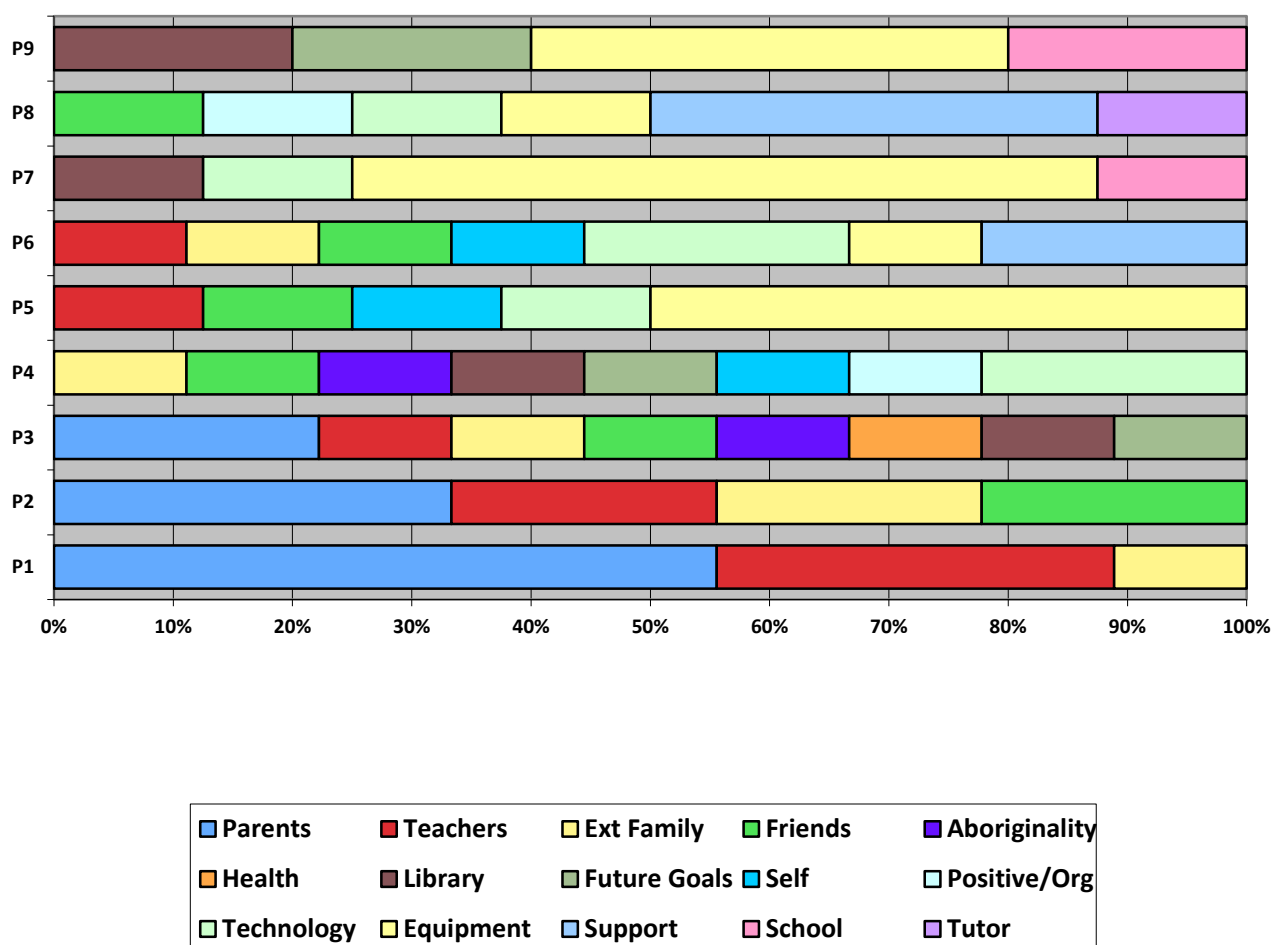


Figure 7.6 Aboriginal Students' Conditions of Academic Success—Metropolitan Students' Priority Orders

The top four themes which emerged for the Metropolitan students were: parents, teachers, extended family, and friends. These were followed by Aboriginality, technology, health, library and future goals; followed by equipment, self, being positive and organised, the school and tutorial support. Samples of comments made by students highlighting the top four priorities follow.

Metropolitan students' priority theme 1: Parents. Metropolitan Aboriginal students' first priority condition for achieving sound academic outcomes at school came from their parents and immediate family first, with comments such as:

Family [in reference to photo of the students' parents] would be number one because you always need family there and maybe you will have your arguments, but they're not going to let you down, and if you want to ask them a question, you're not always going to have the same teacher there. Or the dictionary's not always going to be something that you carry around all the time, and neither is the whiteboard, because the whiteboard doesn't always have anything on it, but your family's always there (MS3-S3).

Metropolitan students' priority theme 2: Teachers. Metropolitan students referenced teachers as a second and very important condition in their achieving sound academic outcomes as being:

Because she is nice, when I need help or put my hand up and she'll just come over to me and help me. ... She teaches me right. Like, you know what it means. ... She is good at explaining things before you move on. She not only sets the work, but helps you understand it (MS3-S2).

Metropolitan students' priority theme 3: Extended family. Metropolitan students nominated the third priority condition of influence being their extended families in provision of support and ensuring they did well academically:

I feel like I need to live up to my standards because my Auntie ... she got a scholarship to university ... she's got 20 high distinctions ... I want to get there at the same rate as well. ...[another Auntie] She's studying to be an archaeologist ... my Auntie 'N' ... she's got a massive exhibitions at one of the museums down in Victoria ... My Auntie 'A' is a manager of a band ... then my Auntie 'O' works for a humongous gas company—a lot of family to live up to and can't let them down. Not pressure. It's not really pressure. It's just I see them and I'm like, I want to do that (MS2-S1).

Metropolitan students' priority theme 4: Friends. The fourth condition mentioned by Metropolitan students was the value of friends at school for feeling safe, assisting with school work and emotional support, with comments such as:

helps me when I'm in trouble at school ... trouble with school work ... and playing in the playground (MS3-S2).

Metropolitan student key conditions of support are first their parents, followed by their teachers, then their extended family, and then their friends.

Regional Aboriginal Students' Priority Conditions

For $n=25$ Regional students the top four priority conditions (see Table 7.2 and Figure 7.7 below), were: parents, support programs, teachers, the curriculum. These were followed by library, extended family, themselves, school, Aboriginal staff, friends, having equipment for school, helping others, technology, health, class mates, being positive and organised; followed by safety at school, the principal, tutorial support, future goals, out of school activities and transport to and from school.

Table 7.2 Aboriginal Students' Conditions of Academic Success—Regional Students' Priority Orders

PRIORITY 1	PRIORITY 2	PRIORITY 3	PRIORITY 4	PRIORITY 5	PRIORITY 6	PRIORITY 7	PRIORITY 8	PRIORITY 9	PRIORITY 10
P-5	P-3	SP-7	SP-5	SCH-5	C-4	E-5	SCH-4	F-5	SCH-3
SP-4	AS-3	SCH-3	SCH-4	E-4	L-3	SP-4	SP-3	TC-3	AS-1
T-3	SP-3	P-2	TC-2	SP-4	AS-2	L-2	F-3	E-2	TC-1
C-3	T-2	OSA-2	AS-2	T-2	SP-2	AS-2	L-2	SP-2	HO-1
L-2	EF-2	AS-2	CM-2	CM-2	TC-2	F-2	TC-1	SCH-1	TUT-1
EF-1	F-2	F-1	F-1	AS-2	SP-2	SCH-1	TUT-1	L-1	OSA-1
S-1	TC-2	T-1	S-1	TC-1	SCH-2	TC-1	O-1	FG-1	S-1
SCH-1	HO-1	EF-1	A-1	F-1	T-1	P/O-1	E-1	T-1	F-1
AS-1	S-1	H-1	P/O-1	S-1	S-1	C-1	PR-1	CM-1	E-1
F-1	H-1	A-1	L-1	A-1	EF-1	H-1	AS-1	C-1	C-1
	L-1	L-1	EF-1	P-1	F-1	P-1	T-1	TUT-1	
	CM-1	FG-1	FG-1	ST-1	E-1	T-1			
	A-1	TC-1	T-1	PR-1	P-1	TUT-1			
			H-1	TR-1	TUT-1	HO-1			
			SCHR-1	L-1	CM-1	CM-1			
				C-1	A-1				
				SCHR-1					

Key:

P- Parent	S - Self	H - Health	E - Equipment
SP - School support program	SCH – School	CM - Classmates	TUT - Tutor
T - Teacher	AS - Aboriginal staff	A - Aboriginality	P - Principal
C - Curriculum	F - Friends	OSA - Out of school activity	S - Safety
L - Library/Books	TC - Technology	FG - Future goals	T - Transport
EF- Extended family	HO - Helping others	P/O - Positive & organised	

Figure 7.7 below, demonstrates Regional Aboriginal students' priority conditions as a bar graph.

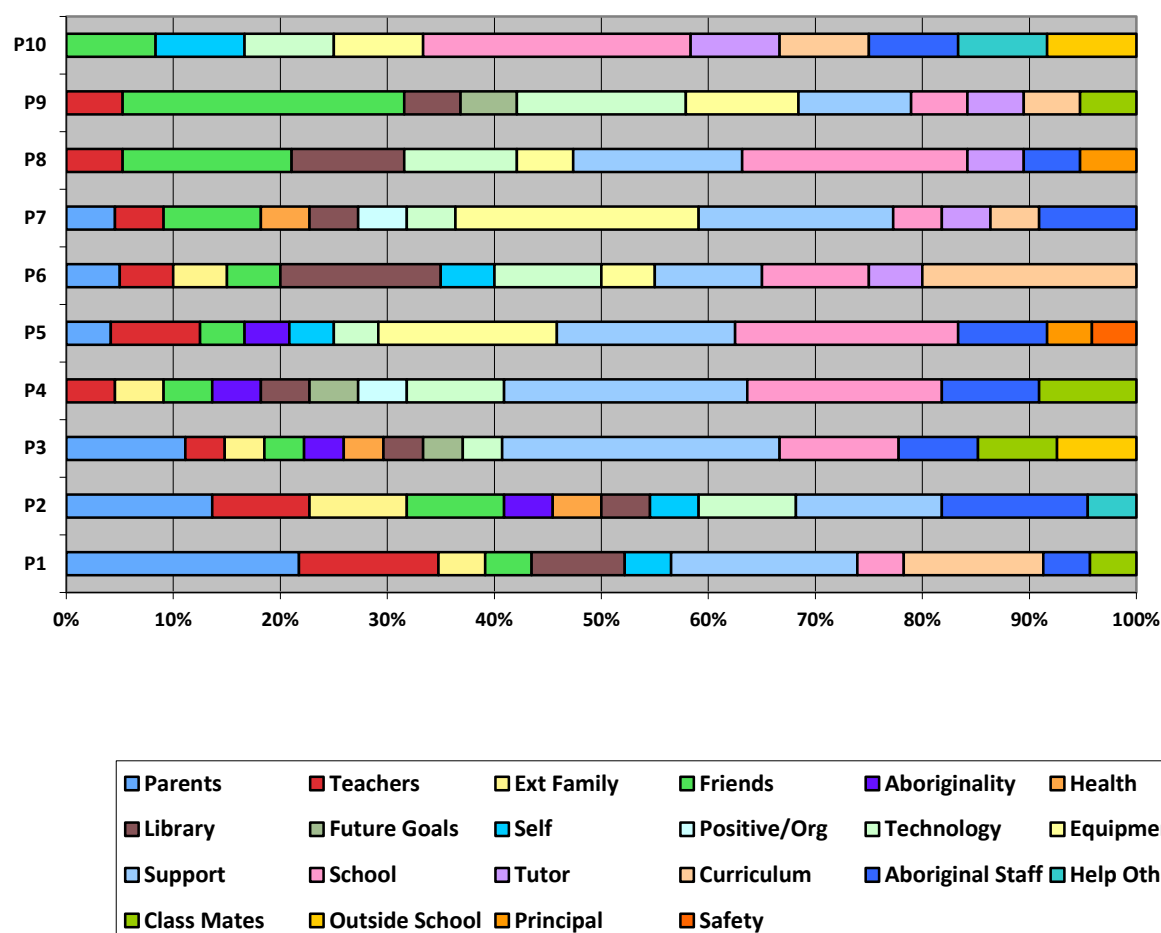


Figure 7.7 Aboriginal Student's Conditions of Academic Success—Regional Students' Priority Orders

Regional Aboriginal students identified their top priority conditions as: parents, support programs, teachers, the curriculum, library, extended family, themselves, school, Aboriginal staff and friends. These were followed by having equipment for school, helping others, technology, health, classmates, being positive and organised; followed by safety at school, the principal, tutorial support, future goals, out of school activities and transport to and from school. Samples of comments made by students highlighting the top four priorities are:

Regional students' priority theme 1: Parents. For the majority of Regional students their first condition of support in doing well academically was their parents, with comments such as:

they're the most important things to me. ... Especially Mum. ... She paid for things for school and excursions. ... She took me up to Sydney last term for softball [to represent school for North-West region]) (RS4-S4).

he encouraged me and says that there's always a way that you can solve it. ... If you're upset, he'll say, what's the matter? Is there a way that we can go over it and like fix it? Like solving a problem (RS1-S5).

Regional students' priority theme 2: Support programs. For Regional Aboriginal students, the second condition of support was to have access to different types of support programs, for maths and literacy development or for different ways to teach, such as:

Smart Board ... we go down to the SMART Board room or we started going down there, and Miss D shows us about the human body and that, like where—how our—we're learning the digestive system and that. Then we just like go on the Internet and search it ... sometimes we used to literacy ... we have to circle all the pronouns we would take it in turns (RS3-S1).

Regional students' priority theme 3: Teachers. For Regional students the third priority condition for their academic success was their teacher, not only as a teacher in the classroom, but first in their relationship with the students, in that teachers help students feel safe at school and how to get safety:

She helps me—I do Personal Development classes with her. How we learn about safety and being safe in—safe by ourselves and if someone's following us. ... She teaches us with that kind of stuff. ... If someone's bullying us, we can go away, tell them no or go tell the teacher, if someone's bullying us at school. ... she's really good with helping me fit in with the school and so that I don't get bullied (RS1-S1).

Secondly, in identifying students' talents and with drawing out talent:

he's the one that always used to draw with me and everything, and taught me how to draw (RS1-S4).

Third was having Aboriginal staff as teachers, who are good teachers, know their subjects, and provide Aboriginal cultural support:

Miss P. She is also an Aboriginal person in the school. ... She's my class teacher. I think it's very important that she's in there because she helps me with everything. ... Because she's like Auntie G [Teacher's Aide Special] and you can talk to her about the Aboriginal kind of stuff and where you're from. You can also, because she's a teacher, you can ask her, I'm stuck on this. Can you help me with it and stuff like that? (RS1-S5).

Regional students' priority theme 4: Curriculum. For Regional students their fourth priority condition was different curriculum approaches which engaged them deeply in the school and provided avenues to gain academic skills, providing confidence in knowledge gained, which in turn supported wanting to be at school to gain sound academic outcomes, such as with RS2:

our school farm. ... because it takes patience—like, you have to be quiet around chooks and cows. ... You have to be really patient to go to feeding them and stuff ... you can co-operate with different people too, from different classes ... yourre there with like—all the years in school. ... Our school garden. I like that, and I think it helps with school because you have to have patience with things growing ... with things like, your teacher can't get to you straight away so it gives you—helps with your patience ... it gets you outside ... and there's healthy things, like you can make your own beetroot and stuff, and corn, and herbs (RS2-S3).

School RS3 had a boys only class:

You just got all boys in your class and you know everyone. ... Year 4, Year 5, and Year 6. ... Just nothing to be ashamed of anything (RS3-S1).

For these students the different ways in which schools approached curriculum outcomes was pivotal to the students' engagement with the school.

Regional students' key conditions of support are as with Metropolitan students; first, parents; second, support programs; thirdly teachers; and fourthly curriculum approaches in schools.

Section Summary

In discussing the priority conditions, students were not making additional statements about the type of support they saw was provided to them, they were outlining the conditions they viewed as being most significant in providing support which supported their academic outcomes. Metropolitan Aboriginal students saw their top four priority conditions of support to be: parents, teachers, extended family and friends. Regional students saw the top four priority conditions which supported their academic outcomes as being: parents, support programs, teachers, and curriculum.

The following section provides a summary for the chapter.

Summary

Chapter 7 provided a breakdown of data collated from the in-depth interviews held with $n=9$ Metropolitan and $n=25$ Regional Aboriginal students through a brainstorm focus session and photograph elicited interviews. The chapter commenced with an analysis of the data, as the findings related to the four Research Questions: Research Question 1.1: What are the personal attributes and skills which Aboriginal students and stakeholders believe have assisted Aboriginal students to achieve successful academic outcomes?; Research Question 2.1: What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider being important conditions that assist Aboriginal students to achieve academic outcomes in their *school* environment?; Research Question 3.1: What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider as being important conditions in assisting Aboriginal students to achieve sound academic outcomes in their *home* environment?; and Research Question 4.1: What are the priority conditions which have contributed to success of Aboriginal students and how relevant are these?

Key findings for Research Question 1.1: What are the personal attributes and skills which Aboriginal students and stakeholders believe have assisted Aboriginal students to achieve successful academic outcomes? The students highlighted eight conditions of support they felt they contributed to their own academic outcomes, these were that they were: a good reader; good in at least one subject; they had good concentration; knew how to listen to the teachers; complete

their school work; know what their personal strengths are; they are a good listener, they have confidence; they are able to be independent workers; they have future goals which provide direction for studies and subjects they need to do; they have good English language skills; they have resilience; and they are mentally and physically active.

Key findings for Research Question 2.1: What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider being important conditions that assist Aboriginal students to achieve academic outcomes in their *school* environment? The conditions raised by Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students in the school environment which they believe have supported their sound academic outcomes, were: good teachers; reading competence; school infrastructure; representing the school; their friends; Aboriginal staff; their Aboriginality recognised in the school environment; and curriculum approaches and Aboriginal studies.

Key findings for Research Question 3.1: What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider as being important conditions in assisting Aboriginal students to achieve sound academic outcomes in their *home* environment? There were conditions identified by Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students which supported their academic outcomes in the home environment around: parental support; homework issues; extended and friends support; sports and hobbies; resources at home; skills gained through the environment and animals; and tutorial support outside of school which supported their high academic outcomes.

Key findings for Research Question 4.1: What are the priority conditions which have contributed to success of Aboriginal students and how relevant are these? This section provided an overview of the priority order of conditions for Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students, which they felt best, supported their academic outcomes.

The following Chapter 8 provides an overview of findings from this research as collected from stakeholders engaged in supporting Aboriginal students' academic outcomes, students' parents, teachers, principals and Aboriginal staff.

CHAPTER 8

RESEARCH RESULTS: STAKEHOLDERS' PERCEPTIONS OF ABORIGINAL STUDENTS' CONDITIONS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS

Chapter 7 detailed high achieving Aboriginal student perceptions of the conditions they considered supported them to gain sound academic outcomes. Students' conditions firstly centred around thirteen personal attributes and skills: being a good reader; were good in at least one subject; that they had good concentration; knew how to listen to their teacher; did their schoolwork; knew their personal strengths; were good listeners; had confidence; were independent workers; had future goals; had good English language skills; were resilient; and kept mentally or physically active. The second set of eight conditions was within the school environment: what students saw were good teachers; reading competence; school infrastructure; representing their school; importance of friends at school; Aboriginal staff; the school's recognition of Aboriginal culture; and inclusion of Aboriginal students in the curriculum and Aboriginal studies. The third set of seven conditions was within the home environment: parents' engagement and role for students; homework; importance of extended family; sports and hobbies; access to resources at home; and tutorial support outside of school. The final section identified the priority order of identified conditions of success for Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students.

The purpose of this chapter is to present data gathered from stakeholder groups who have a vested interest in selected Aboriginal students' academic outcomes from Metropolitan and Regional primary schools in NSW (see Chapter 7). It gives voice to the stakeholders—parents, teachers, principals and Aboriginal staff—who participated in in-depth semi-structured interviews for successful Aboriginal students (see Chapter 6).

The information in this chapter is broken into three sections, which align to the first three research questions which aimed to: (1) Identify personal attributes and skills which Aboriginal

students and stakeholders believe assist Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes; (2) Discover the conditions Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider important in assisting Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes in their *school* environment; and (3) Discover the conditions Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider important in assisting Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes in their *home* environment (see Chapter 5). The responses from the stakeholders have been framed within the students' perceived supporting conditions for academic success (see Chapter 7) and are provided to highlight further factors of which students are unaware, as such giving a more holistic representation to conditions and themes raised.

In the following three sections of this chapter are the comments raised from the in-depth semi-structured interviews with the stakeholder groups on the conditions they perceive support Aboriginal students' high academic outcomes. The chapter provides results for stakeholders' perceptions in regard to: Research Question 1 in addressing Aboriginal students' personal conditions of academic success; Research Question 2 highlighting Aboriginal students' school conditions of academic success; and Research Question 3 identifying Aboriginal students' home conditions for academic success. The next section presents information on the perceptions of stakeholders on Aboriginal students' personal conditions of success.

Results Research Question 1: Aboriginal Students' Personal Conditions of Academic Success

Section Overview

This section correlates with Research Question 1.1: What are the personal attributes and skills that Aboriginal students and stakeholders believe have assisted Aboriginal students to achieve successful academic outcomes? (discussed in Chapter 5). To identify the personal attributes and skills of high achieving Aboriginal students, stakeholders were asked “Why do you think these Aboriginal students achieve such sound academic results?” Aboriginal students identified thirteen personal conditions that they believed supported their academic success (see Chapter 7). The stakeholders’ responses were very different to the *students*, who spoke from their personal experiences. Stakeholders’ observations of high achieving Aboriginal students, and what they perceived were the students’ personal conditions for success, are presented as follows.

Stakeholders–Aboriginal Students Personal Condition 1: Confidence

In line with Aboriginal students, stakeholders identified the Aboriginal students’ self-confidence in their abilities as a key condition for engaging in school activities, and in attempting and completing their work.

Theme 1.1: Students recognise their abilities. For quite a few parents it was their child’s ability to recognise their skills and strengths and having the confidence to use those skills to their advantage in the school setting that resulted in academic success. For example, parent MS2-P1 acknowledged that:

I think he probably realised what potential he had. ... round about, you know, Year Three, he ... went, actually I'm quite smart at this stuff ... just that confidence ... he knew that his thing was maths, and he knew that he was a good reader and writer.

And MS3-P6:

I think she's confident as a person. She's able to express what she wants without emotion—or not without—she doesn't get emotional about things. I think she's just really, really confident.

Another parent MS1-P1 thought that sport gave her child confidence:

I think his success in his sport has given him self-confidence and self-worth that has transferred into his academic area as well.

Teachers identified confidence as:

a lot of focus and motivation (MS3-T3).

While Aboriginal staff identified confidence as being when students:

know they can do it, they're going to do it, they set their mind to it (RS2-AS1).

As one principal RS2-PR stated of high achieving Aboriginal students:

All our top performing kids have: persistence, resilience, getting along, organisation.

Theme 1.2: Confidence to have a go. Confidence was also seen as students attempting work and not being afraid to make mistakes. As one teacher, MS3-T1 suggests:

I think it's ... confidence, being able to simply put their hand up and have a go at stuff.

Confidence in what they were doing was supported by Aboriginal staff member RS4-AS2:

I think it's just more of a sense that those kids that are doing well, they know what they're doing.

The Aboriginal staff also thought that it was important that the students have the confidence to make mistakes as this AEO further explained:

They're not frightened to make a mistake. ... if you make a mistake, then that means that you're going to get better at it.

According to several stakeholders, a safe learning space in which to make mistakes was a personal condition for success.

Stakeholders–Aboriginal Students Personal Condition 2: Student Being Personable

Parents felt that their child often did well because they were personable and sociable, that is, got on well with a wide range of people:

I think because he's just well liked. ... he's quiet. He probably doesn't talk half the time, but he just has a smile on his face. He always gets praised and that in the school, by his teachers and stuff (MS3-P2).

quite a sociable girl. She's quite friendly. ... talk to everyone and try and get along with everybody. ... nice to everyone ... I wouldn't say she's shy, not at all. ... she's quite well-mannered. ... get along with everyone (MS3-P3).

a very friendly, very polite child. I've never, ever in the whole five years she's been at school, never been called in for an issue (RS1-P1).

Parents saw the student's ability to get on with other people at school, as a key to being able to engage with teachers and other students, which helped students settle at school and to focus on their work. When linked with how students saw the importance of their friends in supporting them academically, the ability to get on with others also assisted in problem solving through being able to communicate effectively with others.

Stakeholders–Aboriginal Students Personal Condition 3: Personal Drive

For parents it was their child's personal drive to succeed that was believed to be an important condition for gaining sound academic outcomes. Evidence cited by parents included awards, personal goal setting and organisational skills.

Theme 3.1: Awards. Parents could recognise how a child's drive developed when they received school awards that recognised hard work:

He was always, you know, getting excellence awards ... lots of certificates and things (MS2-P1).

Always good, little merit things (MS3-P4).

Theme 3.2: Personal goals. Student goal setting was recognised by teachers and parents as a key driver for success:

I think it's just them themselves. They really want to try (RS1-AS1).

Some parents were aware of their child's goals, which drove them at school as with RS2-P3:

She wants to be a doctor ... She has always been dedicated, and she's dedicated in everything she does.

Theme 3.3: Organisational skills. For other parents, it was the student's organisational skills that helped them achieve sound results, such as:

Like, K (student) has just done a waste into art project, and we've only just got it back, and she's already working out what she's doing for next year (RS1-P2).

Or for getting homework completed:

I might have to say, M, have you done your homework? Have you done this sort of stuff? But there's nothing—like she's generally already completed it or she's doing it. So she's just really good. I don't know where she gets that from. But she's just really good at that sort of thing. ... Her nature is just to be super organised. She'll organise today what she needs to do next week. She's just like that (MS3-P6).

Stakeholders, however, felt a student's personal drive was instrumental in being able to identify ways to help and support the student.

Stakeholders—Aboriginal Students Personal Condition 4: Talented and Gifted

For some stakeholders the high achieving Aboriginal students were simply “talented and gifted” students, yet this also required a process of identifying an individual student's talents and skills and then supporting the student's personal development. When discussing the students in his school one Aboriginal staff member RS4-AS1 commented:

each one's different ... different home life. Each kid's probably different even with focused ability.

For principal MS3-PR using the “Personalised Learning Plans” (PLP) to identify student skills and supporting the student to develop these skills was of major importance in helping to ensure success and she talked about a particular Aboriginal student:

We had a M's [school] Got Talent ... There was one particular student—never knew that he could sing. Probably a year ago ... on his PLP ... he wrote down he liked singing. Ended up working with, teacher, who actually did accompany him on the guitar, and sang ... we were just blown away. It was just fabulous.

This principal, MS3PR, reiterated that it was identifying the students’ skills and developing them that are the key to academic success. A teacher MS3-T2 also spoke about the benefits of the PLPs; he explains this approach:

the PLPs have been a good approach because they have allowed the children to make their own goals. ... If we could readjust the world’s curriculum to have every kid on a personalised learning plan, everyone would achieve.

The importance of developing skills was supported by another principal who thought it was important to not only recognise students’ skills and to develop them, but you needed to go one step further and recognise that sometimes you needed to support their parents in working through the system, which in turn assisted the parent to champion the development of their child’s talents. She explained that this was important:

not just [for]Aboriginal parents, but parents who have not had a strong school background ... you do have to go that extra mile. Yes it is in the newsletter, but I know that your child is a possibility for OC class or a selective class. Do you need help in filling in the form? ... I think you do have to make those personal connections (MS2-PR).

An important component in identifying Aboriginal students’ talents and gifts is the way in which stakeholders need to work together to support the students’ continued development of their talents and skills.

Section Summary

This section presented stakeholder views of Aboriginal students’ personal attributes and skills and correlated them with Aboriginal students’ perceptions (see Chapter 7) highlighting

some of the additional understanding of support identified by these stakeholders to enhance Aboriginal students' talents and skills. Whilst it was important to acknowledge that it was the student's confidence and drive in the first instance, it was equally important to identify and then set in place processes controlled by the stakeholders to support the student's further development.

The next section presents stakeholders' perceptions of how the conditions of an Aboriginal students' school contribute to academic success.

Results Research Question 2: Aboriginal Students' School Conditions of Academic Success

Section Overview

This section responds to Research Question 2.1 “What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider being important conditions that assist Aboriginal students to achieve academic outcomes in their *school* environment?” Multiple stakeholders were asked to identify and discuss what conditions facilitated academic success for Aboriginal students within the school environment. Aboriginal students’ listed eight conditions in the school environment that contributed to their academic success (see Chapter 7). Stakeholder perceptions of the conditions required in the school environment to support academic success for Aboriginal students are in alignment with students’ perceptions and are described here.

Stakeholders–School Condition 1: Good Teacher

Aboriginal students identified three themes that characterised a good teacher: teacher’s personality; teacher’s pedagogy; and teacher’s classroom environment (see Chapter 7). These three themes are discussed below by multiple stakeholders.

Theme 1.1: Teacher’s personality. For Aboriginal staff (who may be teachers or admin or teacher’s support), the teacher’s personality and their empathy with the students was an important issue for students’ success.

Rapport with students. A teacher’s rapport with Aboriginal students was essential for student engagement, as one Aboriginal staff member RS1-AS2, commented:

For me the key ingredient there is the teacher. I think it’s the teacher personally, because if that teacher is really down to earth and not too cranky ... just sort of even all the time—and lets the child know that they’re in behind them, I think that’s the most important thing. ... if that teacher has got a good rapport with the kid and it’s based on all those things that

they're nice and even and polite and that sort of thing. ... if they do have that rapport with the kids. They can get them to do what they need to.

Another Aboriginal staff member RS3-AS1 said a teacher's rapport with students expressed:

Empathy and a real passion and compassion for student learning. Not judgemental but confident ... someone that can communicate and have the ability, to be able to adjust those communication levels so rather than just having a standard set of rules that have to apply or a standard set with a curriculum. Being flexible and being able to adjust that to tailor suit the needs of their children.

This was also expressed by RS2-T1:

but it's more getting to know the kids and just meeting them that has actually developed my skills on that more than the theory part of it. I mean, it's good to know all that sort of thing but, at the same time, just having a connection with the kids and building up a personal rapport with them I think does more for the child.

Parents also considered the teacher's personality important and could often equate students' academic growth or decline in their child's school work. As this parent (RS3-P3) explained:

Kindergarten through to Year 2, no problems. ... He had Miss K, oh my God he adored her. He had her two years in a row. ... She's just one of those people that she's meant to be a teacher. ... Year 3 he just went downhill.

The parent went on to explain:

We had one teacher who just did not get on with [their child] ... I had a terrible year.

This parent went on to declare that they had had to fight with their child all year to go to school. She also went on to relate that the problem was that this particular teacher had taught their elder child and had expected the younger one to be the same. She admitted that the older child was placid and would let things go by, whereas the younger child had more spirit. The parent raised the point that just because the students looked alike, did not mean they were the same. As such the teacher's rapport with students as individuals is essential in the students' academic growth.

Love children and teaching. In identifying what makes a good teacher, the parents perceived that it was caring about a child and a love of children that made a good teacher. For example, parent RS4-P3 commented:

I guess you've got to love children and you have to be very, very patient, even when you don't want to be. I guess they've got to love teaching.

Some teachers also supported this, as with MS3-T1:

I think for every student you've got to take an interest in the class. You've got to like kids.

Parent RS4-P3 went on to speak about the importance of teacher education and how they should learn about the significance of different cultures.

They're [teachers] going to have all these little personalities and all sorts of cultures and children coming from different families' lives. They've got to realise that. I think they need to be taught that, that that's what's going to happen when they leave the university and go out into the workforce.

Another parent RS4-P3 recalled an incident that was very dear to her and it was the excitement and enthusiasm of a teacher when her child was awarded extra high marks, the parent said:

She[(the teacher)] was running across the playground to me when school ended. ... "Wait, wait ... I need to talk to you", she said, "I've just got to tell you. " She said, "she got 93 out of 100" for—I think it was maths. She said, "I was so excited."

The teacher recounted to her, saying that:

I had to tell somebody last night, I rang my mother and told my mother. ... She [the teacher] was just thrilled to bits. ... So yes, to me that's a good teacher (RS4-P3).

Appreciate student's cultural background. Parents considered how teachers taking the time to learn and understand a child's background was a sign of good teaching.

it really helps to know their backgrounds, like you can't teach someone that doesn't want to be taught if you don't know that much about their background (RS3-P4).

Seeking knowledge about a student and their cultural background was also supported by school staff and they demonstrated the importance of this recognition through the following comments:

knowing who they are and where they come from and working with that and making sure that they know that you care about them achieving (RS1-T4).

identifying Aboriginal heritage and understand that it's important and engaging in it (MS2-T1).

background on their families, and their Totems and things like that. ... Because then that can lead to more cultural awareness and talking to the families about how they think their kids are going ... Once you establish that connection, I think that you can really go forward (RS1-T1).

Teacher flexibility. The ability of a teacher to be flexible was another important skill. Parent RS3-P3 describes why a teacher's personality and flexibility is such an important component to ensuring a student's success:

in Year 4, he got Miss B ... She was flexible and things like that. She didn't take any crap off the kids or anything else and they knew when she meant business. ... I think it was just her personality ... she made him buckle down, but she did it in the right way. She figured out how he clicked. ... he come up like a cracker.

A teacher felt flexibility came with 'experience'. As RS1-T5 explained:

Most teachers finish school; go to teacher training, then straight back into a school and middle class. Most teachers haven't seen any other side of the railway track, whether it's black or white or whatever colour. ... No background knowledge.

This teacher went on speak about good teachers for Aboriginal students and the importance of experience:

They're all old ... Teachers ... the first 10 years of teaching, I don't think you understand that there's kids that come from different homes and have different expectations, and didn't

get much sleep last night or didn't get any food last night. It takes a while to clock into the system and make allowances for kids and then help them along the way.

Principal RS2-PR also spoke about the importance of experience. She had previously taught in Woodenbong Central School and in Boggabilla Central (schools with very high Aboriginal student cohorts) and she thought her previous experiences made her a better teacher and principal for Aboriginal students.

Additionally parents commented that having a blend of older experienced teachers with a blend of newer career teachers was significant to their child's academic outcomes. One parent stated that:

Having some experienced teachers here, we've also had some new teachers so we've had some younger teachers coming through with new ideas and certainly they have all brought with them their own gifts and talents to the school (MS1-P2).

Know students' strengths and weaknesses. Parents thought continuity with teachers formed strong relationships and having teachers who knew students' strengths and weaknesses was essential for students' high academic success, as parent RS1-P3 stated:

K [student] had Mrs R [teacher] for two years in a row, and she really pushed K and she knew how to push her ... what did it for K and what didn't.

Hence, for parents it was important that the teacher really knew the students, and cared about and formed a relationship with their children for students' academic growth. Teachers also thought knowledge of a student, as an individual was important:

I nurture to make sure that I'm providing everything that they need for their learning. So it's not a vessel thing ... I want to know what they know and then what I can do to help them move forward (MS2-T1).

I think that we support academically. I think we look at individual students and decide what it is that we need to do to help them. We acknowledge it when there is and I think that's probably the biggest thing because we have a lot of extension classes. (RS1-T4).

Knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses allows appropriate placement and support.

Respect. Respect was seen as another key ingredient for teachers working with Aboriginal students. For some parents two-way respect was an important component for communication between teachers and students:

I haven't ever had a teacher come to me and say R [child] was disrespectful at any time ... it just all comes back to respect. If you respect your teacher, you're going to get your full attention, and you're going to learn something (RS2-P3).

Teachers also saw this two-way respect as a condition of success. Teacher RS4-T3 expressed concern as she talked about one boy, who has told that teachers were their enemy, that she could see how students who were doing well had trust in teachers:

The kids who do well seem to already have trust. So they've had teachers in the past who have obviously been respectful of them and who they obviously trusted enough to work well for and to try for (RS4-T3).

Hence, having a respectful teacher was identified as an important factor when creating an environment for success.

This was emphasised by a principal RS2-PR, who said of teachers:

I think calm, respectful—respectful of Indigenous cultures for starters ... willingness to learn and to be part of a community.

A good teaching and learning environment is based upon mutual respect between the teacher and the Aboriginal student.

Humour equals good discipline. Good teachers need to use good disciplinary approaches with Aboriginal students and this meant you had to have a sense of humour. These teachers saw it was essential to have good humour in teaching Aboriginal students:

No yelling, threatening with punishment. I think any ... a sense of humour is a help ... Have some humour in the class to lighten it sometimes ... School needs to be a good place to come to (RS4-T3).

Good humour and discipline included not pushing students into a confrontational position that might be hard to return from:

never back these kids into a corner. Let them know that they are equal; they are one and all here ... Teachers must be understanding, compassionate (RS4-T2).

For teachers, having a good sense of humour was an important skill in having a sound relationship with Aboriginal students.

The personality of a teacher and their interaction with Aboriginal students was seen by multiple stakeholders, as an important component in teaching Aboriginal students.

Theme 1.2: Teacher's approach and pedagogy. A teacher's approach to teaching Aboriginal students is essential, as stated by principal RS2-PR:

If they're not achieving, you don't blame the kid.

The teacher's approach influenced their teaching styles and is an essential ingredient in not only teaching Aboriginal students, but in gaining high academic outcomes. Pedagogical practices were identified as:

Teacher's approach. The approach taken by teachers of Aboriginal students was seen as important to stakeholders. This was explained by RS3-T3 who said:

Our approach to teaching we have to look at catering for them [Aboriginal students] as well, so different learning styles ... my class specifically, over half of them, identify as being Aboriginal ... I cater for the Aboriginal students in the class and I find that that works for everyone.

When asked what makes a good teacher of Aboriginal children, one teacher RS1-T3 replied:

The thing I like about Aboriginal students is they really are a quick reflection of how well you're going. If they're reacting adversely to what you're doing, it's obvious the lesson isn't working.

This teacher evaluated her teaching by the interest of her Aboriginal students as she noted that:

A lot of white students will tolerate, particularly girls of course will tolerate boring lessons ... sit there and be quiet.

This teacher went on to say that if the Aboriginal kids start to fidget:

You think, yeah, okay, time to stop, have a break, and think about what I'm doing (RS1-T3).

Expand teaching approaches. Teachers often spoke about the need to expand the teaching practice they gained from teacher training. For many teachers it was teaching Aboriginal students through English as a second language strategies and differentiating on the use of different forms of English usage for different occasions, as teacher RS3-T3 discussed:

you've got to adjust your teaching to suit the students that you're teaching ... it took me a long time to really understand the concept of Aboriginal English ... We talked about it at uni, but at that point ... I couldn't understand it. ... It was hard for me to grasp the concept.

This teacher recognised the difference between home language and the language of school and said:

My grammar lessons are always curriculum-based. ... But if we're doing reading or they're telling their news I'm never going to correct them when they're talking freely or they're writing a story.

For another teacher it was teaching Aboriginal students from a gifted and talented approach.

I think gifted and talented for all students is similar in their teaching, you have to differentiate and you have to make sure that they're identified and supported in lots of different ways (MS2-T1).

Teachers needed to engage in continuous self-reflexivity on the approaches they take when teaching Aboriginal students in order to gain maximum success.

Explicit teaching. A key to teaching Aboriginal students was identified as explicit teaching and that teachers should:

Ensure that they teach explicitly, really well and if the child hasn't got it then you change what you do. ... [teachers should] reflect on their teaching practice (RS2-PR).

When describing how they teach, teacher MS1-T2 responded:

Most of my teaching I try to break everything down into chunks, into manageable chunks. That works for all kids. ... not just throwing everything at them at once, ... so just breaking it down for them so they can see step by step what they need to do.

Teacher MS3-T1 noted that she preferred to give greater direction:

A little bit more of targeted instruction, just walking around. ... Making sure that the kids are doing and achieving their best.

For a principal this meant having teaching staff with good teaching practices and knowledge concerning teaching Aboriginal students:

Really good, solid, explicit teaching practices. I'm not into time wasting. If we are going to have the kids for a limited time, we are going to really make a difference in the time we've got them. ... I've got very, very strong staff (RS1-PR).

High expectations. Recognising the high expectations of Aboriginal students was identified as a key to engaging Aboriginal students. For teacher RS1-T2 it was:

High expectations ... have high expectations of all the kids that I teach. I never give them something that I think would be just beyond them ... you've still got to challenge them. But once they get the confidence to do things, they just fly.

School principals commented that to assist Aboriginal students achieve these high expectations and reach their goals, you had to know what specialist skills your staff possess and have high expectations of the teachers, as principal RS1-PR explained:

I hand pick the teachers that run the different groups. ... I've got two teachers that have a real love of mathematics and some very interesting ways of teaching and understanding the development of maths. They are my extension maths teachers. My literacy teachers are the same. The expectation is right up here and you can do it this way ... who has the skills to work best with those kids. ... What they are confident in ... There's nothing worse than

putting a teacher who is not interested into a class. We do a lot of thinking about where we base teachers.

Theme 1.3: Teacher's classroom environment. For teachers it was important to create a good teaching environment. Teachers identified key conditions for ensuring students' learning, such as, providing an organised classroom and being prepared.

Organised classroom. For teachers a good teaching environment required a teacher to be organised, as stated by MS3-T3:

Being organised and being prepared.

This also meant having lessons and equipment prepared.

Classroom seating arrangements. How the classroom was arranged for lessons was also an issue for teachers, who saw classroom movement as a key part of their pedagogy:

I prefer group learning, so my tables are usually almost always in groups. That's just so the less able can be helped by the more able sort of thing, going back to Vygotskian theories and it works (MS1-T2).

Teachers spoke about the values of changing the seating each term to ensure student support and team work:

more able peers are sitting with less able peers, just so there's that sort of extra modelling (MS1-T2).

I change that [seating] constantly. ... in groups and other times ... Sometimes I do a U-shape, that sort of thing. ... a lot of inclusive learning. So [collaboratively] the kids get in groups and [learn] how to be in groups and how to work together as teams (MS2-T1).

i. Class size. For principals, class size was a predictor of engagement, whereby one principal managed by moving funds and staff around to create a different approach to teaching:

The engagement class ... It reduced our suspensions to such an extent that we had very, very few problem. (RS4-PR).

However the principal acknowledged that due to increased student numbers they could not continue this initiative where they reduced class size and as a result:

making the classes smaller it had the same net effect (RS4-PR).

Class size and general classroom facilities were supported as a key condition of success, because it helped to maximise students' time with teachers. One Aboriginal staff member, RS1-AS2 stated that:

I think class sizes aren't too big here ... class sizes are good.

Class resources. Aboriginal staff member, RS1-AS2, commented on how the teachers managed their classrooms and liked the resources available to students:

every class has got—I would say seven or eight computers ... you know if it's maths, they'll split their groups and they'll rotate them around so every kid will get access to a computer in the maths lesson and same thing with literacy ... a lot of hands on stuff is really good for our Aboriginal kids and especially technology it seems to fit our mob really well.

The teacher's personality, pedagogical approaches, classroom environment, class size, and access to resources was seen by stakeholders as keys to student engagement and achieving sound academic outcomes.

Stakeholders—School Condition 2: Good Reader

Whilst not mentioned by school staff, the parents identified reading competency as a key condition to their child's academic success.

Theme 2.1: Love of reading. Reading for enjoyment was identified by parents as a key to reading competence, as MP3-P1 stated:

Over the last two years, she's - like ... this light-bulb has come on ... I'm always buying books. ... She can be reading two or three books at a time. ... I don't know what triggered it. But yeah, she loves her books.

Similarly, other parents spoke of their child's love of reading:

I think the reading and getting her interested into books, like going to the library as a young kid ... I guess just showing - leading by example (MS3-P6).

She loves reading of a night. I'm usually the one that's got to go in there and say come on, turn the light off and put the book down (RS1-P1).

Theme 2.2: Catalyst for reading. Parents identified that often their child's love of reading grew from their other interests, which created an incentive to read, such as in the following cases showing a student's strong interest in horses and parents' attention to the student:

I guess that might have encouraged her, by having something that she was interested in to get her into reading (RS1-P2).

because she was an only child until she was five. So we focused a lot on her and read (MS3-P6).

Theme 2.3: Assistance to read. Getting help at home from family members with reading was also identified as important for reading competency, as one mother MS1-P2 acknowledged:

I didn't have the time, being a working mum with three kids to spend reading to her every night as I did with the eldest, but by then she had an older sister who read fluently so often they [older sister and brother] would read to her as part of their reading for homework at school of a night, they would read to their little sister. ... so they modelled some positive reading skills.

Parents considered their child's academic success centred on reading competence, which was directly attributed to the child's love of reading that was often inspired by other interests that were linked connection to reading.

Some teachers spoke about reading in relation to reading programs in the school, rather than in relation to individual students' reading competence, that is, the type of reading program they employed in the school which specifically supported Aboriginal students' reading competence. Such as:

We've got a very good reading scheme in the school. Rigby Collections in the primary. It's very comprehensive and you can obviously have kids on their own particular levels. ... all the kids are graded ... So they're working at their level (MS1-T1).

A lot of the programs here are sort of aimed at Aboriginal kids, like AL (Accelerated Literacy) (RS3-T2).

The AL (Accelerated Literacy) program seems to be working to help. ... It allows students to understand—who wouldn't normally read—access to what you're talking about. So it gives them access to literacy that sometimes would just go over their head if you were doing something differently (RS2-T1).

Reading competence was identified as a key requirement to sound learning outcomes.

Stakeholders—School Condition 3: School Infrastructure

Aboriginal students identified school infrastructure, as a condition of their success. These conditions are further explored by multiple stakeholders as outlined below.

Theme 3.1: School leadership. For parents the key to strong school infrastructure was good leadership in the school, as this parent expressed:

It's the same within the home. Good leadership in the home, isn't it, it's the same? ... cause it makes them feel secure cause they don't always know what to do, where to go (RS4-P3).

Leadership was also identified by school staff as being important at the immediate supervisor level:

Our programs are submitted and our assessment folders are submitted to our supervisors once a term, so if our supervisors identify issues with our program or our assessment, then obviously they'll approach us and let us know (MS1-T1).

And through the principal:

Our principal's very strong in her support of the Aboriginal people. I think that flows down to the rest of us (RS2-T3).

Strong leadership was seen as a key to establishing a sound school infrastructure for Aboriginal education in the school.

Theme 3.2: Parents' knowledge of school operations. Aligned with good leadership, was how well parents understood the school structure and processes. This parent outlined their experience:

I didn't at first. At first I was—what's going to happen here, sort of thing, but once you get to learn the way the school is, you just build that comfort. You build that rapport with them and it's just there and the respect is there. ... these things help when they [students] go home to parents, with notes and things like that. I mean, if most parents are like me they'll read them and go yeah and then forget them and lose them anyway, but you're getting the gist of it all the time, do you know what I mean? You're understanding yeah, this is happening, that's happening (RS1-P1).

Parental engagement was supported by principals, and considered pivotal to parental knowledge of school operations:

I think the key element is getting into the community and getting to know the families. That has been critical. Developing relationships with parents and families, because I think if you don't have that really nothing else flows from it. (MS3-PR).

creating relationships so that they feel comfortable coming into the school (RS1-T1).

Theme 3.3: Partnerships. Principals commented on the importance of building respect and engagement through partnerships with parents and the community, as principal RS2-PR commented:

Partnerships with families and community is really important. You need to have partnerships with community organisations, so AECG, ... all the time.

Interviewees acknowledged that developing partnerships was not necessarily easy, but were essential to develop and that sometime different approaches were required, as exemplified by MS3-PR:

I think our approach in terms of lots of supportive, gentle communication and building relationships in a non-threatening way. ... Grandma was coming in. She was really nervous about coming into school grounds. I noticed anytime it was a formal thing, it was really uncomfortable for her. Whenever I spoke to her out in the playground—we just sat in one of the seats—the whole demeanour changed. So instead of pulling her in here—into this office in this formal area—I'd go and meet her outside and we'd have a chat on the silver seats outside.

Creating partnerships requires relationship building that is essential for student engagement. As explained by RS4-T1:

you need to build up a rapport with the community. Because if you don't have that rapport, it makes it very hard to work with anyone. ... you need to have some connection.

Principal RS2-PR also stated that staff needed to recognise that Aboriginal parents had high expectations for their children, hence the relationship needed to be based on positive engagement:

having a good, open relationship with the parents. You have to do that and you have to be persistent with that. You need to be phoning them about the good things, not just to phone about the bad things (RS2-PR).

The principal gave an example of what she meant:

Two minutes—Johnny had a superb day today, he read at level 10. He's a champion. Just wanted to let you know (RS2-PR).

Also being respectful and courteous outside the school was seen as important in building trust:

Saying g'day to them when you see them outside of school. Don't put your head down and walk past, even if they do. Saying g'day, how you going? ... So it's nice to—doesn't matter where you are, to take time. It's just, to me, common manners (RS2-PR).

Stakeholders believed that a positive relationship with parents leads to partnerships and improved engagement with Aboriginal students.

Theme 3.4: School staff Aboriginal education. Developing sound Aboriginal education practice in schools was also reliant on staff training, as principal RS2-PR stated:

We did cultural awareness training with staff. ... none of my staff had ever done that. ... if you've a big change with staff it needs to happen all the time. You've got to have good teachers. So they have to have some cultural knowledge and understanding (RS2-PR).

A principal spoke about the importance of in-service training; in particular, she described her approach to upgrading her skills, which in turn provided guidance for her school:

I've done the Dare to Lead program. ... I actually did the course again last year. ... there is much more of an emphasis now on particularly the personal learning plans, the cultural awareness and how you structure your school to make certain that that is happening for every child in the school, not just Aboriginal children but for every child, that you're trying to meet their needs so that they're able to learn (MS2-PR).

Teachers spoke about formal training for improved knowledge, either through their teacher training:

there was a section of one of our year-long subjects, so it would have been a focal point for at least a term, on Aboriginal education and learning Aboriginal language, and just basically teaching strategies for Aboriginal students (RS3-T3).

Or through Department of Education training and tutoring programs:

I've gone to any Aboriginal training, Aboriginal education, policy, training, those sorts of things (RS4-T2).

The majority of teachers spoke about Aboriginal education more as trial and error education, gained on the job, or because of their own backgrounds that had given them different life and cultural experiences to draw on, allowing them to be more aware of Aboriginal students and community needs. As stated by the following teachers:

I was a tutor on the ATSIC tutoring program for about 10 years, home tutoring. ... It was incidental learning. I learnt a lot about what to do and how to do it. It was good. Then used that knowledge here at school (RS1-T3)

I think because of my own background and my wife's background, that basically makes us probably look at things in maybe a different way, because neither of us have parents who are Anglo-Saxon. ... I think that enables you to see outside the square. Because whether people like it or not, if you view things in Australia from an Anglo-Saxon point of view, it's quite different even to the way maybe Italians or Greeks view things. ... I think because of all of that, and because I grew up in a migrant community originally—I think that makes me see it a slightly different way (RS4-T1).

Teachers spoke about the need for improved educational training particularly in teacher training degrees as essential to providing appropriate support for Aboriginal students.

Theme 3.5: Common school focus. For principal RS4-PR it was the school having a common focus, which set the scene for everyone working together, such as in their school with the “key themes for success”,

We're developing resilience. We're developing the skills for the takings of ups and downs, we're developing the skills for study, developing the skills for work, developing the skills to not interfere with our mates so that they can learn too, resilience has certainly improved. (RS4-PR).

The principal gave an example of how the use of the “key themes for success” had turned around his school:

Two years ago, this school had 200 days lost in long suspensions and another 136 days lost in short suspensions. Last year we went to 50. This year we're down to about 20 suspensions for the entire year. ... So, 'You Can Do It' has become a big part of the way that we operate on a social level at this school. ... we do that as a social arm for our positive behaviour for learning. ... it is making a fairly significant difference to the way that the kids approach each day (RS4-PR).

A clear common focus in the school created improved behaviour, social interaction and learning environment for all students.

Theme 3.6: Aboriginal education strategies. Having a planned school strategy and regular monitoring was seen as a key to sound Aboriginal education and support for Aboriginal students. As one teacher explained:

It's part of our management plan ... Aboriginal education is one of them and so once that plan's done then usually I'll write up an action plan ... We meet once a week only at lunch time but we go and sit, take our lunch and have a half an hour each week discussing where we are, what we're up to, where we're going (RS1-T4).

Teachers identified how a planned approach led to improved action. This action meant specific support programs had been built into schools for Aboriginal students such as:

accelerated literacy was designed for Indigenous students and I was trained ... Back in 2000, I went to Charles Darwin University and did a week-long unit with them there on accelerated literacy (RS2-PR).

A planned approach led to understanding across the school, what was required to support Aboriginal students; how this influenced teaching and classroom practice; and then consistency in monitoring support for Aboriginal students.

Theme 3.7: Aboriginal cultural recognition in the school. Stakeholders believed that previous experiences of staff working with Aboriginal students led to greater number of effective cultural programs in schools, such as the importance of Aboriginal perspective in the curriculum, celebrating NAIDOC Week.

Ceremonial recognition. Incorporation of Aboriginal ceremonies through school assemblies was seen as a major way to recognise and pay respect to Aboriginal people. RS3-PR noted that every assembly is started by a:

'Welcome to Country' in the Gamilaroi language.

And at the assembly Aboriginal students are involved:

Aboriginal students will quite often play the didge as well, so we celebrate their Aboriginality all the time so they know it's not just one week a year when we have NAIDOC Week.

In another school RS1-T2 commented on the importance of culture and language in the school:

We acknowledge the Aboriginal kids a lot. Our Aboriginal students are learning the Dunghutti language now to do 'Welcome to Country'.

At the same school a parent commented:

he can get up and say the 'Welcome to Country' in Dunghutti, like he's learnt that, do you know what I mean? That makes him very proud (RS1-P6).

Physical cultural recognition in school. The school's physical recognition of Aboriginal culture was often mentioned, as:

if you walk around the school there are Totems painted on the ground and that in the Library there's a large display of Aboriginal tools and instruments (RS1-T2).

Furthermore, this teacher was proud that earlier in the year the school had Aboriginal dancers teach the Aboriginal students dancing. She noted:

when our hall was opened, we had a smoking ceremony ... It was just fabulous.

Non-Aboriginal support. The inclusion of Aboriginal culture in the school was appreciated by non-Aboriginal parents, as Aboriginal staff member RS3-AS2 explained:

I did have somebody say to me "I take my hat off to this school. ... you don't hear the official 'Welcome to Country' by a student much. ... you also have a didgeridoo player and things like that".

This parent approached the Aboriginal staff member telling her that these ceremonies made the school a better place, and that she thought it was "really special". This parent went on to say:

she appreciates it because she wants her children to grow up to accept everybody. She thought by doing that, it was really special.

Cultural recognition in the school made it more inviting for Aboriginal students, their parents and communities.

Theme 3.8: School attitude and approaches. Having a positive attitude and approach towards Aboriginal people and their cultures was seen as vital to creating sound academic outcomes for Aboriginal students. This was seen to be supported through the following:

Respect. Creating and building resilience and respect was a key component for many schools, one principal, RS2-PR, has admitted:

we can't change the past, it's not about beating each other up, but you have to understand that to value where each party's coming from.

She acknowledges the privileged lives of many middle-class people who have succeeded at school and went to university. She advocated that to understand when you are dealing with other cultures, you had to be aware, and respectful in understanding cultural difference. Principal RS2-PR went on to clarify:

It doesn't mean that one's [culture is] better or worse, it means they're different.

RS2-PR also explained that she did not like the word “tolerate” as she thought it meant:

to put up with ... I find that offensive for me. I don't want to hear that you will tolerate Indigenous cultures. ... because that's not respect (RS2-PR).

Respecting culture was identified by parent RS1-P6, as a key to students' academic success and wanting to be at school:

I've noticed over the years this is probably the best it's been since I've had the kids here and they're really good. They push for the Aboriginal events, like NAIDOC day, stuff like that. It makes them I suppose feel proud.

Acknowledge racism and bullying. Principal RS1-PR explained racism exists and dealing with it in the school could have its challenges. She declared:

this is a redneck town. We traditionally had some families that had values like that. I think we have broken through that well and truly. We don't accept it. It's just not on.

This principal acknowledged that there were children of all nationalities at the school and she believed that the children knew right from wrong, noting that if there was racial conflict in the school it was dealt with straight away. Although this principal sadly concluded by saying:

I do have one family still who do not send their children if we are doing anything on Aboriginal functions, NAIDOC Day, which is a pity (RS1-PR).

Parents agreed that staff engagement with these issues was essential to creating a positive school but she recognised the importance of good teachers not being racists:

They do a lot and take a lot, teachers ... if they've got an ounce of racism in them, walk away. ... It will come out in their teaching. It will and it'll ruin everything (RS4-P3).

For parents the evidence of the school's approach was in the way they operated, such as parent MS3-P1 explained how her child was being bullied in her previous school and that she had approached the principal, who did not take action to stop this torment. This parent said:

she didn't take to that first year of school. ... She was being bullied ... We saw the principal about it. ... He said basically we'll forget about it. ... So he knew that she was being bullied. This went on constantly. It was happening at school and at after school care as well. It was a boy that was three years older than her. She was only in Kindergarten.

As can be seen from this parent's story, the attitude and approach at the previous school was totally inadequate, and when they moved their child to the new school, because of its caring approach, the child was quickly identified as lagging behind. The change of school for this Aboriginal student obviously made her feel safe and respected as she is now excelling in her school work.

It's one of the best things I ever did, moving her (MS3-P1).

Another parent RS1-P6 remembered when her older children were little; they had been teased because they had a "black dad" but that over time things had changed for the better at the school.

There's been a turnaround in the last couple of years.

The school's attitude and approach with Aboriginal students was commented on by an Aboriginal staff member who said that other schools in the area recognised the good work of their school. RS1-AS1 commented:

We get that all the time, what are you doing over there that we're not? ... We don't have the attendance problem at most schools. We don't have the behaviour problem.

This Aboriginal staff member did concede that they still occasionally had a few problems but nothing very serious and that tackling bullying and racism had resolved Aboriginal engagement issues in the school.

Theme 3.9: Common staff focus. All stakeholders agreed that the crux of the school's interaction with Aboriginal students and their community was the school staff. For Aboriginal staff the school's competence in Aboriginal education had to come from the top down and RS3-AS2 had been a firsthand witness to what could be achieved. She noted:

if it wasn't for this school—if it wasn't for what they've been able to achieve in the last five years, I probably would still have a negative opinion of the school system. But it's really turned me around in thinking and that changes can be made ... But having the appropriate people in place is the key (RS3-AS2).

Principal MS3-PR spoke in relation to changing attitudes as the whole staff responsibility:

I think, over time, the energy and the visibility of our Aboriginal students has changed. It's not just they need to have the same opportunities. We need to put in the energy to make sure every teacher from K to 6—regardless as to whether they have an Aboriginal student in their class—knows these students, knows their strengths (MS3-PR).

The attitudes held by those running schools towards approaches in Aboriginal education required a whole of staff to create a common focus.

Stakeholders–School Condition 4: Aboriginal Students Representing School

Whilst a highlight for the Aboriginal students was representing their school, parents saw this as a developmental tool for the students.

Theme 4.1: Student development. Parents identified that their child's overall development was dependent on being helpful, such as that view expressed by MS1-P2:

just encourage the kids to take on extra responsibilities, both in school and outside of school, and I think that's been a positive thing.

For another parent, RS2-P1, it was the positive endorsement and experience that students benefited from:

there's always like that thing of positive reinforcement ... especially this year, with the principal and a teacher saying, you've been invited to go to this particular public speaking thing, or you've been invited to do this.

Theme 4.2: General school representation. For school staff, school representation was a part of general school activity with one teacher MS1-T1 commenting:

Every kid here has the opportunity to be in the cricket team, if they've got two legs and can hold a bat, you know. Or they can be in the choir because we need numbers, so they do have a lot of opportunities. ... Every child in Year 6 is a leader at some stage, be it sport prefects or librarians or SRC. So every child in Year 6 has a leadership role to fulfil.

Yet, for another teacher RS2-T3 school representation was an essential part of their philosophy in education, that is, to give children as many opportunities as possible because this was important for the students' development:

it's enjoyable to the kids, it allows me to get a rapport with them, and it gives them success.

Further it allowed diverse opportunities for children with diverse skills for this teacher ensured:

every kid's got to have some success, and school should be a place that look back on at some stage fondly, and say, I did that, or I remember when we did that (RS2-T3).

For other parents it was an opportunity to connect with the school, and this was identified as important as RS2-P2 explained:

as a parent going to watch the team play the sports, it makes you feel so proud to be part of the parent group, you know, of that school.

School representation was seen to be important to challenge the students, give them intellectual stimulation, give them courage and how to think on their feet. For school staff

representation was a normal part of school interaction and was available to all students; for Aboriginal students and parents it was often seen as a new venture and an honour.

Stakeholders–School Condition 5: Friends

Aboriginal students perceived that their friends were an important condition in academic success. This perception, whilst not recognised by school staff, was acknowledged by parents. One parent explained how there were only about 50 Aboriginal students in their school, yet all of the students knew one another:

They all know who each other is, and they all stick up for each other ... it's something I can't really quite put my finger on, but it makes her feel safe and secure and special (RS1-P4).

For this parent, having friends at school was essential as she stated:

To be honest, since she has been here, it's the first time she has had friends ... and I think that's one of the reasons why she has thrived in this environment. ... since she has been here, she has friends ... on a regular basis. She has people, when she goes out for lunch, she knows that these people she can sit with and eat lunch (RS1-P4).

For another parent, MS2-P1, friendships established a foundation for the student and the parent:

straight away he met an amazing group of little friends ... he felt belongingness; you know there was that real connected feeling to the community within the school. I think that really gave him an amazing start. ... I became very good friends with all the parents ... I think that had a really big influence.

These comments illustrate why the parents believe that the school environment, and making friends, has led to students feeling confident and supported in their school. Friends have significantly contributed to their academic success, along with the parents comfortably meeting and becoming friends with other parents.

Stakeholders–School Condition 6: Aboriginal Staff

For schools that have the opportunity, the engagement of an Aboriginal staff member made a huge difference. In this research Aboriginal staff was in identified positions only in the regional schools, this is due to high Aboriginal student enrolments. The benefit of these identified roles to the community and the student outcomes, is explained below.

Theme 6.1: Value of working together. Principal RS3-PR acknowledged the strength of the Aboriginal staff, as a team effort in supporting Aboriginal students, as noted:

Some think it's a "them and us" type culture, but I don't think in this school that we foster that at all within the staff (RS3-PR).

Aboriginal staff members in the school substantiated the sentiment apparent in the principal's comment:

When we have an opinion about something it's always valued and we always try to work through our processes, what's the best outcome for that student (RS3-AS1).

He went on further to say he felt his work was valued and that:

being able to adjust what I've learnt outside and make it workable within the school system ... not changing the way things are done but adjusting and modifying how teachers deal with things and getting them to change their mind about things is an incredible tool, it's a powerful tool.

Theme 6.2: Aboriginal student support. The key for schools with high Aboriginal student enrolments is the Aboriginal staff and their support of Aboriginal students. The key reason is as expressed by one principal,

because really they're the only ones that can do it. ... because Europeans just tell them. They don't live it (RS4-PR).

Aboriginal staff provide support in a number of ways, as explained below.

Emotional and cultural. Emotional and cultural support helps students engage at school. Emotional support, as explained by RS1-PR:

makes a difference because the Aboriginal children associate with these people. They trust them. Both of my aides work in the classrooms. They work very strongly on welfare orientation. If a child is troubled or having a bad day or whatever they can go to them. If a child loses itself, M will walk out behind them when they are running away. ... That's part of their role as far as I'm concerned, to be there for the kids that need them when they need them. It's the playing with them. ... Auntie G ... the kids love her. They tell her things that I don't know. Therefore she will often come—if there has been a racist thing ... they will tell her. She will bring it to me ... will have a chat ... [She's] A conduit, but she's also part of the action with it. She wouldn't just tell me and I'll do it. We do it together.

The importance of cultural support is demonstrated when RS4-PR:

... brought T [Aboriginal Education Officer] in because of the expertise with cultural dance and Indigenous understandings. So he's able to mentor these kids ... That was deliberate to—for those kids who were disassociated [in school] with everything to gain a sense of identity (RS4-PR).

Keep an eye on students for parents. For parents the knowledge of Aboriginal staff in the school makes them feel that their children are in a safe environment.

Aboriginal staff have always been great. If anything has happened, I know L [AEO] was keeping an eye on L (student) (RS2-P1).

I think because you know if there's ever a problem she's always there. ... I've never had any problems that she hasn't been able to fix (RS3-P3).

it's somewhere for them to go, to talk to someone. They might feel that they need someone different than just the teacher to talk to (RS4-P1).

They've got that person to go to in the school if they come across any racism. ... I just said, well, you know, if you have that trouble, go and see Auntie G [AEO] (RS1-P2).

Support for teachers to assist students. Teachers mentioned that Aboriginal staff are invaluable in providing support, to assist them in working with Aboriginal students.

I talk to AEO of course. ... I learned from them. Some students just don't like bull-faced white people leaning into their face and saying you will behave (RS1-T3).

She has sort of got the inside story with a few of them and that helps. ... she acts as a go between to—between you and them so if you don't have a personal relationship ... and she sits in on your PLPs ... she helps with them feeling more confident and more positive about coming into the class (RS2-T2).

Because they're so supportive and helpful. They know all the kids in the school not just the Aboriginals and so if I was having a problem with any kid, it didn't have to just be an Aboriginal student, I know I could come here and they'd have some idea or some resource to deal with it (RS3-T1).

I think when you have this many students from an Aboriginal background, I think, as a teacher, I feel very well-supported. I can go and I can ask for support and I can ask questions and we work together for the kids. I do think that's important (RS4-T3).

Aboriginal staff plays a pivotal role working with students, parents and school staff, to improve stability in the school for Aboriginal students.

Stakeholders—School Condition 7: Recognition of Aboriginality

Aboriginality was seen as an important condition of success for the parents, particularly in the school's context for their children. A number of important themes emerged and are outlined below.

Theme 7.1: Pride in identity. The recognition of Aboriginality was important to give students a sense of pride in the school.

He is very proud of his Aboriginal heritage Yeah, I think to him that is important ... he's really proud (MS2-P1).

Aboriginal students' parents saw recognition of students' Aboriginality by the school as crucial to success.

For teachers, recognising the student's identities was paramount if you want them to succeed. Comments that support this include:

We've got to support all our students and they all have their own needs, they all have their own interests, they all have their own backgrounds. They've got to feel valued. They've got to feel that they can contribute and they've got to feel good about themselves. ... Once they have those things, then they're in a good position to succeed (MS2-T2).

Another teacher stated that the strength a student derived from recognition of their Aboriginality remained crucial:

if they're strong, proud, confident, resilient people then they're going to put their hand up and answer a question, whether they think that they're right or wrong. ... if they're feeling shame or they don't want to be a part of it, then their academics aren't going to increase. So when you look at all of the cultural stuff that they get to do within the region and within the school ... it brings them up to be really strong, which can then impact on their academic work (MS3-T3).

Recognising Aboriginal students' Aboriginality was believed to have positive outcomes for schools too. This was identified by teacher RS3-T1 who said that:

We are proud of the fact that we have Aboriginals in the school ... We're acknowledging them and showing their importance.

The importance of cultural identity in the school creates a sense of belonging, as one parent stated:

the Aboriginal kids. They had learned a dance and they could speak Dunghutti, and that just made her so proud, you know? She was so excited, ... She just thinks it's great. ... It makes her feel like she belongs (RS1-P4).

For Aboriginal staff recognition of Aboriginality in the school was demonstrated through being able to provide cultural support to the students in the school:

I actually think it's the kids that have the most want for the cultural knowledge. ... All kids. ... They'll ask me stuff. ... I've got a lot of artefacts. ... Anything they just don't know about culture, they always come and ask me (RS4-AS1).

Building pride in, and ability to carry cultural traditions into the school, assisted students to maintain and enhance their cultural identity and strengthen community engagement in the school environment.

Theme 7.2: Student connection. For some teachers, the student's strength of identity was used to create greater bonds between the Aboriginal students in the school, for example MS3-T3 designed a learning outcome for her students so that Aboriginal students wrote a book about being Aboriginal and what they sometimes had to face. She recounted a time when the students started to work on the book another student had questioned the students about their Aboriginality asking:

“what are you doing here”, and the Aboriginal student replied, “We're going to write a book about how we're Aboriginal. The [other] kid turned around and said, “what you're not Aboriginal, what are you doing here?” ... from that experience I noticed the Aboriginal students really growing closer together because it's that shared experience isn't it? They've got that connectedness, they've got that shared identity and that shared experience of we're always having to face this discrimination and so we're together on this and they've got that bond (MS3-T3).

Aboriginal students created additional support and connections and this enable them to do well academically.

Theme 7.3: Recognition empowers students and parents. Acknowledging the lack of Aboriginal recognition in the Aboriginal students' parents' time at school and now providing that recognition for students empowers the Aboriginal community, as stated by RS3-T1:

it's even more so with the Aboriginal parents, because, like if they were young adults when I was going through school. If I'm not getting any education about Aboriginal history at school, they wouldn't have got any recognition of being an Aboriginal person, going through school or in their early lives.

In terms of building resilience and self-worth, recognition of Aboriginality in the school was understood as important for students and their parents, as one teacher acknowledged:

So I think that recognition has empowered both the kids and empowered the parents as well. So I think parents are probably taking an active—a more active role in their Aboriginality as well and making sure that their Aboriginal kids are seen as pretty much full members of our society (MS3-T1).

For parents it is understanding where the kids have come from and where they are heading is important. Their identity and recognition of that by the school is crucial, because family history, pride and determination as Aboriginal people and children understanding the impact on families, contributes significantly to the Aboriginal student's drive to gain an education for self and family, as this parent explains:

We've got a family with a very proud family history. My daughter spent a lot of time, every day, with Uncle Chicka [respected Elder] ... she learns a bit more about the history, Aboriginal history and about what Uncle Chicka and a lot of the Elders have done and are still doing and why things are the way they are (MS3-P1).

Another parent said in having Aboriginality recognised in the school:

Well, it makes them proud of who they are and where they come from. They don't forget their culture. Then it gives the other kids [non-Aboriginal] an understanding of our culture (MS3-P5).

Recognition of Aboriginality provided the foundation for strength in identity in the school and clearly affected the academic performance of the student, which in turn has consequences for the school community and the Aboriginal community.

Theme 7.4: Recognition due to staff connection. Interestingly, sometimes the push for Aboriginal recognition in the school came from the principal's experience, as one Aboriginal staff member RS1-AS2 commented on his principal and why things have improved for Aboriginal students:

she spent a lot of time at Wilcannia—from the Aboriginal perspective ... she's aware of lots of issues ... She knows the kids individually ... she's approachable ... she has an open rapport with most of the parents. ... tries to get all of us involved in as much of the community stuff that's happening, so our kids don't miss out.

For a parent it was that her principal has a more personal connection to ensure cultural recognition in the school:

The previous principal had Aboriginal heritage himself (not publically known). ... so myself and another member of the Aboriginal community and the Principal set up and started running the ASSPA (Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Association) Committee here in this school. ... the school has been very supportive of the Aboriginal kids ... they've had a big acceptance of their culture and their background. ... very supportive environment in the school and I think that he had a very big part in it (MS1-S2).

The personal engagement of school executive in the overall process of Aboriginal education with targeted programs and support for Aboriginal students and engagement with Aboriginal parents was essential in providing support in the school system.

Theme 7.5: Recognition through community engagement. Another principal, who privately acknowledged his Aboriginal heritage, highlighted that respect of Aboriginal students stemmed from understanding Kinship and the way this linked the school to the Aboriginal community:

Aboriginal kids need to build a relationship. ... Really I think that comes from ... the whole notion of the extended family. An Aboriginal child actually has to see you as part of their extended family (RS4-PR).

Some principals took on board getting parents engaged through their participation in the school:

When it was awards time, I actually got the parents to come up on stage to present [the awards] to their children. ... Just little things you know. Owning that achievement (RS1-PR).

The recognition of students' Aboriginality by the school community for another principal was again by engaging with Aboriginal family and the community:

I think the key element is getting into the community and getting to know the families. ... It's not just about having a presence. It's actually developing genuine relationships with people in the community and really building from there (MS3-PR).

Recognition of Aboriginality in the school was seen as vital to maintain students' identity and allow them to engage in the school environment.

Stakeholders–School Condition 8: Curriculum and Aboriginal Studies

Curriculum and Aboriginal studies was a key condition for school staff. The issues raised about both were identified as:

Theme 8.1: Curriculum for Aboriginal students. All the schools involved in the research had created specific programs to support Aboriginal students in gaining high academic outcomes, operating from the executive through to the teachers. In addressing her style of teaching MS3-T3 saw strength based methods for Aboriginal students as her operative:

It's a bit of a strength-based model where you're not just closing the gap or looking at the weaknesses, but you're taking what they can do really well and you're working to strengthen students (MS3-T3).

Principals saw the approach in creating improved outcomes came from improved understanding of the students' outcomes from data generated through tests and using these in planning cycles, as with RS1-PR:

We will collect our data and get a bit of an idea of—through the year where we are ... That pulls up some of the teaching aspects. ... basically we've got our school plan. ... Then it's usually executive team, we sit around and throw around some ideas of how we can do things differently or what we will keep or throw out depending on the cohort coming through. ... I take it into the staffroom I said okay, here are your options. ... We decide on all those things and go backwards and forwards between staff. Then we develop the plan and decide our big directions for the year so we know where we're going.

Principals highlighted how knowledge of students' needs to be assisted with curriculum in order to target students' needs. Sometimes this was about educational needs, as outlined by RS2-PR:

I think high expectations. Sometimes you could say same expectations. ... I think also developing really good practices in terms of accelerated literacy. ... That comes from

really good, explicit teaching and it comes from teaching standard Australian English. You have to acknowledge and appreciate Aboriginal English, but you do not help someone pass our curriculum if you do not teach them, and that's our job—standard Australian English. ... We're in this job for kids. Kids come first, not me and not parents and not staff.

For other schools it was emotional and social support as shown by RS1-PR:

We highlighted a group of 18 kids, a lot of them Aboriginal and boys who were constantly in trouble, very little anger management. ... T my assistant principal (AP) and all my AEO staff have got involved. ... They did trust initiatives and all kinds of things and basically just got to know them. That bond has been great. It's been great for the families too because they've been much happier.

All schools in the research spoke of the need to have a clear understanding of their Aboriginal students' needs to provide appropriate educational and support services.

Theme 8.2: Aboriginal perspectives and content. Teaching the curriculum from an Aboriginal perspective was not mentioned by parents, but was important for teachers and principals. With one teacher discussing the importance of including Aboriginal views in dissecting and discussing history:

Being able to adapt, being able to cater for different types of students. Definitely just being able to adapt a lesson, cultural sensitivity, so if we are doing a topic on British colonisation ... you need to be culturally sensitive ... we looked at it from the aspect of the Aboriginals as well ... experimenting, discussing, seeing what they thought about it so that it wasn't just—that's history ... not accept what I'm telling them or what the books are telling them ... we go a bit deeper (RS3-T1).

In working on Aboriginal curriculum the advance for schools has been the development of more appropriate resources in the schools to use in teaching, as stated by one principal:

it's been here where we've really been able to develop cultural programs that have got depth. We've got a lot of resources and increasingly seeing resources in the term (RS1-PR).

Better resources had meant improvements in teaching Aboriginal perspectives and content, demonstrated by the following examples by teachers:

I think we do a fantastic job on our stage ... in terms of our Aboriginal perspectives in our COGS units. Especially with our government unit and looking at successful Aboriginal—we did a COG study on—once a jolly swagman ... and the Aboriginality around that and the gold. ... we did our own programming, based on the COGS, we source a lot of good reading material (MS2-T2).

we've looked at British colonisation. ... we've had more of a focus on the Aboriginal side of history. How did their world change? How did their life change? Linking in excursions through that. We went across to the Botany Bay National Park at Kurnell there. The kids had a brilliant time, again linking in with Aboriginal history and Aboriginal things that had happened. ... they've got to have both sides of the view, of the coin and be able to have the knowledge to be able to work out their own understanding (MS3-T1).

Aboriginal perspectives and content leads to improved engagement for Aboriginal students and greater in-depth studies for all students.

Section Summary

This section addressed the perceptions of stakeholders on what conditions contribute to improved academic outcomes for high achieving Aboriginal students in the school environment. Significantly, the conditions highlighted were in line with Aboriginal students' perceptions. In summary these conditions were: what is a good teacher for Aboriginal students; reading competence; school infrastructure which supports Aboriginal students; Aboriginal students representing their schools; importance of friends; Aboriginal staff; recognition of Aboriginality in the school and curriculum and Aboriginal content, which all contribute to supporting Aboriginal students' high academic outcomes.

The next section provides an analysis of stakeholders' views on conditions which support high academic outcomes for Aboriginal students in the home environment.

Results Research Question 3: Aboriginal Students' Home Conditions for Academic Success

Section Overview

Multiple stakeholders were asked what they perceive as necessary conditions in the Aboriginal student's home environment, and activities outside the home and school that contributed to academic success. Aboriginal students highlighted seven home conditions that they believe supported their academic outcomes. The conditions mentioned by stakeholders concur with the students' perceptions; their additional four sets of conditions are outlined as below.

Stakeholders–Aboriginal Students Home Condition 1: Stable Home Environment

Whilst students did not discuss their personal home environment, they did speak about how wonderful their families were and what was evident was that the students had happy supportive homes. The students were well fed and felt safe in their home environments. Additionally they felt loved and valued. As one parent RS4-P3 stated:

Stable environment. We owe her, do you know what I mean? We bought her into the world, we owe her the best we can give her to become the best adult she can become.

The parents of the students came from a range of circumstances, married, divorced, single, and grandparents raising children (see Appendix 6), sometimes conditions have created trauma which can create some troubles at home for a while and then when home life settles, school life gets better for the children. As presented by RS2-P2:

I've been living in a gay relationship for a long time, so K [student] has seen that. ... [become more] open and understanding of different people's needs. ... and as I said, he still has his contact with his dad, so he's got the best of both worlds, really. Stability in family, emotional and stable family – he doesn't see me and dad fight, so every weekend when C [father] picks him up—every phone call and that—we're talking more amicably now.

Different family arrangements mean a range of economic circumstances from very poor and living through Centrelink funds, working public servants, professional people, doctors and teachers, through to owning their own businesses. In the overwhelming majority parents had created safe home environments, which the children took for granted. A few parents spoke candidly about having been—in the past—in unsafe living conditions, which they had been able to turn around and they had seen the positive effects on their children particularly with raising school achievement levels. As explained by RS1-P4:

as a family, we've come so far as well, you know? Like, I was in a really bad place. I had drug problems ... I couldn't help her. ... everything just fell apart, you know? It was awful. It really was, but as a family, we've just come so far, and I think we've been blessed to have this school, because she has done so well.

Additionally it was clear that the parents valued education and saw value in education for their children:

A single mum, wanting better quality of life. Wouldn't want to wish this life upon anybody. I don't know why we got dealt this hand. They say life's what you make it. ... I just can't give up because I would have given up a long, long time ago (MS3-P1).

If you can get parents and families to work together you've got a bigger—I don't know, influence on the kids at school (RS1-P1).

Teachers saw parents' engagement and involvement with their child's education as well, with statements such as:

kids who have done well, because their parents were involved in what they were doing at school (RS1-T2).

They're there and they keep on top of him and they value education (MS2-T3).

Stable home conditions with parents who value education have provided sound foundations for students achieving high academic outcomes.

Stakeholders—Aboriginal Students Home Condition 2: Parents Knowledge of Student

For students, personal development of the parents' knowledge of their child's abilities and learning needs was seen as instrumental.

Theme 2.1: Parents' knowledge of student's needs. Parents' knowledge of students was seen as foundational for appropriate support to gain sound academic outcomes. One caregiver noted that his child who had transferred to the current school, had not flourished at his previous school:

I don't know why. I can't put a finger on it, I'm not blaming them ... It just didn't work for him. But he quickly adjusted at this school and quickly made friends and I think the fact that having K [his aunt] here really helped him ... I think that that was good for him. (RS3-P1).

As one parent candidly discussed the history of her child's situation:

With L [student], since she was, like, three, J [husband] and I would say—at preschool ... there's something not quite right, because she was this outgoing, bright, happy child, but you'd give her a direction and she'd get to the cupboard and go, what am I here for? ... by Year One, we got a teacher, who said, I think it's a language problem. ... well, we interviewed with the counsellor first. ... Nothing much came of that. ... and we were at a loss ... If you didn't know L [student], you couldn't pick up on it, because everybody would say, she's such a bright, intelligent child. Yes, she is, but we would know there's something not quite clicking over. ... Jim's program. ... It would have been Year Three ... he would look at your child, obviously individually, and say, this is what I think. Then you would do, well, Jim's work. Which, with L, ... the two halves of her brain; they didn't work independently of each other when they needed to. ... if she'd do something with one hand, the other hand would start copying it. So, an intensive program with Jim in years 3-4 ... It definitely helped her (RS2-P4).

And for the following parents it was knowledge of health needs:

her eyes—she had something wrong with one of her eyes, and so for a while there she couldn't see the board, ... she was falling a bit behind, but once we got her eyes checked

and fixed, she just caught up straight away. ... Kindergarten ... we recognised it at home (MS3-P4).

She has actually got the loss of hearing for your lower sounds. ... She's a kid who will put up with a lot of pain, and you don't know until she's like so down that she can't sort of pick herself up. So, she could have an earache and we wouldn't know about it (RS2-P4).

For these parents it also meant having the confidence, conviction and communication skills to discuss health issues with teachers.

Theme 2.2: Parents speaking up. Parents saw supporting their children as speaking up in the school to support their child, as the following parent suggests:

when you've got children with learning difficulties and you need that extra help, you have to be out there and stating what you want. You have to really get in there and do it, because otherwise if you don't fight for your kids, no-one else will. ... If you don't know the system, you have to find out (MS1-P1).

Theme 2.3: Understanding the system. For parents, understanding how the system operates and how they can assist their child was a key issue. For RS1-P5, understanding his student's academic progress was a revelation, when he and his wife took their children around Australia for a year and they had to learn how to teach the children through distance education. The father explained:

one thing that I found really confronting when I did it, is when day after day you sit down with different levels of books and read with your kids and you find out ... how poor her reading was ... I think because as a parent when you come to a school and you ask how your children are going, you get stock standard responses. "Oh no, she's doing okay" (RS1-P5).

What this father has shown is that it is extremely important for parents to understand the education system; so knowing what the levels are and what questions to ask, is a key condition for parents.

The personal development of a student would not occur without parents' knowledge of their child and their willingness to push to get students' personal requirements met. For many

parents it was important to have family connections in the school to help students thrive and feel comfortable and secure in the school. This was not directly mentioned by Aboriginal students, though the majority did mention relationships with Aboriginal staff, Aboriginal elders coming into the schools and the large numbers of cousins and extended family they had at their schools which helped them feel connected and engaged with their school. Additionally, for parents it was knowledge of their child's particular health and learning needs which assisted to support the students' high academic outcomes. The key issue here for parents was how to become engaged and learning how the system operates to ensure they were able to ask in-depth questions.

Stakeholders—Aboriginal Students Home Condition 3: Parents' Support Through School

For the students, knowing that their parents were in the school, or able to come to the school, was a key condition of academic success.

Theme 3.1: Parent comfort in school. For the parents it was being comfortable to go into the school setting, as parent MS3-P1 describes:

I'm not uncomfortable going anywhere. ... It wouldn't matter if I was walking into a jail or walking into a public school, walking into a library. I don't know. Maybe I'm a bit of a chameleon. I've learnt to adapt.

For a parent, dealing successfully with the school was a skill they had to learn. RS1-P6 noted that they probably did not go into the school often enough in their child's early schooling, but they were forced to become involved:

It wasn't until there was one incident at school where we thought no, we're not doing this anymore. We're going to be upfront and approach the school when something upsets us or the kids. ... There was an incident ... with bullying, he was accused of being a bully. ... So these two kids—I could see my child and this other—go head to head, I knew it was coming because he kept coming home and talking to us.

The parents were frustrated after going to the principal to discuss the bullying issue and felt that nothing was being done until the white family complained, then their child was labeled “the bully”:

we felt like we were discriminated against a bit I suppose.

The parent went on to say:

When someone tells you your kid's a bully like we actually sat back and thought God, does he do it—and we knew that he wasn't. ... It was just—yeah - it blew up. ... Once that all got resolved, things settled and believe it or not him and the kid are friends now (RS1-P6).

Theme 3.2: Creating a link with the school. For teachers, parent involvement in supporting the school and their children was important as teacher RS3-T2 states:

the parents, those who come to school and get involved in things, those kids seem to appreciate that and they think that mum and dad value education more, so they tend to do quite well. I think some parents aren't involved 'cause they had some bad experiences at school so they might be a bit scared. ... We found that sometimes if you personally ask someone they're more inclined to come up here and help rather than just sending out a blank letter (RS3-T2).

Involvement in the school for many of the parents meant creating a link for cultural education at the school:

I'm on the board of the [Aboriginal] Land Council here ... I'm the chairman of our Aboriginal child and family centre ... Their identity is important to them, it's important to us that they know their identity. We do language programs in the school here sometimes and all our 'Welcome to Countries' are done in language, I'm involved in a lot of the Gamilaroi language programs that we do here (RS3-P1).

Parents were required to develop an understanding of the school system in order to work in their children's best interests, and in the process, they needed their own cultural validation within the school.

Stakeholders—Aboriginal Students Home Condition 4: Out of School Activities

Parents spoke about the importance of out of school activities for the development of skills such as teamwork, working with other people and learning how to care for animals as a condition

of success, which aided in their children gaining sound academic outcomes. Parents identified a variety of benefits students gained from playing sport, such as:

I wanted him to learn to play team sports and play fair, you know, and the only way to learn to play fair is, be in a team. ... looking after his welfare for the long run, more or less. ... because of the rapport he has with the boys ... when we do go on sporting trips he's happy to see the teammates and it's different, weekends, than it is school (RS2-P2).

Other parents also used their involvement in other external community organisations to support skills development for their children, as one parent MS1-P2 related, in terms of her child going to before and after school care, where she had been on the committee. Because of their involvement this parent was able to:

insist when they [the children] first go to the Centre that they sit down and do homework.

Other parents related the busy schedule of their children:

Mondays is ATYP which is drama at the Sydney Theatre Company. Tuesdays he has a one-on-one cricket training session. ... Then Thursday he has his normal cricket training. ... then he's got a voluntary cricket training session on Saturday morning, and then cricket goes for pretty much half the day Sunday (MS2-P1).

For students keeping busy and active was also important and the parents mentioned that their children were involved in a variety of hobbies or other activities such as scouts and swimming clubs and a few children were occupied in their free time by caring for animals such as horses. All parents of all the students who engaged in this research supported children in extensive out of school activities, in order to develop friendship networks and to develop skills they thought the students may not gain through school.

Section Summary

This section presented the perspectives of stakeholders on home conditions which support Aboriginal students' successful academic outcomes. The following section provides a summary of this chapter.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of stakeholders: parents, teachers, principals and Aboriginal staff perceptions of conditions of success as contributing to sound academic outcomes for Aboriginal students. Significantly, the stakeholder perceptions were aligned with conditions raised by Aboriginal students in relation to Research Questions 1.1, 2.1 and 3.1 (see Chapter 5).

The first section addressed the personal conditions of academic success for Aboriginal students, through identifying the importance of students' confidence, students being personable, students' personal drive, talented and giftedness of students and parents' knowledge of students' personal learning needs.

The second section presented the school environment conditions to support successful outcomes for Aboriginal students which involved good teachers and their capacity to engage with a student's Aboriginality, reading competence, school infrastructure, school representation, friends, Aboriginal staff, recognition of Aboriginality, and curriculum in the school.

The third section highlighted home conditions identified as supporting Aboriginal students' high academic outcomes, such as, a stable home environment and parents' value of education, parents' knowledge of students and support through the school to ensure sound academic outcomes, and out of school activities which provide additional development of skills for students which enhance their engagement and involvement at school.

In the following Chapter 9 a discussion will be undertaken to synthesise the findings from the data of Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students (see Chapter 7) and from stakeholders (parents, teachers, principals and Aboriginal staff) in this present chapter. The synthesis from all stakeholders will be presented as four dimensions, with their sets of conditions and themes which enhance academic success for Aboriginal students.

CHAPTER 9

CROSS ANALYSIS: ABORIGINAL STUDENTS AND STAKEHOLDERS' PERSPECTIVES OF CONDITIONS OF ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

Determining and understanding conditions which seed academic success for Aboriginal students fulfils a multitude of goals. For the student it provides happy memories of school, fruitful friendships, positive engagement with educational systems, and foundations for lifelong learning and skills which allow the student to enter the Australian social system on an equitable basis. Specifically for Aboriginal students, school should not be a place of assimilation but recognition and respect for cultural practices (Buckskin, 2012; Campbell, 2000; Price, 2012; Rose, 2012). Having Aboriginal students succeed at school enables parents to have faith in a school system which previously sought to exclude or subsume Aboriginal people and have positive interactions with schooling through their children (Friedel, 1999; NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2010; Noonan, 2005). Additionally when teachers have quality teaching skills which support students from a diversity of social and cultural backgrounds, they have satisfying engagements with Aboriginal people, develop greater understanding of Aboriginal people their histories and cultures, and provide a sense of fulfilment as a teacher (Buckskin, 2012; Gambley, 2005; Partington, Richer, Godfrey, Harslett & Harrison, 1999; Rose, 2012). For principals Aboriginal students affords them the opportunity to acquire cultural competence. Principals are then able to use cultural competence within their schools to create positive learning environments and systematic support for students, teachers and the Aboriginal community (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2006). Principals are then able to support Aboriginal staff to provide a cultural bridge within the school which allows them to support Aboriginal students academically and culturally, whilst also supporting their communities and schools (Munns, O'Rourke & Bodkins-Andrews, 2013; Price, 2012; Schwab, 2001).

The additional impacts for Aboriginal students in achieving sound academic outcomes, benefits Aboriginal people by providing skills which build capacity and assist them to work successfully within culturally different social systems. For Australia as a nation it improves cultural competence, and increases the human potential of all its citizens.

If we wish Aboriginal students to achieve the same academic outcomes as other Australian students it is imperative we understand the conditions which best support Aboriginal students who are achieving sound academic outcomes. Primarily understanding these conditions may provide the tools for implementing more appropriate strategies to raise educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. The best way of ascertaining conditions which support high academic outcomes is from the students themselves along with their immediate stakeholders; their parents, teachers, principals, and Aboriginal staff. Hence this research sought to provide a voice for Aboriginal students and the stakeholders who work together to ensure these Aboriginal students achieve sound academic outcomes.

This chapter provides a consolidation of conditions of academic success as discussed by Metropolitan and Regional (see Chapter 7) Aboriginal students ($N=34$) and as described by stakeholders (see Chapter 8) involved in this research. The chapter presents the cross analysis results and discusses the findings from in-depth interviews with Aboriginal students and stakeholders; and also synthesises and illustrates conditions of success which lead to positive outcomes for Aboriginal students. It also compares and contrasts the results of the cross analysis and discussion of the significant conditions of success identified by the multiple stakeholders as impacting positively on Aboriginal students' academic outcomes.

The chapter for ease of contextualisation is set out under five sections. Section 1 examines Aboriginal students' priority conditions for academic success which assesses the response from Metropolitan and Regional students in their photographic prioritisation exercise. The prioritisation analysis has created four dimensions within which four sets of conditions are grouped: 1) School conditions which support academic success for Aboriginal students; 2) Home conditions which support academic success for Aboriginal students; 3) Friends as a condition of academic support for Aboriginal students; and 4) Aboriginal students' personal conditions for academic success.

These four dimensions are then set out in sections 2-4 being: Dimension 1: School conditions which support Academic success for Aboriginal students–Good Teachers for Aboriginal Students; Reading Competence; Good Schools for Aboriginal Students; and Aboriginal Students and School Representation. Dimension 2: Home Conditions Which Support Academic Success for Aboriginal Students–Stable Home Environment; Parent’s Engagement; and Out of School Activities. Dimension 3: Friends as a Condition of Academic Support for Aboriginal Students–Importance of Friends; and Friend’s Personal Support. Dimension 4: Aboriginal Students’ Personal Conditions for Academic Success–Aboriginal Students’ Personal Strengths; Aboriginal Students’ Academic Strengths; and Aboriginal Students’ Personal Drive.

The following section highlights what Aboriginal students prioritised as their conditions for academic success.

Aboriginal Students' Prioritised Conditions for Academic Success

Section Overview

Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students were asked to take ten digital photographs of items which they considered supported their academic outcomes (see Chapter 6). These items were then prioritised by the students (see Chapter 6) to provide a snapshot of their key conditions of academic support; these conditions have been grouped under four dimensions of support. Under each of the four dimension of support are a number of conditions initially raised by Aboriginal students, then allied by and contributed to from stakeholders; these have been further refined and are discussed in the following four sections within this chapter. This section synthesises and illustrates the four dimensions of support as prioritised by Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students through their individual photographic sessions.

Priority Conditions for Aboriginal Students' Academic Success

In consolidating the conditions prioritised by the students (see Chapter 7) the conditions fell within four dimensions of support: (i) school conditions; (ii) home conditions; (iii) friends' conditions of support; and (iv) personal conditions. Figure 9.1, below, tabulates the number of times students mentioned these four dimensions of support (0%-100% vertical columns) indicated by the four bands of colour within each vertical columns and the priority order in which the students mentioned those dimensions (1-10 horizontal) as aligned with the students' prioritisation of themes. That is, students took up to ten digital photos to demonstrate the key conditions which they considered supported their academic outcomes and then placed these in priority order; these were then placed into four dimensions: school, home, friends and self, which are represented by the four bands (see Figure 9.1) within each column of students' 1-10 priority orders for conditions of success. For example, in Figure 8.1, Column 1, represents the first priority condition mentioned by all students, whereby 50% of the students mentioned school conditions as their first dimension of support; 40% of students rated home conditions as their first priority of support; 5% of students rated friends as a support condition as their first priority; and 5% of students rated personal conditions as their first priority in supporting academic success. Each successive column is the following priority mentioned by students (1-10) and the

number of times (bands within each column) students mentioned each set of conditions, that is, dimension of support: school, home, friends, and personal.

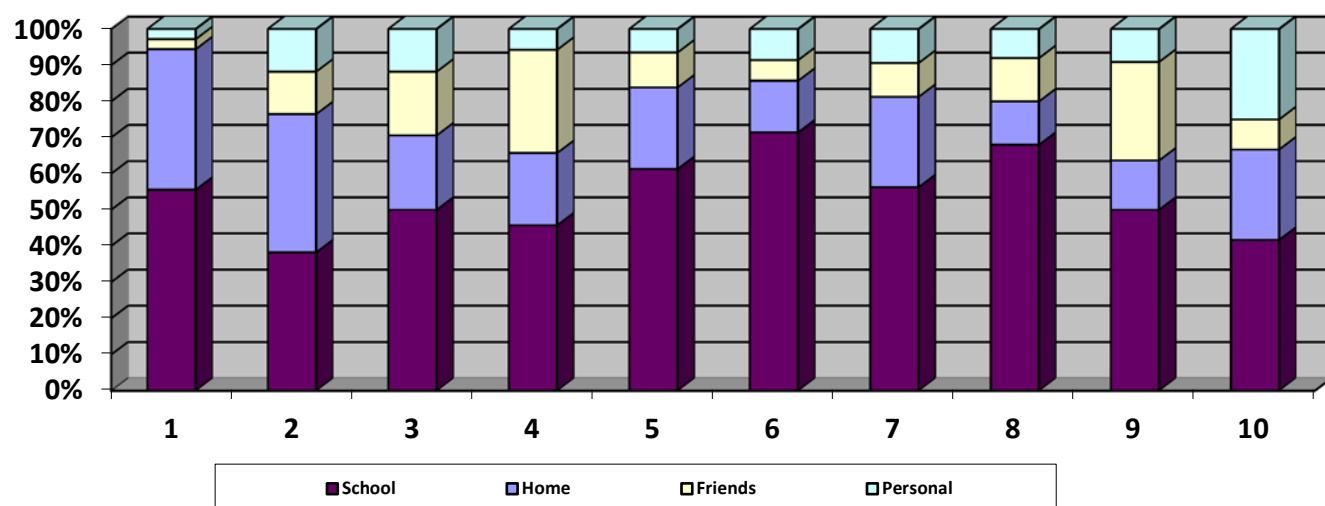


Figure 9.1 Aboriginal Students' Priority Conditions of Academic Success

As can be clearly seen across the 1-10 prioritised conditions (columns), school conditions were a significant condition in each priority order, except in column two where school conditions were mentioned by 30% of students and home conditions were mentioned by 40% of students as the highest second priority condition by all students. As such the dimensions of school and home conditions were revealed as the highest conditions of academic success for students across the ten priorities; followed by friends—cited as a key condition in priority order in the third, fourth and ninth priority orders (columns); then students' own personal conditions of success, whilst mentioned consistently across all ten priority orders was listed as a high level condition in the tenth priority order (column). Interestingly, the quantitative data suggests school conditions were the highest priority; yet, in the interview process students generally talked about home conditions first as their first condition of support, then their friends, then themselves, and finally the school conditions. Hence whilst the greater number of students spoke about school conditions, the first condition students referred to on a personal level was home conditions, indicating they saw home conditions as their major condition of support.

For ease of discussion the researcher has decided to use the quantitative data to determine the order of the four dimensions of support—school, home, friends and personal—raised by students (see Chapter 7) and in turn stakeholders (see Chapter 8) who highlighted a number of conditions and themes which have been grouped under each dimension; these have been outlined in Table 9.1: Dimensions and Conditions of Academic Success for Aboriginal Students, as below.

Each of the four dimensions, their conditions, themes, and sub-themes is expanded in the following four sections of this chapter.

Table 9.1 Dimensions and Conditions of Academic Success for Aboriginal Students

DIMENSION 1	
SCHOOL CONDITIONS WHICH SUPPORT ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS	
1.1 Good Teachers For Aboriginal Students	1.1.1 Teachers engage with Aboriginal students 1.1.2 Teacher's pedagogical practice with Aboriginal students 1.1.3 Teachers engage with Aboriginal students' parents
1.2 Reading Competence	1.2.1 Reading competence 1.2.2 Reading competence leads to academic success
1.3 Good Schools For Aboriginal Students	1.3.1 School ideology 1.3.2 School staff 1.3.3 School curriculum and Aboriginal Studies 1.3.4 Recognition of Aboriginality
1.4 Aboriginal Students' School Representation	1.4.1 Aboriginal students' self-esteem representing the school 1.4.2 Aboriginal student representation within the school 1.4.3 Aboriginal student representation outside the school
DIMENSION 2	
HOME CONDITIONS WHICH SUPPORT ACADEMIC SUCCESS FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS	
2.1 Stable Home Environment	2.1.1 Stable home environment
2.2 Parents' Engagement	2.2.1 Parents' support and engagement with school 2.2.2 Parents' knowledge of school systems 2.2.3 Home resources
2.3 Out Of School Activities	2.3.1 Extended family 2.3.2 Sports, hobbies and animals 2.3.3 Academic support 2.3.4 Cultural activities
DIMENSION 3	
FRIENDS AS A CONDITION OF ACADEMIC SUPPORT FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS	
3.1 Importance Of Friends	3.1.1 Importance of friends at school
3.2 Friends' Personal Support	3.2.1 Friends and academic support 3.2.2 Friends and emotional support
DIMENSION 4	
ABORIGINAL STUDENTS' PERSONAL CONDITIONS FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS	
4.1 Aboriginal Students' Personal Strengths	4.1.1 Personal strengths and weaknesses 4.1.2 Confidence, concentration, good listener 4.1.3 Resilience 4.1.4 Talents and gifts
4.2 Aboriginal Students' Academic Strengths	4.2.1 Good reader 4.2.2 Good in one subject 4.2.3 Listen to teacher 4.2.4 Complete work 4.2.5 Independent worker 4.2.6 Good English language skills
4.3 Aboriginal Students' Personal Drive	4.3.1 Personal drive 4.3.2 Future goals 4.3.3 Mentally and physically active

Section Summary

This section introduced the priority conditions which Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students considered supported their high academic outcomes, these have been grouped under four support dimensions, firstly their school environment; secondly their home environment; thirdly their friends; and fourthly what they personally contributed to achieving high academic outcomes. Aboriginal students and their stakeholders – parents, teachers, principals and Aboriginal staff have contributed their perceptions to the formation of these conditions. Each of the four dimensions, conditions, themes and sub-themes is presented in the following sections, as an analysis of students and stakeholders' conditions of success.

The following section presents conditions highlighted as supporting Aboriginal students' academic outcomes in the school environment.

Dimension 1: School Conditions Which Support Academic Success for Aboriginal Students

Section Overview

Dimension one provides an analysis of what students and stakeholders revealed as four conditions in the school environment that they considered assisted Aboriginal students to do well academically. The first set of conditions outlined is what students and stakeholders perceive is a good teacher for Aboriginal students. The second set of conditions is reading competence for Aboriginal students. The third set of conditions is related to what is a good school for Aboriginal students. The fourth set of conditions is Aboriginal students' school representation. Within each of the four conditions of academic success in the school environment are listed the themes and within these are the sub-themes which have been highlighted as contributing to academic success for high achieving Aboriginal students.

School Condition 1.1: Good Teachers for Aboriginal Students

Hayes, Mills, Christie and Lingard (2006) and Ladwig (2007) agree that the "Quality Teaching Framework" determines that a teacher's ability to work with students from a variety of cultural backgrounds is an essential tool in the delivery of quality education. Hattie (2003) demonstrated that good teachers account for 30% variance and influence in students' positive outcomes. Hattie's assertion is supported in this research by students and stakeholders; as one Aboriginal staff member clarified the importance of good teachers when saying: *the key ingredient there is the teacher* (RS1-AS2).

Partington (2003) also believes that for Aboriginal students, good teaching requires the teacher to adapt to the needs of Aboriginal students. This research demonstrates that a good teacher for Aboriginal students' needs to take account of their engagement with Aboriginal students, their pedagogical practice with Aboriginal students and Aboriginal community engagement. As such the consensus is that quality teaching for Aboriginal students is dependent on the teacher's ability to teach across cultural groups as demonstrated in the discussions below.

Theme 1.1.1: Teachers engage with Aboriginal students. Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students classified good teachers—the first three sub-themes—as being dependent on the teachers being nice people ($n=21$), they did not get angry ($n=17$) and good teachers speak to students ($n=16$). The sub-themes started to vary at the fourth sub-theme which was for Metropolitan students that good teachers listen to students and for Regional students, that the teacher was a happy person (see Chapter 7). Hence, students saw a good teacher's engagement being demonstrated in personal contact with the teacher, as extolled by MS3-S3: *having a good relationship with the teachers really helps a lot.*

Teachers and Aboriginal staff also saw engagement with students as important:

developing a relationship—an understanding of who they are [Aboriginal students] and what they want and where they come from. ... I'm talking about family background as well ... family is so important to them (RS1-T4).

you've got to have a background and understanding of what they require, how they require it, when they require it and the relevance of what you're going to teach them. You're empathetic towards their needs, their responses, their interpretations of learning, success, failure and supporting their behaviour ... It's an adaptive world, a world of being flexible (RS1-T3).

RS2-AS1 emphasised good teachers as being sensitive and encouraging by stating:

they're sensitive not just to the cultural traditions but to families. They're sensitive to all the children's feelings and behaviours and try to understand where they're coming from. ... They want the child to succeed. ... they are encouraging these Indigenous students to apply themselves.

Good teachers use Aboriginal students' cultural identity, practices and learning styles as a strength base in the classroom. There is incorporation of individual students' academic strengths and weaknesses into teaching, as student RS1-S6 reflects: *They know my personality and attitude.* Students' language differences and needs are built into teaching, explained by RS3-T2 as: *you're always constantly rewording for this kid and that kid or making adjustments for different children.*

Good teachers do not denigrate students; and have a positive, respectful and personal relationship with Aboriginal students (Buckskin, 2012; Riley-Mundine; 2007; Rose, 2012; Yunkaporta, 1999). Teacher RS4-T1 explained:

I think the main thing is that if they feel valued as individuals and they can see the importance of what's happening, then I think students do a lot better.

Parent MS2-P1 commented that engagement with the teacher benefitted her child: *made him feel that he had something very significant to contribute, which feeds his confidence.*

In this research teachers' engagement with Aboriginal students was further defined as the teacher's approach to students, through having a personable nature, cultural competence and discipline skills as set out under the headings below.

Personable nature. Students in this research stated that good teachers did not get angry, they did not yell, they did not hold a grudge, and they spoke in a calm and mannerly way, and used a normal tone when speaking to students—this is perhaps reflective of cultural difference where tonality in Aboriginal languages is used. Eades (1993) in her studies on differences between Standard Australian English and Aboriginal English discusses the differences in use of tone in Aboriginal languages which have been carried over into Aboriginal English, where in Aboriginal communities when someone is angry or upset, high tones are used, students may be translating this with teachers who may speak in loud and high tones as anger, even when a teacher may not be angry. Good teachers were in this research also cited as, happy, humorous, told jokes, and students could have fun with the teacher. This is supported by student RS1-S1, in discussing their teacher, who explained: *he's really funny and it makes kids be happy to be around him.*

Good teachers were considered to provide emotional support for the students; are not judgemental; are not afraid to be emotional themselves; and admit when they are wrong. Students felt a good teacher was someone they had a personal connection with; this was supported by a number of teachers as: *having a connection with the kids and building up a personal rapport with them I think does more for the child* (RS2-T1). Connection with students was demonstrated by the teacher listening to students as MS3-S3 commented: *a good teacher is*

a teacher who wants to listen. Teachers' personal contact with Aboriginal students was seen as a key component in making a positive difference in teaching Aboriginal students, as commented by Aboriginal staff RS3-AS2: *That personalised contact is wonderful.*

Cultural competence. Teachers' recognition of students' Aboriginality as a strength was seen by stakeholders to create trust and respect with and for students. A component of teachers' cultural competency was the teacher's knowledge of a student's culture and family connections so that the teacher could relate to students. For teachers cultural competency meant ongoing education and training, and changing their perceptions:

As a teacher, you're also a learner as well. So you want to be learning something new every day, changing some of the stereotypes that you've got in your own head (MS3-T1).

little things, for instance like don't expect the eye contact all the time, those sorts of things. ... Cultural differences. That it is okay that when they're getting up and speaking in front of an audience, that no, they won't be looking at all the kids in the class. Little things. ... Yeah, because often if a teacher doesn't understand that, they will mark down the kid and saying they're not confident. ... But looking down, that's quite normal. If they [teachers] don't have that understanding right from the word go, the child can be penalised (RS4-T2).

As these teachers suggest, cultural competency leads to improved engagement with and understanding of working with Aboriginal students.

Discipline skills. A good teacher knows how to control order in the classroom to maintain high levels of work completion and uses a more personal approach for discipline with Aboriginal students. These teachers spoke to students one-to-one, in a quiet tone and shared their attention with all students. Students and teachers spoke about the teachers' good classroom control, where the teacher does not become too strict, or as one student said, become like: *a cop* (RS2-S6).

Good teachers' classroom control depends on listening to students for their input and needs; this was supported by teacher RS4-T1 as: *you need to listen to them and actually actively listen.* Additionally students stated that good teachers do not bully students and are not seen to be "mean" by picking on kids. Teachers do not embarrass students when they get something wrong;

are flexible in approaches to all students; and do not place students on detention as a regular means of controlling students. Students also felt good teachers allow students to be themselves as MS2-P1 commented in relation to her child that this: *allowed him to have a real voice*.

Personal contact between the teachers and Aboriginal students plays a critical role as noted by Gambley (2005) in assisting students' academic growth. Aboriginal students and their stakeholders relayed that academic growth was determinant on the students' feeling that school was a safe place; that they were cared for; and that students had a respected identity in the school. Teacher RS1-T3 categorised this as: *Aboriginal students like to know that you're there for them and they in turn expect something from you*.

Respect and awareness from the teacher as demonstrated through the attributes of: personable nature, cultural competence and discipline skills, makes students want to attend school and gave them positive personal connections through the teacher with the school which gave students the impetus to achieve sound academic results.

Theme 1.1.2: Teachers' pedagogical practice with Aboriginal students. The way a teacher works with Aboriginal students was a major condition mentioned by $n=27$ students and stakeholders. The top five pedagogical conditions for Regional Aboriginal students were that teachers provide: direct instruction; help students when asked; make learning fun; have sound subject knowledge; and are good communicators. The top five conditions of a good teacher for Metropolitan students were: teachers tell you how to do the work; teachers know students' strengths and weaknesses; teachers help when asked; teachers are good communicators; and teachers help students learn. Stakeholders supported students' perceptions and that pedagogical practice with Aboriginal students must ensure high expectations that challenged students, with realistic goals; explicit teaching; teachers must have specialist subject training; be inclusive of all students; be organised; and see their classroom as an extension of teaching practice (Hewitt, 2000; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003).

Ten areas for good pedagogical approaches with Aboriginal students are discussed under the following headings: direct instruction, helps students, makes learning fun, subject

knowledge, good communicator, knowledge of students' strengths and weaknesses, high expectation and challenges students, inclusive teaching and the teacher is organised.

Direct instruction, explicit teaching. Good teachers provided direct instruction and explicit teaching, for students this meant clear instructions as a process to understand the work. This is illustrated by RS2-S4, who commented on how, his teacher: *breaks it down (step by step) ... just kept on helping me* and for MS3-S3: *breaking it down making it easier*. Principals recognised explicit teaching in modelling and showing students how to do the work:

the good teachers of Aboriginal students, will recognise that it's more about the actual demonstration and the doing, the modelling of what you're trying to teach, rather than this is how I want it done (RS4-PR).

Help students. For students this was that a teacher assists when asked: *mainly when you ask them to help they help you* (MS1-S1). If teachers are busy, they will always remember the students who need help and come back to them, as noted by MS3-S3: *he'll tell you that he'll come back to you and he will*, and the teacher actively monitors student progression: *They ask you what you're stuck on and then they make sure you know what you're doing* (RS2-S1).

Make learning fun. Ensuring that students engage in the learning through fun, interactive and hands on activities was seen by students and teachers as a prime teaching tool: *he makes it fun and he talks to you* (RS2-S3). For teachers having fun lessons involved ensuring variety in the learning activity and having a more hands on approach for Aboriginal students:

I know that they're really hands-on learners, so for a maths activity I'll have one on the computers, one doing a sheet or something in their book, one with me, and then another hands-on game so that they can do it a different way (RS1-T1).

For other teachers it was engaging students through their making choices, such as with RS4-T3:

I try and give them the choices about topics and what they want to present on. If I want to teach them research skills, it doesn't matter what they research. So I like to give them a bit

of choice so that they're more engaged in what they're doing. ... Interactive and practical things too ... hands-on to do. Then I see the thinking come through to complete the task.

For students, teachers, and principals it was important for learning to be exciting and fun through appropriate learning activities for Aboriginal students.

Subject knowledge. Aboriginal students identified their best teachers as being those who knew their teaching subject, as stated by students RS1-S1: *she's good with HSIE*, and RS4-S1: *The teachers are really well taught to teach other kids. ... They teach us well ... teach a lot of different subjects, and teach them well.* Principals noted selection of teachers was instrumental in schools with Aboriginal students to ensure teachers taught what they were skilled in as general classroom teachers and as extension classes, as noted by principal, RS1-PR: *who has the skills to work best with those kids. ... the teachers get to teach what they are good at. What they are confident in.* The flow on effect is students who become engaged and develop enjoyment of subjects: *It made me think about maths, because in Year Four, one of my Year Four teachers I had taught me a lot about maths* (RS4-S2).

Good communicators. Teachers have good communication skills. Parents saw this as essential for students' understanding as: *if they're not understanding, they're not learning* (RS3-P4). Students saw this demonstrated as improved teaching: *Yeah good at communicating—if you don't understand it hell help you and he'll show you how simple it is* (MS3-S3). Aboriginal staff saw good communication stemming from the teacher's own confidence as a teacher and in ability to communicate across cultural groups, hence they could be flexible in their approaches to Aboriginal students:

Not judgemental but confident about being able to communicate with anyone on any level—someone that can communicate and have the ability to be able to adjust those communication levels so rather than just having a standard set of rules that have to apply or a standard set with a curriculum. Being so flexible and being able to adjust that to tailor suit the needs of their children (RS3-AS1).

Know students' strengths and weaknesses. Aboriginal students stated good teachers were those who knew students' strengths and weaknesses, that is had a greater holistic appreciation of

the student, as reflected in comments by MS3-S5: *What my behaviour's like and what I'm doing in class*. Teachers thought it was essential to understand each student's needs: *it's more getting to know the kids* (RS2-T1) and principal MS1-PR said: *to work out what they need to focus on in the class for that child*. Understanding individual student needs assisted in developing appropriate support and made the students feel valued:

I think the main thing is that if they feel valued as individuals and they can see the importance of what's happening, then I think students do a lot better (RS4-T1).

Many of the schools in this research also used Personalised Learning Plans (PLPs) to generate an improved understanding of students' personal and learning needs.

High expectations and challenge students. Teachers considered high expectations, along with challenging students with positive encouragement as a key tool for high Aboriginal student outcomes. This was reflected by teacher RS1-T2, as an approach taken by the school: *You expect them to achieve as to the best of their ability. You don't just assume that they can't achieve*. Students identified high expectations when teachers gave them harder work to do: *When things get too easy for me I can just go and tell her, but also she always gives me the opportunity to do more* (MS3-S6).

Therefore a key ingredient was that Aboriginal students in these schools were not told they could not achieve high academic outcomes but were challenged and encouraged to do better.

Inclusive teaching. Students considered the importance of teachers being inclusive of all students; for them this meant they included Aboriginal students, and importantly they also thought it important that they did not exclude non-Aboriginal students. As this students expressed: *spend time with everyone, not just one* (RS4-S4). While other students said:

It's good that they—like they don't treat us differently or anything. So that's good. ... It makes me feel good but it also doesn't make me think that I'm different to anyone else (MS3-S6).

You're just another student. ... A positive thing. ... say I'm chosen for this and the other children who aren't Aboriginal they can't be because they're not Aboriginal. So they don't

point you out and say oh, you're better than them ... they make you feel good that you're Aboriginal—Except they don't make the [other] students feel bad because they weren't (MS3-S3).

From these comments it can be discerned that being inclusive made the students feel valued and a part of general school operations.

Organised. Students and teachers spoke of the need to have an organised and structured classroom, which assisted students in where resources were; what was happening each day in lessons; and expectations of work to be completed. *I like how that it is good and organised. ... That—well, we always know what we've got to do* (RS4-S3). RS1-T2 said:

I believe in structure. I work to a timetable. The kids get to know the timetable. ... the kids know exactly when to do it, how to do it, what the expectations are when you do it.

Likewise, classroom organisation was also seen as assisting students to focus on their class work. A teacher spoke about moving desks around to provide group work and to allow more able students to work with less able peers:

they're sitting in groups and other times ... I'd start in rows ... Sometimes I do a U-shape ... a lot of inclusive learning. So collaboratively the kids get in groups [learning] how to be in groups and how to work together as teams (MS2-T1).

In summary ten pedagogical approaches were identified as conditions of success: direct instruction and explicit teaching; helping students when asked; making learning fun; subject knowledge; good communicator; knows students' strengths and weaknesses; has high expectations and challenges students; has inclusive teaching; and is highly organised. These pedagogical practices were seen to be foundational for Aboriginal students' successful academic outcomes, and relied on teachers' cultural competence through understanding Aboriginal students' learning styles and needs.

Theme 1.1.3: Teacher engagement with parents of Aboriginal students. Stakeholders reinforced that successful teachers of Aboriginal students were those who developed engagement to create a relationship with parents and take the time to get to know the student's family; and

has awareness of local Aboriginal community's histories (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004; Price, 2012).

Engagement with students' parents and community made the student feel valued and maintain connectedness to their community. This is supported by past research Munns, O'Rourke, and Bodkin-Andrews (2013) and Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Gunstone, and Fanshawe (2000). Additionally Greenwood, Frigo and Hughes (2002) suggested that increased parental engagement leads to increased Aboriginal students' achievements, which is supported by this research. Principals commented that community engagement was pivotal to the school, as principal MS3-PR stated:

the key element is getting into the community and getting to know the families. That has been critical. Developing relationships with parents and families, because I think if you don't have that really nothing else flows from it.

Parents saw engagement with the school as primarily being through the teachers, as a major issue as stated by RS2-P4: *The ability of the teacher to approach you is huge.* Parents considered teachers needed to be open communicators, as commented by RS3-P1: *Not judgemental but confident about being able to communicate with anyone on any level.*

Parents felt teachers' flexibility assisted them to better engage with the school. Teachers spoke about what they did to improve parent engagement:

We do interviews with the parents and talk to the parents about what their aspirations are for their kids. It just, I think, gets the parents to know the teacher a little bit better—because I know some parents have a real thing about coming up and talking to the teacher. They feel a bit intimidated. ... I've always had a good relationship with a lot of the parents (RS1-T2).

Hence, parental engagement by teachers was essential in working with Aboriginal students, and required cultural and local history knowledge to assist in the process of parental engagement.

School Condition 1.2: Reading Competence

The majority of students $n=33$ commented that they thought one of the main reasons they did well at school was that they were good readers (see Chapter 6), with $n=28$ students stating they had reading competence by the end of year 3, Figure 9.2 reiterates findings in Chapter 6.

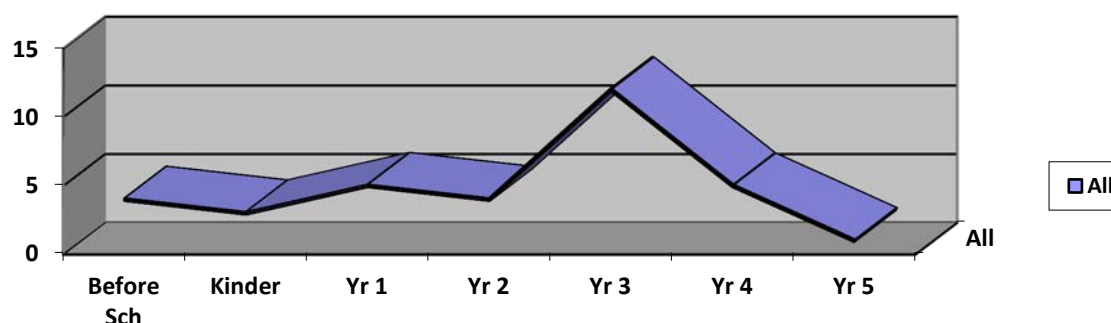


Figure 9.2 Aboriginal Students' Reading Competence at School

Theme 1.1.1: Reading competence. Reading competence was cited by $n=33$ students as a major reason for their academic success: *I've always been really good at reading* (MS2-S1), and all students spoke about enjoying reading: *I usually read every day* (RS3-S5). Students stated that reading competence came through personal interaction in students' early years, through their parents, siblings, or extended family, or through personal interests, (e.g., a love of animals therefore wanting books on animals). Sometimes as relayed by student MS3-S1 and her mother MS3-P1, it was a *light bulb* moment of deciding reading was "cool" because the student's friend liked reading. Parents supported students' perceptions on reading competence, whilst other stakeholders commented on various programs brought into each of their schools to facilitate reading competence such as, "Accelerated Literacy": *We do the accelerated literacy—definitely I think caters for Aboriginal students greatly* (RS3-T1) and: *I trained in accelerated literacy and piloted it off in my classroom, who are now ... those high achievers* (RS4-T2) which they used to target Aboriginal students' literacy needs.

Interestingly, the PISA report (De Bortoli & Thomson, 2010) states that the low achieving Aboriginal students in their research had a lower interest in reading than non-Indigenous students and those Indigenous students were less engaged in reading. This research has shown that the high achieving students were engaged in reading. Comments from students on reading competence support the case for targeted reading programs. It would seem that these programs could focus on early years reading skills development with family engagement where someone in the family is assigned the task of being a mentor for each child to engage with reading. Targetted reading programs on an individualised basis in schools would be useful to ensure high level engagement with reading and English comprehension skills are gained, by the end of Year 3.

Theme 1.2.2: Reading competence leads to academic success. Students commented that reading competence helped them in literacy development with writing, learning new words, speaking, and comprehension and in other subjects. As with the following students, as MS1-S1 explains: *because I got help with reading it helped me with other things*, and another Metropolitan student agreed, saying:

it helps in everything. ... in your writing, in your words, you know which words to use. In my public speaking, my debating, ... I can always write down something. Reading, I know the words again. I can just read off the top of my head or even having a simple conversation, I just can (MS2-S1).

Reading competence was identified as a key condition of academic success by Aboriginal students and their parents. As such engagement with reading and reading competence would support findings as highlighted in the PISA research (De Bortoli & Cresswell, 2004; De Bortoli & Thomson, 2010) in which the majority of Aboriginal students are seen to be well below OECD benchmarks; indicating the need for improved reading competence for Aboriginal students.

School Condition 1.3: Good Schools For Aboriginal Students

Whilst not stated specifically, the interviews with school staff highlighted that each school engaged in the research had very stable school staff, with many staff having been in the

school for between 5-15 years, which provided a continuity of engagement between the school staff, community and students. Students and their stakeholders identified four key themes pertaining to characteristics of schools that enhance Aboriginal student academic outcomes: school ideology, school staff, school curriculum and Aboriginal Studies, and recognition of Aboriginality. These four themes and their emerging sub-themes are further explored below.

Theme 1.3.1: School ideology. Quality schools for Aboriginal students as outlined by Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (2006) and the NSW AECG and NSW DET (2010) require leadership in both Aboriginal Education and Aboriginal leadership. The school must be seen to have a broad school philosophy, structures and systems which are inclusive and deal with racism (Purdie et al., 2000). The school should build on and respect the cultural integrity of the Aboriginal community (NSW DET, 1996).

Aboriginal students were very specific when it came to why they considered their school to be a good school. They spoke candidly about the following points which they perceived contributed to their sound academic outcomes, these are:

School environment. The school environment was pivotal to students' *N=34* wellbeing and was a reason students attended the school, such as with RS1-S4: *came to this school because it had a good reputation with Aboriginal students*; MS3-S1: *Yeah I didn't really like the [old] school. ... this school, I like it. Yeah it's good*, and RS2-S6:

I reckon they just do well at being a school for everyone and anyone that can come ... they're so good as a school that they get more and more people coming every day.

The conditions within the school infrastructure that were identified as being good in the student's schools were: that they had a good playground (this was the top condition mentioned by Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students), and this generally meant it was large, spacious, and well equipped: *it's just a great place. I really like the playground* (RS1-S3). Many students felt that they had a good school, they also identified this as a happy school; it had good classrooms which were modern and well equipped: *they've got modern buildings; modern classrooms, and the hall* (MS1-S2).

Under cover areas (a key issue for Regional students), other than gardens and trees to provide shade, were seen as positive, particularly as a larger area in which to meet friends. Some students felt that having a modern hall where they could meet as a whole school and have functions was important; and a modern equipped library was essential as commented by RS2-S3: *we have new stuff, like new technology ... we just got our library fixed ... we just got a new hall ... and it saves us sitting on the cold cement for assemblies*. Students felt that the development of nice grounds was important, to have gardens and plants and shade created by trees, students especially liked being able to sit on grass in out of classroom activities.

Health care when the students were injured was seen as a positive in the school, as with MS1-S2: *there's lots of friendly people around to help you. ... the staff; like the office ladies—and most of the kids will like help you or something. Like if you fall over, people will usually come and help you, [and if sick], they'll take you home if mum couldn't pick you up* (RS3-S5) which made the students feel safe and cared for in the school. Additionally that the school organised a large variety of activities which all children could participate in, and that their parents could not afford for them to do out of school, as commented by RS1-S4; *Well, we're all doing a different thing. We're doing drumming, and then we're doing our ribbon twirling, and then we're doing heaps of other stuff*. MS3-S3 agreed saying:

I think that they have a lot of good things to offer ... where you get to go out and play sport and represent the school. ... a good thing about this school is that if you don't get in we also have this School for Sport thing ... even if you're not chosen to go and represent the school in their sport you're still doing something.

School's parent and Aboriginal community engagement. A key issue in the case of Aboriginal students doing well academically was that their parents had developed a sound knowledge of the school's system, understood how to negotiate through the system for their students and had confidence to enter the school. Parents also spoke of the personal contacts they had developed with teachers and the school principal whom they felt gave them greater confidence in being in the school. Parent RS1-P2 commented on their relationship with the staff but particularly the principal:

The teachers and staff, like, are unreal. They all stop and talk to you, and like, I find J [Principal] very—like, you can come and talk to her about issues.

Principals considered that their schools developed a strong family identity which encouraged knowing students and their extended families as this Metropolitan principal explains,

our schools a very family orientated school—a family feel. All of our staff know every child, every child knows every staff member. Every staff member will be able to say siblings, cousins, neighbours. They know about mum and dad, grandmas and grandpas even, aunties and uncles (MS1-PR).

Students felt an important aspect of the school was having Aboriginal Elders and Aboriginal teachers/Aboriginal Education Officers. A key issue for Regional students who had greater engagement in their schools with local Aboriginal community, such as RS1-S5: *all the Aboriginal elders that are like here*. In contrast, Metropolitan students had greater regional engagement in schools to look after the Aboriginal students, particularly in relation to their education and culture. Sound family engagement was essential whereby students mentioned that their extended Aboriginal families were on Aboriginal Education Committees and/or helped at school, as declared by RS3-S4 who had family working in the school: *Aunty S's been here for a long time. She's my real aunty, but here everyone just calls her Aunty. She means a lot to me.*

School infrastructure. Students identified the overarching school themes or school keys, which governed students' behaviour with one another and through the school, as creating a positive school environment. Students also commented that the school was effective because it was well organised. Some students noted that it was the provision of after school care at the school which supported their learning as they could do their homework there and get help if they did not understand the work. Other students commented on being able to vote to elect school leaders such as the school captain and prefects, as they felt this gave them control over what was happening at the school. For Aboriginal staff, who were often in the schools longer term than many teachers, they identified changes in the school system which benefitted Aboriginal students as demonstrated in the comment by RS3-AS1:

It's created a fantastic environment. This school has changed the way I've thought about the education system. I was totally was opposed to the Department of Education and education for Aboriginal students. From the time—from when I started at this school and it's changed my opinions.

School's high expectations. Students were encouraged, were inspired to learn and expected to be good people, as reflected upon by RS2-S1:

they help you through school, like getting along—to be good at school you have to get along with lots of people, and RS4-S6: Have pride in who you are and your work. ... you have to have all those things to be a good person.

Students felt the school's high expectations meant that the school had confidence and pride in them as Aboriginal students. For example MS3-S3 noted that he got to: *go to Parliament House ... me and a few other Aboriginal students ... We got to speak about things that happen, ... learn more about public speaking and I felt like that was a bit of an honour.* The Aboriginal staff considered that the school could help the students achieve sound academic outcomes because the staff knew the students' academic needs and what they should do to challenge the students, as Aboriginal staff member RS1-AS1 noted: *We don't allow any of our students, the staff don't allow any of our students to fall too far behind.*

Staff had high expectations of the Aboriginal students as they were identified as high achieving students and put into special talented programs to help them excel. As RS1-T2 explained:

High expectations ... I never give them something that I think would be just beyond them, so it's not like they're ever going to be driven into the ground because they can't do something. But you've still got to challenge them ... once they get the confidence to do things, they just fly.

Gifted and talented programs were particularly evident in Metropolitan schools MS2 and MS3, and in Regional schools RS1 and RS4, and were built into the school through extension classes and Aboriginal students were supported and encouraged into these programs.

Support programs. Students felt that peer support programs, such as the “Buddy Program” with Kindergarten students were important in linking them into the school and with students across the school, plus they just liked to help the younger students. Academic support programs such as “Accelerated Literacy”, “QuickSmart” and “Norta Norta Tutoring” were mentioned as programs which supported Aboriginal students, along with “Personalised Learning Plans” (PLP), which targeted students’ individualised academic needs and gifted and talented development. As stated by RS3-AS2: *there’s almost an individualised program for the students? They’re recognised for what their needs are, each child.*

The schools often had additional programs which the whole school accessed, such as: RS2 had a school farm; RS3 had a boys only class; RS1 had employed male Aboriginal support officers to work specifically with boys and organise constructive play in break times in the playground. Other schools targeted programs for Aboriginal students, such as: MS3 had a school project to write a book with all the Aboriginal students, about being Aboriginal; and RS4 had employed a male Aboriginal Education Officer (AEO) to develop cultural programs with Aboriginal students. The added value of these programs to the schools gave opportunities to develop identities and skills which might otherwise have gone unnoticed by staff and students.

No racism, no bullying. What students liked about their schools was that they had effective “No Bullying” programs, which made them feel safe in the school. As expressed by this Aboriginal staff member RS1-AS1, their school did not allow racism in their school: *No, [racism] it’s one thing we won’t allow at this school.*

The issue of racism was seen as a major issue for students and stakeholders with a number of parents having moved their children out of their previous school due to racism and bullying (which were often linked together). Students attending their current school with no racism and bullying made friends, felt safe and their academic outcomes improved dramatically. Some parents and Aboriginal staff felt the process for negotiating and recognising racism in schools was a developmental adjustment for schools, but was achievable and when done successfully changed the whole nature of the school. As explained by RS3-AS1:

When I first started here at this school, people—teachers didn't really understand the different culture values. They didn't understand Aboriginal people a real lot. They had a lot of Aboriginal students here but they just saw them as another student. That change in attitude over the last few years ... it's been a transformation for them to understand that, they've sort out answers and the teachers have modified the way they do things to really cater for the needs of those children.

In summary, the schools involved in this research have addressed racism and bullying by identifying it and acting on it, therefore ensuring a safe place which allows Aboriginal students to concentrate without harassment on their education.

Theme 1.3.2: School staff. The entire school staff, Aboriginal staff, teachers, executive and other support staff are instrumental in Aboriginal student's educational outcomes (Moyle, 2004; Munns, O'Rourke, & Bodkin-Andrews, 2013; Purdie et al., 2000). Aboriginal students $N=34$ mentioned the role staff played in their academic success; different staff roles brought different nuances to the school in assisting Aboriginal students gain sound academic outcomes, these were:

Aboriginal staff. Aboriginal staff—identified positions in schools—are educators, translators and role models who provide the essential connections between Aboriginal students, school environment and community in a foreign and unfamiliar institution (Munns et al., 2013). The Metropolitan schools in this study did not identify that they had any identified Aboriginal staff positions. Aboriginal education worker positions were located in Regional schools specifically due to the high Aboriginal student populations. Students and stakeholders involved in the Regional schools spoke of the invaluable assistance of Aboriginal staff in provision of academic and cultural support for Aboriginal students with comments such as: *it's their skills and empathy and compassion in working with the kids* (RS4-T3) and for Aboriginal staff it was that: *our opinion is valued* (RS3-AS1).

Aboriginal staff is seen as essential in schools with Aboriginal students to provide support to teaching staff and executive; and they are the cultural and academic conduit for Aboriginal students, their parents and communities with the school.

Teachers. The students mentioned a prime support for them was that they had good staff in the school, particularly good teachers: *they have really nice teachers* (RS2-S1) who explain the work and expected them to learn. Interestingly when assessing profiles of the teachers (see Appendix 6: Aboriginal Student and Stakeholder Profiles) it becomes evident that the teachers identified as good teachers had either been long-term teachers with over 15 years teaching experiences or had come to teaching from another career or they had travelled and had experiences with people from a wide range of cultural backgrounds prior to entering the teaching profession. This is a pertinent issue as often in communities with high Aboriginal student enrolments, we see younger teachers with little teaching experience being required to teach students with higher educational and cultural needs. It would therefore seem to be more effective to attract experienced teachers or people with greater cultural experiences to schools with high Aboriginal student enrolments to raise academic outcomes of these students.

Both Metropolitan and Regional schools had small numbers of teachers who were Aboriginal (see Appendix 6: Aboriginal Student and Stakeholder Profiles). Metropolitan Aboriginal students spoke about Aboriginal teachers in relation to them being a good teacher who happened to be Aboriginal. The Aboriginal teachers provided unspecified support to the Aboriginal students, such as, in MS1 the previous Aboriginal teacher created a positive profile for Aboriginal students; in MS2 the Aboriginal teacher was the gifted and talented teacher in the school; and in MS3 the Aboriginal teacher created a project in which all the Aboriginal students in the school contributed to writing a book about issues surrounding Aboriginal identity in their school. Regional Aboriginal students spoke of Aboriginal teachers as supplying academic and cultural support, as with RS1-S5:

you can talk to her about the Aboriginal kind of stuff ... You can also, because she's a teacher, you can ask her, I'm stuck on this. Can you help me with it?

Many of the students in the Regional schools did not make a distinction between AEOs or Teacher's Aide Special (TAS) and general classroom teachers who were Aboriginal; they identified them all as great teachers that: *Help you more if you're not doing your work* (RS3-S2). Regional students identified all Aboriginal professional and teaching staff as contributing to their academic development equally.

Executive. The school principal was mentioned by only a few Aboriginal students as having a positive role, often in relation to discipline or helping to break down bullying and racism in the school. For example, RS1-S4 mentioned: *When I was getting bullied, she helped me.*

The role of the principal was significantly remarked on by other stakeholders, whether it be as a personal relationship as remarked by parent MS1-P1: *It's good. I can ring D [principal] and say I'm really not happy about this or what is going on with this;* or the principal's support in recognition and acceptance of Aboriginal people in the school: *I do think that's a part of them feeling comfortable in their culture here in the school, that they've had a big acceptance of their culture and their background;* or the principal's follow through with issues such as RS1-P2: *He [son] got bullied a couple of times, and I got into the school ... and it was all done within 24 hours.*

For Aboriginal staff it was that the principal wanted to create better communication:

at the senior most level in the school, the principal is constantly looking at ways of creating that greater interaction between staff, pupil, parent, uncle, aunty whether it be a foster carer or whatever (RS1-AS1).

These areas of support in turn helped to improve academic outcomes for Aboriginal students.

When assessing the profile of the $N=7$ principals all had personal reasons for commitment to Aboriginal education, such as at MS1 where the previous principal identified as Aboriginal to the local Aboriginal parents and he assisted the parents to establish programs at the school which continued under the current principal and continuing Aboriginal parents. Principals in MS2 and MS3 had a strong commitment to Aboriginal education: MS2-PR worked hard to create a positive profile and increase Aboriginal student numbers in the school; MS3-PR had a long term engagement with the local Aboriginal communities and had as such developed a personal relationship with families in the community. RS1-PR had worked extensively in far western NSW and had broad experience in working with Aboriginal communities and an in-depth understanding of Aboriginal people's historical educational experiences and cultural needs. RS2-

PR had grown up as a child within large Aboriginal communities and considered them part of her extended family; she therefore understood the issues on a deeply personal level and had as such committed in her early teaching years to working in schools and communities with high Aboriginal populations. RS3-PR had come to teaching late in her career having worked in many other positions, such as bar tending, which gave her a comprehensive grounding of the “realities of life” and the wider community and was less judgemental in her attitude of working to include Aboriginal parents and staff in decision making in her school and classes. RS4-PR identified as Aboriginal on a personal though not public level and worked to enshrine improved conditions for Aboriginal students in his school.

These principals provided quality support for Aboriginal students through: targeted Aboriginal education strategic planning; Personal Learning Programs (PLP) for Aboriginal students; targeting teachers for specific subjects and class groups; and support programs such as: “Accelerated Literacy”, “Quick Smart” and Norta-Norta; tutoring was also undertaken with extension classes for gifted and talented programs and projects, and Aboriginal cultural programs; along with staff development, including local Aboriginal community history and culture for teachers and “Dare To Lead” programs for executive. This study found that principals with personal connections, background and experiences with Aboriginal students and communities are able to improve school structures and systems raising Aboriginal student academic outcomes.

Support staff. Students spoke about friendly and supportive school staff, such as office staff who are nice, friendly and helpful. These staff had a big impact on them as they thought these staff helped them personally by giving them confidence and making them feel safe at school as with RS4-S1: *if we have an emergency and we need to go home or anything and we're sick we can go to the office and they'll ring our parents.* Of interest is that in one school RS3, where students spoke of the office staff who they knew would not be judgemental and they could go to for support was also the only Aboriginal office staff member in the 7 participating schools; as this comment from RS3-S5 shows: *if I have lost my dollar for the bus, they'll give it to me. L [front office staff], ... she's really, really nice. ... some people, I don't like asking.* For two students with specialist needs it was having additional support with specialist staff such as a

Teacher's Aide Special and the Vision Itinerate Teacher who come to the school and assist with specific learning needs and equipment which help students academically. Schools with office staff who have cultural sensitivities provide improved support for Aboriginal students; schools with Aboriginal staff in their front office particularly in schools with high Aboriginal student enrolments, provide greater support for Aboriginal students.

Theme 1.3.3: School curriculum and Aboriginal Studies. Ladwig (2007) contends that school curriculum must have authentic curriculum—Aboriginal content—which ensures Aboriginal student engagement and higher order thinking. In addition there must be a concerted effort to build in Aboriginal cultural perceptions (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003) and adapt the curriculum to suit Aboriginal students' learning needs to address the educational requirements of Aboriginal students (Partington, 2003) in language difference (Eades, 1993), oral traditions (Graham, 2005), learning styles (Garvis, 2006) and Kinship relationships (Riley-Mundine, 2007). As Yunkaporta (2009) states “Aboriginal content is about being complementary and finding common ground which assists to foster pride in Aboriginal students and Indigenise the learning environment for Aboriginal students” (p. 40).

School curriculum. Students $n=16$ mentioned curriculum as a key area, they commented on physical education so they could learn sports and be active, evidenced by RS1-S6:

I reckon after you do something and you win or something, the school respects you and that makes you boost your confidence a bit more so you get—I reckon you do better in schoolwork. It keeps you fit and stuff so you feel good about yourself.

Having access to creative subjects such as art and music to learn new things was also mentioned: *you can learn musical notes as well. ... I went all shaky and then I went real, real good. It takes practice* (RS1-S3). Other students mentioned the different integrated teaching approaches (pedagogies) used by these schools such as, a school farm in RS2 and having animals at school was what helped them develop as people; and a “Boys Only” class in RS3. The students felt that the school they attended made sure they learnt; and that overall they thought the school had good educational programs.

Aboriginal Studies. The students took a personal interest in Aboriginal content in school work and loved that they could do Aboriginal culture in school, that they could do Aboriginal projects in their subjects and learn Aboriginal languages. Aboriginal content, perspectives and cultural lessons were mentioned by students, teachers and Aboriginal staff as essential in not only teaching Aboriginal students, but also to benefit the learning for all students, as demonstrated by the following comments:

I think that everyone should get a chance to know that the Aboriginal kids or the Aboriginal people were the first people to walk on this earth. So I think everyone needs to know and do stuff like that (RS1-S5).

when we started learning about the First fleet. There was this teacher who was saying, putting Captain Cook and Arthur Phillip as good people. I stood up and said, it's wrong. They're villains. Yeah. That's when it kind of started (MS2-S1).

you learn things that you never learnt before. You might think it's easy to make a fire out of sticks but then when you actually do it, you learn this is actually hard ... It's pretty cool (RS2-S5).

incorporate Aboriginality into my teaching ... to make the children feel more valued (MS1-T2).

As can be seen from these comments, schools need to take into account Aboriginal students' ways of learning, which may mean creating new ways of teaching across the whole school, such as a boys program or having a farm in the school. Aboriginal Studies through embedding Aboriginal cultural content and Aboriginal perspectives adds value to teaching for non-Aboriginal students' awareness and understanding of Australia's history and Aboriginal people being seen to be valued.

School technology to support curriculum. Technology for use and access to the internet was seen as essential. Teaching made learning seem new such as RS3-S1 comments: *Smartboard room ... was showing us parts of the body and that. Like digestive system where our food goes and that, down your you know [throat], and how it's broken down;* and you need the new technology as stated by RS4-S2: *Because you need to learn technology and that, to understand*

some things. Access to technology that students may not have access to at home or limited access as stated by MS1-S2: computers at school instead of having to go home and fight my brother and sister off the computer. Or to assist with research for school projects: a computer's an easy way to find something, because it's got a resource in it, which is internet, which has basically everything. ... the computer as a tool to research (MS3-S3). Students consistently mentioned technology as a tool which assisted them to do better academically.

Theme 1.3.4: Recognition of Aboriginality. The NSW AECG and NSW DET (2004) and Purdie et al., (2000) agree that to achieve good academic outcomes for Aboriginal students school must be seen as a place which welcomes and values Aboriginal students. Hence it is important to ensure Aboriginal students, their parents and community feel that they belong and are supported in the school environment and that their identities are nurtured and affirmed. Students $n=19$ spoke about their pride in their Aboriginality, such as RS1-S6: *we're proud to be Aboriginal.* When students' identity was supported positively in the school environment, students had a greater connection to the school, as demonstrated by student RS3-S1: *we're a cultural school.* RS1-S6 stated what it means for Aboriginal students to see their culture in the school:

Pride for culture. ... Because you've got to be proud for who you are and if you feel proud and there's other things in the school that represent you—your culture, you'll be more comfortable in school and I reckon you'll do better work.

Students also spoke about their identity as a key personal driver to wanting to gain successful academic outcomes for themselves, such as: *I've got a big strive. ... I think that does come into my Aboriginality (MS2-S1).* Cultural identity in the schools was supported strongly by all stakeholders who worked to ensure this positivity was enshrined within the school, as expressed by RS1-T4:

... accepting of and fostering pride in their own culture is something that I actually do. I am really committed to do that and I do in lots of subtle ways.

The students spoke forthrightly of their school's positive recognition of them being Aboriginal which boosted their pride in identity and gave them the confidence that they were

valued and had something to offer the school as an Aboriginal person. Schools' recognition and positive support of Aboriginality through strengthening students' cultural identities and provision of opportunities to represent the school as Aboriginal people is a key condition for schools in raising Aboriginal students' academic outcomes which was supported by many parents and teachers, as demonstrated by the following comments: *to make sure that Aboriginal culture is learned at school ... it's better for the kids* (RS2-P2). And MS3-TS who said:

I don't think it's about assimilation and they're becoming white or you know you hear that phrase. I don't think that that has anything to do with it. They've got strong identity, they love their culture, they love being Aboriginal and they love what that represents.

Recognition of the students' Aboriginality in fostering cultural identity in the school assisted in enhancing Aboriginal students' pride and confidence which in turn encouraged the students to engage in the processes of learning.

School Condition 1.4: Aboriginal Students and School Representation

All Aboriginal students engaged in this research represented their schools in a multiplicity of roles within the school and in the wider community. In representing their schools students spoke with great pride in their voices of the roles they played in their schools and of the personal sense of values, such as: they felt a rise in their self-esteem $n=21$; they valued the additional learning they received from representing their school $n=20$; they liked being able to assist their school $n=23$; and they felt helping the school strengthened their Aboriginality $n=18$.

Theme 1.4.1: Aboriginal students' self-esteem representing the school. The highest recorded comments from students were in relation to the way representing the school made students feel. The students expressed that it made them feel good and made them proud $n=23$, as with MS3-S3: *We get invited to a lot of openings which makes you feel really good*; they felt valued and respected $n=20$; they got enjoyment from representing their school $n=20$; and they got confidence from representing their school $n=13$. Teachers thought this was important in that the students had a go at whatever was made available to them, one teacher said the students: *haven't been told that they can't achieve* (MS3-T2). Although students felt it was often a challenge to do something new, they liked being seen as a leader in their school, as with MS3-

S3: *I felt like that was a bit of an honour; and RS3-S: The mayor was unveiling a plaque there, and I went up there and did the 'Welcome to Country'.* The students recognised the valuable learning they received from being a school representative and liked that they learnt new things outside the classroom; they got to give speeches in public places; and they were able to visit different places. The key issue for Aboriginal students was that they liked being able to help the school and give back to the school, they were able to assist school staff, run assemblies and help other students. Regional students also identified that they valued being able to assist in raising funds for their school. Students felt that their Aboriginality was recognised by the school and within the community and they got to meet Aboriginal kids from other schools. The students also felt they strengthened their Aboriginal identity in being able to represent the Aboriginal community.

Theme 1.4.2: Aboriginal students' representation within the school. Aboriginal students $N=34$ represented their school in a variety of roles, as noted by MS3-S6:

I'm Vice Captain as well and I've been SRC four times; when I was in Kindergarten, Year 2, Year 4 and Captain. ... Yeah I've done heaps. I represented our school in all sports; netball, AFL, softball, athletics, swimming, cross country. So basically anything there is.

Many of the Aboriginal students in the research filled leadership roles within the school $n=21$; these were in positions such as: School Captain, Vice-Captain, Prefect, Sports Captain or House Captain, and being on the school Student Representative Council or a library monitor. Students represented the school in school concerts where they sang or were in plays; where they were in the school band or school choir, and were in the debating team. Students valued being able to attend Aboriginal celebrations in the school, such as National Aborigines Week, and to perform "Welcome To Country" for the school. School staff saw student representation as a normal part of school operations, providing an opportunity to all students to be leaders and develop new skills. Aboriginal students and parents saw school representation as an honour and as a new opportunity, with a majority of parents not having the same opportunities in the past. Parents saw school representation as a positive and felt that the school that their child was attending *encourage the kids to be involved in everything* (RS1-P2).

Theme 1.4.3: Aboriginal students' representation outside the school. Aboriginal students $N=34$ were representatives outside the school in a variety of activities. A key representation was in sports, with a large number of the students $n=20$ being involved as representatives all year round in multiple sports at district, regional, and state levels, as demonstrated by RS1-S6:

I usually participate in lots of sports. ... I'm in about six of them [school photos of representation] because I've made heaps of sports and I'm a leader of our school. ... Well sport, a lot of sport. This year I made the state in three things. Rugby league, union and cricket.

While a small number of students represented their school in a sport other students represented the school in the arts, dance, music, or bands, and public speaking. Students also represented their schools at community functions, such as ANZAC Day ceremonies. Students mentioned it was important to be able to represent their school at Aboriginal events and do Aboriginal performances in the wider community. Students entered academic competitions such as: science or spelling bees; chess; and for other students it was being given scholarships—organised by the school—to participate in talented programs for art. Another student mentioned they were selected to represent the school at a horse carnival.

Aboriginal students $N=34$ identified school representation as a major condition for being engaged in the school and as a way they could give back to the school. Students fulfilled a number of roles in the school and felt it was an honour to represent their school.

Section Summary

This section has highlighted high achieving Aboriginal students' and stakeholders' perspectives of what supports academic outcomes in the school environment. The key conditions mentioned were firstly, identification of good teachers for Aboriginal students with teachers' engagement and pedagogical practice with Aboriginal students; and engagement with students' parents. Secondly, Aboriginal students and stages of reading competence aligned to reading competence being essential for academic success. Thirdly, noting a good school as being those which had sound ideology which supported and strengthened Aboriginal students and their

communities; school staff who supported Aboriginal students; school curriculum which had curriculum specifically for Aboriginal students and Aboriginal Studies; and recognised Aboriginality as a strength in the school. Fourthly, Aboriginal students' school representation in raising students' self-esteem; the roles filled by students within the school; and school representation outside the school.

The following section presents home conditions which support Aboriginal students' academic success.

Dimension 2: Home Conditions Which Support Academic Success for Aboriginal Students

Section Overview

This section is a reflection on what assisted the students to do well from within their home environment. The students' comments can be categorised into two key areas, firstly, what happened within their home and secondly, activities they did outside the home and school which they considered helped them to develop skills and knowledge, which then had an impact on their academic performances at school.

Home Condition 2.1: Stable Home Environment

Theme 2.1.1: Stable home environment. Whilst the Aboriginal students did not quantify their physical home environment, they all spoke with love and fondness about their individual homes and their parents or caregivers, whether they came from single parent families, had two engaged parents or divorced parents, or lived with extended family such as grandparents, aunts or uncles. Maslow (1970), Maslow and Lowery (1998) and Riley-Mundine (2007) speak of the requirement for children to have specific needs met and built on to allow for academic engagement, such as, their physiological needs: food and shelter, safety within their environment, love and belonging, self-esteem through being able to give back, which leads to self-actualisation. When parents discussed their living or home circumstances, which in the main were all stable living conditions, a few parents mentioned how in changing their living conditions they were able to change learning for their children, as mentioned by RS3-P2:

we had to do a lot to change and have our life the way it is now. ... P [student] went from a nice quiet life ... to just violence all around us. ... Our only safe place was inside our house. ... He'd sleep and he'd only have little naps. He couldn't come to school, he was too tired; a lot of stress on him. ... [moved house] He's doing really good now.

Aboriginal staff could also identify changes in students when their home conditions became more stable as with RS2-AS1:

his family life seemed to be settled more. So that had that effect for him. ... Even his confidence—he had no self-confidence before they were settled and everything. His self-esteem picked up when they got settled.

Parents also spoke about the value of education and stressing importance of education to their children:

We've always told him how important it is to be at school and have a good education (RS4-P1).

All Aboriginal students engaged in this research and their families demonstrated all five components of Maslow's hierarchy of motivation and needs (Maslow, 1970; Maslow & Lowery, 1998; Riley-Mundine, 2007) were in place for these students, as such supporting students to be engaged in their own education.

Home Condition 2.2: Parents' Engagement

Theme 2.2.1: Parent support and engagement with school. For $N=34$ of students it was their parents who they saw as their key support in gaining sound academic skills as parents often modelled the work expected to be completed $n=30$; academic direction and support often came from parents or extended family to assist in explaining how to do the school work as with MS3-S6:

My first teacher, my dad ... He's really smart ... and since we were little ... my dad used to help me with everything. We had a whiteboard, a massive white board and I could do massive additions at the age of seven. ... Spelling and basically everything.

Students also felt that their families had high expectations, that is, parents and others expected student to do well and talked to them about future goals and what they needed to do to achieve these goals, as mentioned by MS3-S3: *my family ... they're always there to help me.* For other students it was that their parents had a direct involvement with the school as with MS1-P2: *very involved in the P & C. I've been on the P & C and actually on that committee for the before and after school care centre for 12 years; giving advice to the school on Aboriginal education or*

through support agencies such as the Home Work Centre which provided additional support at the school.

Theme 2.2.2: Parents' knowledge of school systems. This research identified that a key issue for successful support from parents is if parents have knowledge of the system, with RS1-P1 this meant *Aboriginal parents to be involved ... it's a big learning curve for everybody*, for example, how to interact with schools and confidence to negotiate the student's needs. This often meant that parents learnt these skills over a number of years through all their children attending school, mentioned by RS1-P6: *Probably when they were younger we used to probably stand back too much if anything and just let things happen*, parents felt they got better with understanding school systems over time. A major influencer in creating improved parental engagement as relayed by parents, teachers, principals and Aboriginal staff of both the Metropolitan and Regional schools were the PPL (Personalised Learning Plans) which require face-to-face meetings between teachers and parents—and Aboriginal staff where possible—to discuss students' learning needs and skills development. Particularly important as shown by Friedel (1999) and Greenwood, Frigo, and Hughes (2002) and substantiated in this study was the involvement of parents in a continuous manner and the discussion of positive approaches for students which places parents in a position of control and empowerment to question, challenge or support the teacher and school focuses for their children. This collaboration and mutual accountability can and does create respectful and engaging schools (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2010).

Theme 2.2.3: Home resources. Another condition $n=31$ which students identified as supporting them to achieve sound academic outcomes revolved around completion of homework. These students considered it was their responsibility for getting their homework done as stated by MS3-S4: *Sometimes I get asked but sometimes I just go and do it* and that they had homework space. Some students spoke about having access to their own desk but the majority preferred to work in a communal setting at the kitchen/dining table so they had quick access to their parents and/or siblings, this was supported by parents as a process which helped them monitor their children's work. Additionally many of the students believed they did well because they had access to books at home, all students spoke about the large number of books they had at home:

bookcase in room, there's lots of books of varieties of books (RS1-S3), which they could read. Students also spoke about access to general supplies such as pens and calculators and access to computers, as with RS3-S1: I've got my own computer. Nan's got two computers and pop's got one. Nan's got a laptop and K [cousin] got a laptop and MS3-S5: Computer, because it helps me research and helps me do work, and the internet, printers or whiteboards at home to assist with research for projects.

Home Condition 2.3: Out Of School Activities

Students $N=34$ mentioned their out of school activities were just as relevant to their academic achievements as they thought these extra activities taught them things they could not learn at school. The range of out of school activities discussed by the students was:

I also play out of school and OZTAG. ... I do netball. I used to do touch. I do horse riding, I run my dog every day and I go swimming (MS3-S6).

I do tennis every Tuesday morning, Thursday morning and Thursday afternoon. ... I do soccer in the winter, and I also do comp for tennis (RS2-S4).

I go in skate comps. ... I went to the state for scooters. ... In Sydney ... came fourth in the state. Wednesday night comps. ... Saturday morning sports ... softball, skateboard, roller-blading, football, soccer (RS4-S4).

The students felt they learnt skills such as, team work, working with other people and/or animals, which were seen as important.

Theme 2.3.1: Extended family. Students' $n=30$ felt their extended families' expectations played a role in their doing well at school, because they didn't want to let these family members down, as mentioned by MS2-S1:

all my aunties and my dad ... I wrote down all the really good jobs that they have and what they're doing and why they've succeeded and that's why I want to do well;

and RS1-S7:

Nan and Pop ... they help me a lot with homework and other assignments and they buy me things like stationery for school ... without those things and their help I wouldn't be able to, you know, be very good.

Expectations happened through contact with extended family, where students had constant family activities, and were able to play and learn from their extended family.

Theme 2.3.2: Sports, hobbies and animals. For the majority of students it was being able to regularly play team sports $n=27$ that provided greatest personal growth. They considered that the sport and training helped them to learn how to work with other kids and built their resilience. For a small group of students $n=5$ they felt they gained similar skills through activities such as in art, music, and/or dance. A number of students $n=11$ spoke about working with animals, which they reflected taught them about responsibility through caring for animals.

Theme 2.3.3: Academic support. A smaller but still significant number of students $n=10$ mentioned academic support they received out of school which had a direct impact on their understanding of their school work. These activities included specialist tutors or assistance through after school care and Home Work Centres such as RS2-S6:

Homework Centre Tutors, Tuesday and Thursday after school—They help me to—if I have homework, they help me to do my homework, and if I don't have homework, then they give me sheets and they have heaps of homework sheets and stuff.

This assisted students in completion of school tasks and understanding of work requirements. These extra curriculum activities were organised by their parents to further support their learning outcomes.

Theme 2.3.4: Cultural activities. A number of students $n=11$ mentioned that going to the beach and/or bush walking was seen as both cultural and recreational as they often did these activities with extended family. A few students mentioned that they learnt how to do better in school through becoming more competent in their Aboriginal culture and language which they learnt out of school through community activities or through extended family. This was

supported by some parents who spoke about being involved in community organisations to impart cultural learning to their children and the wider community, as with RS3-P1:

I'm on the board of the land council here but we're really heavily involved—the local land council building's named after my father. I'm the chairman of our Aboriginal child and family centre here that's being constructed so we're really out there with the Aboriginal community. We do everything we possibly can, we involve the kids in all that process. Their identity is important to them, it's important to us that they know their identity. I'm involved in a lot of the Gamilaroi language programs that we do here. ... We do do language programs in the school here sometimes and all our 'Welcome to Countries' are done in languages.

Section Summary

This section has provided Aboriginal student and stakeholder perceptions on conditions which support high academic outcomes for Aboriginal students in the home environment. These conditions were identified as parent's support and engagement within the school; parent's knowledge of the school systems; and access to resources in the home. Out of school activities formed a second key set of conditions highlighting the importance of extended family for students; sports, hobbies and animals to teach team work and responsibilities; academic support through tutors and homework centres; and cultural activities within the wider community.

The following section looks at the importance of friends as a condition of academic success for Aboriginal students.

Dimension 3: Friends as a Condition of Academic Support for Aboriginal Students

Overview

Dimension three provides an overview of friends as a condition of success for Aboriginal students. This was seen as important to Aboriginal students in having friends at school; and the personal support given to Aboriginal students by their friends who assist them to gain sound academic outcomes.

Friends Condition 3.1: Importance of Friends

The importance of friends at school was seen by $n=32$ students and their parents as foundational to their feeling happy and safe in the school, leading to gaining improved academic outcomes. Interestingly the role of friends in supporting Aboriginal students was not identified as a condition by school staff, other than being mentioned in relation to the group of children students associate with.

Theme 3.1.1: Importance of friends at school. A majority of Aboriginal students' $n=32$ saw having friends at school as being important, as with MS3-S5: *So you have company and someone to play with and someone to talk to when you need to*. Metropolitan students saw their closest friends were extended family in the school, whilst Regional students mentioned their closest friends were at their school, their best friends were Aboriginal, and their friends attended after school care with them. Students' $n=24$ also felt it was important to have friends to play with you and that you needed to have friends across the whole school: *Some are in my classroom and in the classroom next door to us, and in the classroom underneath us* (RS3-S1).

An Aboriginal student cohort with whom students can identify and work with was an issue for the Aboriginal students in this research. This supports the findings by Purdie et al. (2000), who found there was need for Aboriginal students to have other Aboriginal students with whom they can learn and peers with whom they can see a reflection of themselves in a positive image

and that this is an important factor which needs to be built into classroom and school practice to improve students' resilience and interaction, to improve academic outcomes.

Friends Condition 3.2: Friends' Personal Support

Students mentioned close friends demonstrated their personal care for one another through academic and emotional support, as below.

Theme 3.2.1: Friends and academic work. Students $n=20$ identified friends as being important in gaining sound academic skills because their friends helped them with their school work, but also some students thought it was just as important that they were able to support their friends. The students felt their friends influence them to learn their school work and do better. As demonstrated by RS1-S3: *She's like really good at maths and English. She's in every extension class and she helps me.*

Theme 3.2.2: Friends and emotional support. A key issue for $n=24$ Aboriginal students was that friends were important to have in the school as they provided emotional support. This support was provided by supporting you if in trouble, being nice to one another, as stated by RS1-S6: *Because they're nice. They stick up for me and they just be good friends*; by getting to know one another, that they are humorous and have fun with each other. Additionally Regional students stated it was important to have friends at school as they showed support by talking with you, they didn't bully or tease you: *When people are bullying me, she'll stand up for me and tell them to go away and leave me alone and stuff like that* (RS1-S1). MS3-S3 clarified support as: *best friend because we always need that bit of encouragement, and they'll always be there to help you through your way*. Emotional support provided by friends was seen as a key issue by a number of parents, specifically those who had moved their children due to bullying, where they believed their children had had no friends and were miserable at school:

To be honest, since she has been here, it's the first time she has had friends, ever. ... I think that's one of the reasons why she has thrived in this environment (RS1-P4).

As the above statement shows, moving to current schools where their child had now gained friends the parents saw the effect that a safe and friendly school environment had on their child's

academic outcomes. The parents also felt that because the student was settled and happy at the school that they could now concentrate on their learning and this was evidenced by their NAPLAN results and therefore their inclusion in this research of high achieving Aboriginal students. It can be concluded then that a safe environment where friendships are formed helped students feel safe at school and that friends gave them confidence to focus on school work.

Section Summary

This section highlighted the importance of friends at school and across the school for Aboriginal students and in having a cohort of peers who students could identify with. Friends were also important in providing academic and emotional support which assisted Aboriginal students to feel safe at school.

The following section discusses Aboriginal students' perceptions of their personal conditions for academic success.

Dimension 4: Aboriginal Students' Personal Conditions for Academic Success

Section Overview

Dimension four provides an overview of what Aboriginal students felt are their personal conditions of academic success. Students supported by stakeholders relay these three conditions as: personal strengths; academic strengths; and personal drive which assist students in gaining sound academic outcomes. The following section provides student and stakeholder perceptions on the three conditions, their themes and sub-themes as follows.

Personal Condition 4.1: Aboriginal Students' Personal Strengths

Students and stakeholders spoke of personal attributes and skills which students capitalised on to boost their performance at school in their academic studies, as shown in the following six themes.

Theme 4.1.1: Personal strengths and weaknesses. Both Metropolitan and Regional students $N=34$ commented that having a clear understanding of their personal strengths and weaknesses as with RS3-S4: *I think it's just as important to know what you're good at as knowing what you need help with*, such as, organisational skills, how they learn, and/or persistence gave them a better awareness of how they worked as a person to get school work done. As demonstrated through the following comments by students:

I've got quite a wide vocabulary. When I'm just writing. I can always think of better words. I'm good at this ... I'm good at making other people's stories better (MS2-S1).

I'm quite a good listener ... if I'm interested in something I'll actually think about it a lot and see if I can learn more about it. ... When I learn something that's really interesting it sticks to my (MS3-S3).

I'm involved in the school band ... I play drums ... but I'm a guitarist more than a drummer (RS1-S7).

I'm just naturally good at maths. (RS4-S4).

Theme 4.1.2: Confidence, concentration, good listener. A common theme derived from students $N=34$ and all stakeholders were that all the Aboriginal students were confident people, as reflected by MS3-S3: *confidence would have to be part of it*. Stakeholders commented that whilst some students were verbose and others were quiet students they had a confidence which drove them to high achievement. The students' confidence was seen to stem from a range of factors: strength and pride in their identity, knowledge they could achieve their school work and know what they are good at and personal support through friends and teachers.

Students spoke about having good concentration, that is, they could block out noise in the classroom and concentrate on what the teacher was saying or block other student chatter when they had to get work done; or they could stay on task until they worked it out. For example, RS4-S3 commented that: *I didn't get this thing in the class. But then at home I kept on thinking about it and I got really excited when I finally got it*.

Additionally students spoke about being a good listener as a personal skill in assisting them to identify work to be done and helped them focus on work to be completed.

Theme 4.1.3: Resilience. Students' $n=12$ specifically mentioned they had really good resilience, where they can work out problems as reflected by MS2-S1: *I know how to bounce back. ... you really need to have that* and for RS1-S5: *I also encourage myself to have a try again and it's not good to give up*.

Whilst only $n=12$ students spoke about their own resilience $n=25$ Regional students had a clear understanding about resilience which they spoke about in relation to their schools' key themes:

'You Can Do It' sign. ... it's got organisation and resilience and everything and I look at that, because they've got them all around the school and I look at that every day and it reminds me. ... To get organised and don't get too angry or anything (RS4-S2).

the keys of a good life. There's getting along, resilience, persistence, and confidence. ... They're the things that the school, throughout our school life, they teach us. One of the things for getting along is like so we have friends (RS2-S6).

The school keys or themes provided guidance to all students on working through problems and issues between themselves, to work with one another to create a collegial school environment.

Theme 4.1.6: Talents and gifts. A majority of students $n=24$ spoke about being good in specific subjects or a broad cross-section of subjects or good in English; they did not identify these as specifically their talents or gifts, they spoke about what they felt they were good at. The stakeholder groups spoke about identifying students' talents and gifts and how these could best be nurtured, for MS2-T1 it was *it's just about providing opportunities*. The identification of a student's talents and gifts was often done through parents and was being addressed with students through PLPs with support from executive assisting parents through the systemic educational processes as RS1-T1 commented: *where the children identify their strengths and weaknesses and they set goals for themselves*, to get appropriate nurturing and support.

Personal Condition 4.2: Aboriginal Students' Academic Strengths

Students and stakeholders spoke of a range of personal academic skills which supported students' sound academic outcomes. These were clarified under six key themes which are expanded on below.

Theme 4.2.1: Good reader. Students' $n=24$ felt that being a good reader and loving to read assisted them in the classroom. This meant the majority of students wanted to read outside of school and this added value to their English language development as explained by MS2-S1: *I can show my wide vocabulary from reading books* or with RS2-S1: *Because it helps you be more confident in yourself when you read, it makes you more confident*, and understanding directions from teachers: *because it gets the image in your head what's going on (RS1-S3)*. Parents supported good reading as a key issue for the student's academic success.

Theme 4.2.2: Good in one subject. Students' $n=15$ identified that often it was their strength in one subject which gave them the impetus to have a go in other subjects. Confidence and ability in one subject helped them attempt other academic work. Such as MS3-S4: *write stories—narratives and literature*; and RS1-S6:

sports that I enjoy playing and they help me with school, because I like keeping fit. Then that helps with my education because I feel good about myself and then just take that into school and I do, I reckon, better work.

Theme 4.2.3: Listen to teacher. Students' considered a key to doing well in the classroom was the skill in being able to listen to teachers $n=33$. This was in relation to how to listen to the teacher; students felt they had acquired sound teacher listening skills: *I listen what they're like—when they're explaining on the board, I listen* (RS4-S6). In turn students could transfer listening to the teacher into the work required to be undertaken.

Theme 4.2.4: Complete work. Students' $n=15$ mentioned that the reason they got high outcomes was that they got the basic work required to be done in class completed, this then allowed them to do more challenging or extension work. As with RS1-S5: *it's not good to give up and just say, this is too hard, I'm going to give up right now*; and RS1-S2:

I was done in a few minutes and they were still going on and then I was giving like heaps and heaps of work and they were still doing that [original] work.

This approach to getting work completed was supported by Aboriginal staff with *they'll get on with it and get it done because a lot of them find it easier. So they just get it done and finish it* (RS4-AS1).

Theme 4.2.5: Independent worker. Whilst students all spoke about their preference for group learning and gaining additional information from their fellow classmates, $n=7$ also mentioned they felt they were independent, motivated and self-directed people as explained by MS3-S6: *I'm sort of independent. ... I love working with other people but I just sort of focus more when I'm by myself*. That is, when asked to do class work they could get the work done.

Theme 4.2.6: Good English language skills. Students' $n=14$ commented that their strength lay in English language skills and that they were good English speakers. Students mentioned competence in English language gave them the ability to do well in other subject areas. Teachers mentioned this was important in providing students with cross-communicational skills as pointed out by teacher RS3-T3: *differentiating on the use of different forms of English*

usage. Additionally teachers stressed sound English language use was not in detriment of the students' home language as expressed by RS3-T3: *I'm never going to correct them in socially speaking.*

Both the Aboriginal students and stakeholders identified that understanding the whole student requires an analysis of the student. This means understanding students' personal strengths and weaknesses; students' levels of confidence; students' techniques for concentration and listening skills; students' resilience; and students' personal talents and gifts; this understanding assists students in developing, refining and gaining sound academic outcomes. Understanding Aboriginal students' use and understanding of English creates guidance for teachers in areas where students require development.

Personal Condition 4.3: Aboriginal Students' Personal Drive

Students commented on their personal drives; their future goals; and need to be physical and mentally active as contributors to their sound academic outcomes.

Theme 4.3.1: Personal drive. Students $n=21$ mentioned they wanted to be seen as leaders and to achieve to their best ability, with students often influenced by parents and extended families. But it was their personal drive which made them want to gain sound academic outcomes in school, as mentioned by MS2-S1: *ambition, why I really want to succeed in life and be able to do things.*

Personal drive was supported by Aboriginal staff and teachers in the schools, as mentioned by RS2-T2: *their interest and their attitude*, and RS4-AS2: *more of a sense that those kids that are doing well, they know what they're doing.*

Theme 4.3.2: Future goals. All students $N=34$ commented that their future goals were important because they had something to aim for and could use these in determining the relevance of school, such as becoming a mechanic or engineer, required the need to be good at maths, such as with RS4-S4: *I want to be a builder when I grow up. ... So I've got to be good at maths.* Other students discussed how becoming a writer necessitated being good at English, or wishing to become a vet or going into medicine required overall good grades. As relayed by

MS3-S6: *I've thought about being a paramedic.* Having future goals helped students identify what they needed in school to achieve those goals.

Theme 4.3.3: Mentally and physically active. All students $N=34$ were clearly involved in a range of sports and club activities through school and home. Students mentioned they thought it important to keep active and not be lazy, as demonstrated by RS1-S2: *Yes. I just try to get involved in like as many things as I can do ... Instead of being like lazy all the time;* MS3-S3: *you do need to know how to swim ... it's good for your health;* and RS1-S6: *sports that I enjoy playing and they help me with school, because I like keeping fit.* The flow-on effect was good health and interests which stimulated their need to interact with other people and learn.

Section Summary

This section provided an overview of the personal conditions identified by students and supported by stakeholders which provided them with the incentive to do well academically at school. The conditions and themes raised by students were, firstly, identifying their personal strengths and weaknesses; having confidence, concentration and good listening skills; having and understanding resilience; and identifying talents and gifts to be nurtured and supported. Secondly, understanding students' academic strengths, such as being a good reader; being good in at least one subject; knowing how to listen to the teacher; completion of work; being an independent worker; and having good English language skills. Thirdly, understanding what drives students to do well academically; their future goals; and needing to keep mentally and physically active.

Summary

Chapter 8 provided a consolidated discussion on the research data provided by Metropolitan Aboriginal students and Regional Aboriginal students (see Chapter 7) and stakeholder groups (see Chapter 8). The chapter provided a cross analysis of the conditions of academic success as voiced by the Aboriginal students and stakeholders in this study. The findings were presented in five sections, the first being the priority conditions of support for Aboriginal students; the second, how schools support Aboriginal students to attain sound

academic outcomes; the third, students' home conditions which support Aboriginal students' sound academic outcomes at school; the fourth discussed how friends assisted Aboriginal students to gain sound academic outcomes; and the fifth section discussed what Aboriginal students themselves did which provided them with sound academic outcomes.

The following Chapter 10 provides a summary of the thesis, strengths and weaknesses of the research and a conclusion for the research undertaken.

CHAPTER 10

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION CONDITIONS WHICH SUPPORT HIGH ACADEMIC OUTCOMES FOR ABORIGINAL STUDENTS

Dodson (2009) suggested there are “plenty of examples of Indigenous success; we just have to recognise it and replicate it” (p. 3). This thesis sought to rigorously examine the conditions which support Aboriginal students’ academic success. The research recorded the voices of Aboriginal students $N=34$ (see Chapter 7) who have been identified through NAPLAN test results as achieving high academic outcomes with placement in the top 25% bands; along with stakeholders, i.e., parents ($N=22$), teachers ($N=26$), principals ($N=7$) and Aboriginal staff ($N=8$) (see Chapter 8) across ($N=7$) schools – $n=3$ Metropolitan and $n=4$ Regional NSW primary schools. The research aims were to: (1) Identify personal attributes and skills which Aboriginal students and stakeholders believe assist Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes; (2) Discover the conditions Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider important in assisting Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes in their *school* environment; (3) Discover the conditions Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider important in assisting Aboriginal students achieve successful academic outcomes in their *home* environment; and (4) Determine the priority conditions for Aboriginal students in what they perceive assist them to achieve successful academic outcomes.

The research has provided valuable insights into the dimensions of success: school, home, friends and personal conditions that have been identified as supporting sound academic outcomes of these successful Aboriginal students in this study (see Chapter 9). The dimensions and conditions have potential to guide stakeholders in supporting Aboriginal students.

In depicting the urgent need to have a planned approach to resolving the educational “gap” faced by Aboriginal students, stakeholders have been urged to recognise the role they serve in

closing educational “gaps” (Price, 2012). A “Partnership Cube” devised by MCEETYA (2005) and Riley-Mundine’s “Stakeholders Matrix” (2007) aimed to address how stakeholders can work together to achieve sound academic outcomes for Aboriginal students. The “Dimension and Conditions” model presented in Chapter 9 provides an additional framework for stakeholders on the key identified areas which high achieving Aboriginal students and their stakeholders have stated as conditions which support Aboriginal students.

Self-efficacy, self-concept, and self-determination theorists have emphasised the importance of an individual person’s efforts in being proactive with a belief in themselves (Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Berliner & Biddle, 1995; Bracey, 1991) as creating a cycle of confidence to successfully accomplish future unknown tasks. This research demonstrated that all Aboriginal students who participated in this investigation had high levels of confidence and resilience which assisted them in achieving sound academic outcomes. Additionally as referred by Schunk (1989, 1991) the students’ continued success increased their perceptions of control in what they achieved, expectations of high outcomes, valuing their outcomes, which provided feedback of their worth which provided greater motivation to achieve high academic outcomes (Bandarra & Schunk, 1981).

Self-concept theory suggests that a person reflects what they believe others perceive them to be (Pajares & Schunk, 2001) and this is important in having high concepts to influence a person’s judgement of their capableness, significance, success, and worth (Hattie, 1992; Coopersmith, 1967; Cooley, 1902). This research provided evidence that the students involved in the study had a high level of positive interaction with their immediate stakeholders – parents, teachers, principals, and Aboriginal staff – who had a high level of belief in these students, contributing to what the students did and their internalised need to be and do better academically (Bandura, 1997, 1986, 1978; Schunk, 1989, 1991; Erikson, 1980). This research supported theorist’s contentions of the important roles of teachers (Martin, Marsh, McInerney, Green, & Dowson, 2007; McInerney, 2005) in having a positive connection where the teacher’s belief in the student and the nurturing and cultivation of the student’s self-belief created a beneficial environment for the student. The schools engaged in this research transformed themselves through the efforts of the Principals and the teachers to encourage Aboriginal students; have proactive engagement with their parents; and change curriculum and school processes to ensure

an inclusive Aboriginal identity across the school. Mansour and Martin (2009) stressed the importance of a positive child-parent relationship and involvement of the parent in the school to shape a student's positive well-being and that the parents contributed to the students' academic growth with home resources and personal out-of-school assistance; these were also proven to be a key factor for the Aboriginal students engaged in this research. Parents in this research also felt they were welcomed to their child's school which Lopez, Scribner, and Mahitvanichcha (2001) considered a pivotal influence in students feeling that they belonged in the school. Self-concept and self-efficacy research demonstrated the importance of peers as being particularly important in students valuing education and wishing to achieve high academic outcomes (McInerney, 2005; Fredericks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Wentzel, Barry, & Caldwell, 2004). Peers were a key influence voiced by the Aboriginal students in this research, for maintaining students' feelings of well-being, positive identity, and setting high academic outcomes.

This research supported findings by Magson, Craven, Nelson, Yeung, Bodkin-Andrews, and McInerney (2014) that Aboriginal student achievement and motivation requires a complexity of personal, family, and the inclusion of group orientation within a circle of positive engagement with the schooling system of teacher, principals, and Aboriginal staff. This research provided evidence to offer further support for research undertaken by Weiner (1990), McInerney (1994), McInerney and Dowson (2003), Martin (2006), Munns, Martin, and Craven (2008), Sarra (2012), Rhea (2012), McInerney and King (2013), Herbert, McInerney, Fasoli, Stephenson, and Ford (2014), Magson (2014), and Tracey, Craven, Yeung, Tregeagle, Burnstein, and Stanley (2015) in the provision of information of the motivators and incentives for Aboriginal student engagement and academic success in schools.

Whilst this research aimed to determine conditions which were evidenced by participants as conditions which led to Aboriginal students' academic success, a secondary unintended outcome was the clarification of the importance of stakeholder engagement in supporting Aboriginal students' academic outcomes. That is, schools which have quality teachers, supportive programs which ensure reading competence for Aboriginal students, sound school ideology and leadership, and provision of leadership opportunities for Aboriginal students through school representation. The study also found that Aboriginal students' home conditions were an important factor. Stable home environments, with parents who understand the school

system; parents have knowledge on how to support their children in the school environment; and are comfortable in entering schools, led to successful outcomes for Aboriginal students. Students also gain valuable support through their extended families and talents gained through sports, hobbies and their animals help them develop skills and confidence which are transferable into the school context. Additionally students need to have access to academic support out of school such as tutors as required. Also cultural activities both within and outside the school provide strength in identity which supports them to achieve higher academic performance. The value of friends for Aboriginal students across the school and particularly through academic and emotional support was shown to be pivotal to students' success in the school environment. Aboriginal students recognise their own personal contributions to their academic success through their personal strengths, academic strengths and personal drive to achieve academic success.

In the school dimension, findings demonstrate the need for schools with Aboriginal students to have teachers with quality teaching practices; principals with sound Aboriginal educational and community experiences; parents with appropriate understanding of school systems and practices; programs which assist students to develop strong and supportive friendships; and educational programs which assist Aboriginal students to identify their personal and academic strengths.

This research has been pivotal in assessing conditions of academic success from a position of high achievement through determining from and listening to Aboriginal students and their stakeholders. Additionally the research strengthens the essential role of stakeholder groups and their inter-relationship in supporting Aboriginal students to achieve high academic outcomes.

Implications for Theory, Research, and Practice

Research Impact

This section provides an overview of implications for theory, research and practice which has arisen from this research. The impact of information gleaned from this research provides greater understanding of the conditions that support high academic achievement and outcomes for Aboriginal students that could be replicated. For example, this research has identified a range

of conditions which support sound academic outcomes for Aboriginal students hence there is an opportunity for stakeholders to assess how these conditions may be replicated to support and strengthen Aboriginal students' academic outcomes on a greater scale and in a more sustained fashion in schools. The findings in this study further validate and extend those found by Sarra (2011) in his work turning Cherbourg school, which was identified as a school failing Aboriginal students, into a school which achieved sound practice and academic outcomes for Aboriginal students.

This research has identified four key dimensions and conditions, as raised by high achieving Aboriginal students and their stakeholder groups as providing support for high academic outcomes. The four dimensions: school, home, friends and personal, provide a range of conditions and themes which could be replicated across many schools to assist a greater number of Aboriginal students to gain improved academic outcomes. The key conditions for each of the four dimensions (see Chapter 9) are:

Dimension 1: school conditions which support academic success for Aboriginal students. Academic success for Aboriginal students requires good teachers who engage with Aboriginal students; are flexible in and have sound knowledge of best pedagogical practices with Aboriginal students; and are confident in their engagement with students' parents. A key to Aboriginal students' academic success is their reading competence achieved primarily by Year 3. That a good school for Aboriginal students have sound ideological approaches in supporting Aboriginal students and engaging with the local Aboriginal community; that a whole school and staff approach is required to support Aboriginal students; that school curriculum embeds Aboriginal perspectives and cultural knowledge and have a rigorous Aboriginal studies program; and that the school have visible and school-wide recognition of Aboriginality. Additionally, that schools incorporate school representation both within and external to the school to build valuable learning experiences and self-esteem in Aboriginal students, to strengthen their Aboriginal identity.

Dimension 2: home conditions which support academic success for Aboriginal students. A primary condition for Aboriginal students, no matter the socio-economic circumstances is that they have a stable home environment. It is important that students' parents'

have knowledge of school systems and are able to engage with the school. It is also relevant to ensure students' participate in out of school activities to develop personal skills and talents through cultural activities, sports, animals and hobbies.

Dimension 3: Friends as a condition of academic support. Friends were seen as an importance for Aboriginal students in the school setting to create a stabilising environment for students in the school; and that these friends are across the whole school. Friends' were essential in provision of emotional and academic support which assisted Aboriginal students gain high academic outcomes.

Dimension 4: Aboriginal students' personal conditions for academic support. A significant condition was recognition of Aboriginal students' personal strengths and weaknesses to determine appropriate approaches and support with students; that Aboriginal students who have: confidence, good concentration skills, good listening skills, resilience, and recognition and development of their talents and skills will achieve high academic outcomes. Aboriginal students' academic strengths rely on: being a good reader; being a high achiever in at least one subject; knowing how to listen to the teacher; that they complete foundational school work; can be independent workers when required; and have good English language skills. Finally it is Aboriginal students' personal drive; understanding of what school skills they require for future goals; and that they keep mentally and physically active which will assist students to gain sound academic skills.

Implications For Theory

Utilising multi-grounded theory within a qualitative framework as the primary focus for information collection in this research has provided foundational information from a primary source, being Aboriginal students who have gained high academic outcomes, within a system in which Aboriginal students are not identified as major academic achievers. Additionally stakeholders involved with the students such as parents, teachers, principals and Aboriginal staff validated and enhanced Aboriginal students' responses. As such this research has provided a strong theoretical framework for understanding the conditions which support academic outcomes for Aboriginal students.

Implications For Research

This research has established foundational information on the dimensions and conditions which Aboriginal students and their stakeholders consider best support Aboriginal students' high academic outcomes. As such this research will strengthen the knowledge base, being from a positive position to further seed success for Aboriginal students.

The AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) is a rare only major research study in Aboriginal education within the public education sector in the past decade. The AER (2004) has been the key source for policy development and practice in NSW since 2004, providing guidance in a multitude of conditions to improve educational outcomes for Aboriginal students. The AER (2004) aims to: strengthen policy, planning and implementation; extend quality teaching and learning; fortify identities of Aboriginal students; engage Aboriginal students; apply Aboriginal cultural knowledge; form collaborative partnerships between schools and Aboriginal communities; build community capacity; challenge racism; and advance leadership and accountability. The pivotal factor being that support for Aboriginal students should be a joint focus engaging all stakeholders with each having a role to be fulfilled, as is demonstrated in Appendix 1: Stakeholders Matrix—Conditions for Success for Aboriginal Students, which is drawn from the conditions mentioned in the AER (2004) (see also Riley-Mundine, 2007).

From the response by the students and stakeholders engaged in this research, it could be argued that the schools participating in this research are addressing a large number of the AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) factors as mentioned through the AER (see Chapters 2 and 3). The present investigation contributed to further understandings of conditions of success for high achieving Aboriginal students and their stakeholders' perspectives of what supports academic outcomes in the school environment. The findings in this study further validate and extend those found by the AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004).

A number of research implications have arisen in this research within the school environment, such as:

Strengthen dimensions and conditions within schools. Case studies using a multiple-case study replication design in schools that have Aboriginal students consistently in the top 25% of the NAPLAN test bands to determine to what degree the dimensions and conditions identified in this study are actively used in schools, to identify conditions for further development and support thus providing an opportunity to enhance educational outcomes for a greater number of Aboriginal students.

Good teachers of Aboriginal students. Case studies of 5–10 teachers who have been recognised as good teachers for Aboriginal students and profile their careers, backgrounds, Aboriginal education and their pedagogical practices in the classroom with Aboriginal students.

Good schools for Aboriginal students. Case study and/or survey of schools to gain in-depth knowledge of structures and systems used to best support successful Aboriginal students in the top 25% of NAPLAN results.

Executive strength and support for Aboriginal students. Case study of 3–5 identified effective principals to determine integrated approaches, skills developments and educational requirements for teaching Aboriginal students in primary or secondary schools.

Aboriginal staff. Case studies to assess the additional roles played by Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal Education Officers and what they provide for schools in supporting high academic outcomes and cultural support for Aboriginal students and their parents.

This potential future research would add value to a holistic understanding of successful conditions for Aboriginal students achieving sound academic outcomes.

The research presented in this thesis has supported theoretical and practical factors which have arisen in much of the prior research undertaken in Aboriginal education, particularly in the identified important role of parents in students' schooling; and it has strengthened the need for parent knowledge of the school system to facilitate their engagement in the school to best support their children. Additionally it has shown that access to resources out of school, either through the home or other facilities is required to ensure academic success for Aboriginal students.

Research could be carried out in the parent school relationship area, such as:

Schools' interaction with parents and Aboriginal communities. Case studies with schools and Aboriginal communities to determine improved working relationships to enhance Aboriginal students' academic outcomes and cultural identity in schools.

Aboriginal communities and life activities. Research to support and enhance out of school activities for Aboriginal students' participation in cultural, sports and/or hobbies development.

Past research has focused on the importance of a cohort of Aboriginal students within schools to support one another (Purdie et al., 2000). This research has highlighted the importance of friends for Aboriginal students in seeding success through their academic and emotional support. A future research might be:

Aboriginal students and friends. Assess friendships in the school environment for their importance in Aboriginal students' emotional and social wellbeing. Consider how friendships support academic outcomes; how friendships can be strengthened; and what may be the implications for program development to support friendships.

This research discussed what Aboriginal students felt they themselves brought to their own academic success, that is, what attributes and skills they had; that reading competence by the majority of successful Aboriginal students was acquired by Year 3; and the value to their personal development and education these students gained from representing their school.

Future research in this area might be:

Aboriginal students and school representation. In-depth case studies of school representation and Aboriginal students' value added skills development.

Implications For Practice

The implications for school practice from this research provide guidance from a positivist position rather than a deficit position. The dimensions and their conditions as raised in Chapter 9,

provide a framework for stakeholders and schools to strengthen Aboriginal students and provide appropriate support for stakeholders and placement of appropriate staff in schools thus assisting Aboriginal students to gain high academic outcomes.

Strengths and Limitations of the Present Investigation

Strengths Of The Research

The strengths of the present investigation have been found within a multitude of levels, these are broken down as follows.

A core strength of the research was providing a safe and understanding space to listen to and document Aboriginal students' perceptions. This in-depth study from the point of view of Aboriginal students has been lacking in research into Aboriginal students' achievements and their needs in Aboriginal education. Previously much of the emphasis on Aboriginal student success has been from stakeholders' perception, that is those people seen as authorities in Aboriginal education, such as, state and regional staff, and school executive; yet it is pertinent to engage the people most affected by this research—Aboriginal students themselves—as a driver for policy directions.

Importantly the creative exercise of using photographs (used in session two with Metropolitan and Regional students, see Chapter 6 and Chapter 7) was an alternative way to gather students' views and engaged the students in “doing” and “being” an active participant in the research. Feedback from parents showed that their children were excited with this approach (see Chapter 9), because they felt that the researcher had trust in them by giving them a camera to use over two to three days. Throughout the study teachers often spoke to the researcher about the high level of engagement the students had in the research, with some teachers recognising the educational benefit of the photographic activity the researcher had used, and thinking that they too would like to undertake a similar exercise with their students in the future.

A second core strength of the research was the participation and engagement of multiple stakeholders such as, parents, teachers, principals and Aboriginal staff, whose authority, understanding and guidance has direct impact with Aboriginal students. This approach was undertaken as the researcher believes that no clear understanding of issues in Aboriginal

education can be undertaken without multiple engagements of stakeholders and ensures a 360 degree approach to gain multiple insights in Aboriginal education. The multiple stakeholder approach has ensured there is a reflection of different participants' views; that there was triangulation and corroboration of perceptions to collate common or divergent themes; to gain greater insight from particular participants' perspectives for cross-study comparisons and analysis; and for validation and cross-checking of themes across the multiple stakeholders.

A third area of strength is that the researcher is from the same cultural background of key participants in the research, that is, Aboriginal. This allowed the researcher to respond to nuances within interviews with individuals and the ability to focus on key issues for participants. The researcher is also a teacher who has worked for four decades in Aboriginal education; as such the researcher's depth of knowledge in the discipline was used to draw more subtle shades of meaning from the participants as they were more comfortable with someone from the same culture.

A qualitative approach has been used as qualitative methodologies apply to natural settings and attempt to interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. Including the voices of Aboriginal students in this research was a key strength as it added a depth of knowledge from their perspective (see Chapter 7). Qualitative research gives flexibility in the way participants respond; adds information which is in-depth and rigorous; and provides validity and credibility through multiple stakeholder perceptions (Winn & Keller, 2001). This research also allowed the researcher to identify unanticipated themes, which has meant the research direction was able to be quickly revised as new information was presented; and for subtleties and complexities as identified by differing stakeholders to be clarified and expressed.

An unexpected strength was the use of the brainstorm focus session and photograph sessions, which provided a unique process to engage individually with Aboriginal primary school students which allowed for optimum opportunities for students to present their understandings and time to reflect on what they thought was important to them. The research also provided a prime opportunity to validate findings as presented in previous research which had not engaged with Aboriginal students to check they were indeed accurate or to refute and present new findings.

This investigation will be useful for policy makers as it describes the setting within which policies will be implemented; and in provision of feedback on the practice in developing teaching and learning and school structures specifically for Aboriginal students. The findings are transferable to other settings, to improve academic outcomes for all Aboriginal students.

Limitations Of The Research

Qualitative research has limitations as with all research. In qualitative research the researcher has to be mindful that the results may be influenced by researchers' own biases and idiosyncrasies. There could be assumed bias of researcher in being from the same cultural background *Aboriginal* as most of the key participants. The researcher's presence could affect the participant's responses, and the researcher could impose their own views on children and stakeholder participants. Additionally, the research quality is dependent on the researcher's individual skills. A limitation with qualitative research is that the data collection and analysis is time consuming and intensive, and the knowledge gained in the research may not always be able to be generalised to all locations and all Aboriginal students. Finally, a limitation is often the lower credibility with administrators and policy makers due to the perceived smaller sample size in qualitative research, which can be viewed as anecdotal and/or lacking in rigour.

Summary and Conclusion

Finally this research provides a consolidated view of high achieving Aboriginal students' and stakeholders' perceptions of those conditions evident in supporting high academic outcomes of the Aboriginal students. The thesis has ten chapters. In Chapter 1 is an introduction and an argument for the research; Chapter 2 provides a contextualisation of the place of equitable education for Aboriginal people internationally and nationally; Chapter 3 provided an overview of research relating to self-efficacy and self-concept theory and its impact on Indigenous students schooling in achieving sound academic outcomes; Chapter 4 gave an overview of what seeds success for Aboriginal students as presented through current research. The thesis framed in Chapter 5 provided the research's investigation with the aims and research questions for the participants; followed by Chapter 6 with the research methodology utilised. The key data

chapters were: Chapter 7 with analysis of Metropolitan and Regional Aboriginal students' perceptions of conditions which they identified as supporting their sound academic outcomes; and Chapter 8 providing an analysis of stakeholder perceptions aligned to the conditions raised by Aboriginal students' with additional information from their own engagement in Aboriginal students' educational outcomes. Chapter 9 presented a cross-analysis of Aboriginal student and stakeholder perceptions creating four dimensions from Aboriginal students' priority order of conditions: school, home, friends and personal conditions. This final Chapter 10 has provided an overview of the implications of the research and a summary and conclusion to the research.

The results of this study are important as they demonstrate an accurate account of the conditions which best support academic success as perceived by Aboriginal students who are achieving sound academic outcomes as demonstrated through their NAPLAN test results and as perceived by stakeholders actively engaged in supporting these students in achieving their sound academic outcomes. This foundation as presented in this thesis can be built on and used to replicate academic success for other Aboriginal students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1

Stakeholders Matrix—Conditions For Success For Aboriginal Students

To ensure the education system creates Aboriginal students who will become successful and self-actualised people, it is imperative that the stakeholders involved understand their roles. It is also vital that schooling is not seen as stratified levels which exist in vacuums with little or no knowledge of the students previous years and what may be the destination of the student should particular decisions be made by the stakeholders who hold influence over the students educational directions and how this may impact on the students involvement in the external environment. Educators, whilst they may be specialists within their own domain, are required to have an understanding of the effect on the learning they impart to students and that this is affected by previous experiences. What this means is, educators having an understanding of students educational, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds to ensure they build on the students experience to create positive and successful experiences for the student, this will in turn create a sense of self-fulfilment and a strong sense of self and identity for the student.

The stakeholder is an individual or groups who have a personal stake in the educational process, that is, there will be a positive or negative experience due to the role they play. Stakeholders have conditions they need to consider in ensuring student preparedness for education. This will result in students who have the personal rigor and resilience to set their own courses for their own measures of success.

Core conditions for success across each stage of learning, involves intimate knowledge of the following by the stakeholders, to establish sound strategic planning: cross cultural awareness and understanding; racism – how it is handled and strategies for overcoming racism; community profiles; and meeting syllabus outcomes with quality teaching. Each stage of learning has many similar conditions which are required to be met to ensure the educational opportunities received by Aboriginal students are optimised; there are also a number of conditions specific to each stage. These may change from school to school or institution to institution. What

will be required to ensure all strategies work in open and transparent communication with measurable targets to ensure all stakeholders are accountable and can see the student's progression occurring.

Throughout the educational process it is essential that all stakeholders have a clear understanding of the effecting factors which are core components to creating successful students and how these inter-relate to form either positive or negative experiences for the student. The following conditions for success are based on information gained from an analysis of, the AER (NSW AECG & NSW DET, 2004) and personal experiences and training as an Aboriginal educator.

Stakeholders Matrix : Adapted from: Riley-Mundine, L. (2007). “Untapping Resources for Indigenous Students”, in Knipe, S. (Ed).

Middle Years Schooling. Sydney: Pearson.

STAKEHOLDER & CONDITIONS REQUIRED	PRIOR TO SCHOOL	INFANT YEARS SCHOOLING	MIDDLE & UPPER PRIMARY	JUNIOR / MIDDLE SECONDARY	15 TO 19 YEARS	FURTHER EDUCATION VET & UNI TO EMPLOYMENT
EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS	Acknowledge parents and their Kinship structures as being the first educators of students	Build on the student’s cultural, social, intellectual, spiritual, physical and educational potential which will allow students to engage fully as learners and become self-actualised	Foundations which contribute to future educational success, ensuring development and identification of talents and gifts. Not just to see Aboriginal students as the “problem” students	Schools further support and strengthen self-esteem through understanding and respect of culture in the local community	Retain Aboriginal students with provision of subject selection which allow for optimum future educational and career choices	Greater access to programs of study which provide optimum career opportunities through completion of courses of study
PARENTS & COMMUNITY						
Parent health & wellbeing	Healthy and happy parents who are themselves active and self-actualised will impart these skills to their children, to create: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nurturing and strong bonds with children • Valuing children • Belonging & pride created in children 					
Cultural strength from parents	Provision for students / child: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Kinship support • Cultural affirmation • Language development Provision for teachers: Understanding of cultural differences and how lack of understanding can create alienation at the school / within institution for parents and students					
Positive life experiences	Fun and life skills with the opportunities to make mistakes, which allow child growth in strong sense of self in self resilience, belonging and pride. Through activity provision in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Family and Kinship activities • Clubs and camps • Educational experiences external to school setting 					Continuance of development of life skills outside the formal educational structures

Involvement in education - educational needs - student needs - understanding strategic plans - data analysis	Provision: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Health needs and screening• Language development in own language and English	Understand: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Educational support for child• Syllabus outcomes at each stage• Need for attendance on a regular basis of child at school	Pro-active and continuous programs which enable parents to understand school and educational requirements	Self-actualised learning setting and achieving own goals
Understand and acknowledge socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal students	It is important that Aboriginal people understand their own circumstances so that they may develop their own pro-active strategies to break the “Cycles”, they may find themselves caught in.			
STUDENTS - ABORIGINAL				
Health and wellbeing	Consistency in receiving appropriate health services Wellbeing through positive reinforcement and external activities such as, sports, music, drama – life skills development gained through clubs and other social activities. These are important as they provide opportunities for students to develop an internal sense of resilience Service delivery which takes into consideration actual health needs			
Positive relationships	Opportunity to see teachers as positive educators and as mentors not just in role of disciplinary manager Use the strength of peer group and Kinship networks to support Aboriginal students			
Successful educational experiences	Individual success breeds need for future success	A majority of Aboriginal students are entering early stages of learning and high school with low literacy levels, making the learning experience incomprehensible. The result is large numbers of Aboriginal students enrolling in VET programs to gain basic skills and competencies, which should have been gained at school		
Early intervention and support	Case management and tracking of students with an identified educational mentor at each stage, should ensure early intervention and support programs are maintained			
STUDENTS – NON- ABORIGINAL				
Understand and Knowledge of Aboriginal history and Culture	Aboriginal perspectives across all syllabus / subject areas Aboriginal guests visit classes regularly and form relationships with students	Aboriginal Studies as a core course in Years 7 to 10.	HSC Aboriginal Studies given greater weight and recognition for entry to university	Provision of Aboriginal Studies and perspectives across all faculty areas
STAFF - ABORIGINAL				
Cultural strength	Valuing what the Aboriginal educator brings to the school setting: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultural knowledge• Kinship systems			

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultural protocols• Communication skills Inclusion of staff in all planning processes – use staff as “drivers” in creating change					
Understand and acknowledge socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal students	As with all other staff, it is imperative that Aboriginal staff receive on-going training to keep up-to-date with community and student conditions					
Training	Appropriate remuneration for staff to undertake training to up-grade skills					
STAFF - TEACHING						
Understand and acknowledge Cultural identity and Cultural protocols	To provide an appropriate service to Aboriginal students all teachers must undertake Aboriginal Education in: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-service training• Orientation on arrival at new school• Continuous training and up-grading skills and knowledge					
Recognition and appreciation of language differences <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Traditional Languages- Aboriginal English- Standard Australian English (SAE)	Early intervention and support will ensure sound foundations for future years of education	By Year 3 – BST results indicate 18 month gap in learning for Aboriginal students	By Year 5 – BST results indicate 18 month gap in learning for Aboriginal students Use of Aboriginal English may cause communication difficulties	By Year 7 – BST results indicate 36 month gap in learning for Aboriginal students ESL teaching for Aboriginal students required Often students not functional in SAE, which leads to disengagement	The current minority of students succeeding at the senior levels are proficient in English literacy	The majority of Aboriginal students are enrolling in VET programs to gain literacy competency
Understand and acknowledge socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal students	It is imperative that all other staff, receive on-going training to keep up-to-date with community and student conditions					
Creation of positive relationships and successful educational experiences	Teachers need to ensure students: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• achieve educational success• Recognise individual successes – not just in comparison to other students		Use Kinship and peer support as a positive strength to support and engage students Alternative approaches: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Class / Year Homerooms Homework Centres			

Quality teaching practices	Qualified early childhood teachers	How the teacher teaches Teachers ability to recognise different requirements for: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Learning difficulties• Behavioural problems Understand the correlation between language and literacy across all faculty areas Teaching programs that engage and motivate students
Cultural teaching practices	Effective pedagogical practice that take into consideration the students ontology (cultural background)	
Syllabus and curriculum outcome requirements	In depth knowledge of syllabus requirements and expected student outcomes across each stage	VET programs available for students to study whilst at school
Transition stages for students & support requirements	All educators are required to be aware of the various transition stages students go through and how they can best support students through these stages Case Management of students to ensure: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Syllabus requirements are meet• Talents and gifts identified and supported Establish links between feeder primary and high schools and VET Centres to share students’ performance information Smaller groups in Year 7 to cope with transitional changes	
Intervention - identification of intervention required and when it needs to be used	Teaching staff need to be familiar with and aware of how to engage students in reference to: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cultural difference• Learning difficulty• Behavioural problems Rather what is occurring is that these factors are being mixed by teachers in how they will manage students and then strategies they then invoke to work with students	
STAFF - EXECUTIVE		
Understand and acknowledge Cultural identity and Cultural protocols	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Staff training in Cultural awareness in a continuous up-grading of knowledge• Demonstrated use of Cultural awareness in – use of protocols and Cultural referencing• Cultural programs which have large Aboriginal involvement• Use of Cultural protocols in school functions; seeking information; and community involvement• Aboriginal Education Council – to advise the School / Institution on relevant Cultural issues and educational needs of Aboriginal students	
Understand and	Understand socio-economic conditions and how they may effect:	

acknowledge socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Parental involvement in educational activities• Student participation in extra-curricular activities• Parent and student self-image				
Community profile	In-depth knowledge of each Aboriginal school community, through developing a community profile on: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Community history• Traditional affiliations and Kinship networks• Socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal and wider community				
Parent communication and consultation	Support and strengthen students’ self-esteem through proactive and “real” communication and involvement				
Leadership and school management	To ensure teaching and other staff are able to be strategic and aware of Aboriginal students issues requires sustained leadership and direction at every level				
Monitoring, evaluation and reporting student’s <ul style="list-style-type: none">- attendance- suspension- achievements	To provide appropriate and accurate information which will form a basis for improving student support through provision of accurate: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• reports to staff and parents• monitoring student progress to assess where need is required for students and staff <p>Attendance patterns affect student performance, the average attendance for Aboriginal students throughout the learning stages is an increasing pattern of in-attendance and increased suspension rates, with lower achievements. It is essential that these be monitored to analyse current statistics, why this in-attendance is taking place and then develop strategies to overcome attendance & suspension rates.</p>				
Transition stages for students & support requirements	Readiness for school as a majority of Aboriginal children do not attend pre-school	Case management and open staff discussions to apply support requirements of each student, through monitoring: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Progression of students and readiness for each new stage in literacy and language skills	Greater change in transition from Year 6 to Year 7 than for other students	Reduction in students progression to Year 12 would indicate a need for greater monitoring and pro-active action strategies	Issues in VET are completion of all modules to gain certificates of completion
Student tracking and monitoring	Systemic process of tracking and monitoring students is required. This can be done at a school level through case management				
STAFF - ADMIN					
Understand and acknowledge Cultural identity and Cultural protocols	Admin staffs are the front line staffs that are often the first contact at the school. These people are often left out of training programs and yet need to be included if there is to be consistency of awareness and pro-active programs which will create an inclusive climate in the educational environment				
School community					
Public relations and customer service					

REGIONAL & STATE	
Understand and acknowledge Cultural identity and Cultural protocols	It is essential that Aboriginal education is seen to be everyone's business and not just the teachers or Aboriginal Units responsibility. This requires staff at all levels to be aware, strategic and vigorous in their duty of care and planning
Racism	<p>Acknowledge Racism in the school environment and develop proactive strategies which:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide Aboriginal students with coping mechanisms to create resilience • Teach other students about racism and how they can assist to combat racism • Development of state-wide programs and resources • Teaching strategies and training to assist the classroom teacher in identifying and combating Racism in themselves; teaching practices; and with all students • Appropriate discipline for staff and students who carryout acts of racism – deal with it seriously • Strong leadership from executive on dealing with Racism and supporting Anti-Racism Officers
Community profiles	<p>Develop better profiling and data on Aboriginal communities on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student numbers – within each school range; at each stage; and how these students' progress • Where students are geographically located and how this effects or is affected by priorities and funds, that is, overall numbers in PSFP schools and do all Aboriginal students get access to funding and support programs
Teacher and Executive training & support	Through strategic planning and focusing on priority issues allocate funding to ensure appropriate training is available
Aboriginal employment	<p>Aboriginal employment strategies and targeting where staff are most urgently required</p> <p>Staff training programs for career development</p>
Staff fitness - Culturally appropriate and understanding	<p>Staff who apply to work in schools with high Aboriginal populations are appropriately trained and prepared to work with Aboriginal communities, parents and students</p> <p>Priority Aboriginal staff</p>
Strategic Planning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop effective tools in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - data collection & collation - strategic plans - monitoring and evaluation • Monitoring, evaluation and reporting school's effectiveness with student's: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - attendance - suspension - achievements • Student tracking and transition stages: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved tracking of students between schools - Strategic policies and funding targeting to decrease impact of transition points between educational stages
Resourcing	Development of long-term strategies with appropriate resources for teachers, schools and students

requirement for	Case management of students – how this can be done at each level
INTERAGENCY	
Community profiles	<p>Understanding of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community and its diverse needs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • History • Socio-economic conditions – age, gender, levels of education, employment, health, housing • Who are the relevant stakeholders in the community • Organisations and Businesses – roles, functions, summary of operations, strategic plans, what they have to offer as support
Understand and acknowledge socio-economic conditions of Aboriginal students	<p>Essential to have a clear understanding of the current status of students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Socio-economic conditions • Schools attended • Performance data
Services which impact on learning - Health - Employment - Transport	Co-ordination of whole family approach to resolving socio-economic needs
Co-ordination of interagency services	Working across and within agencies in a matrix approach at all levels of service delivery

Appendix 2

Research Questions And Interview Schedule

Aboriginal Students Participant Questions And Interview Schedule

The schedule of questions, for Aboriginal students and stakeholders is presented in provides an overview of the questions as asked of each student. These questions were designed to tease out Aboriginal students' perceptions of significant conditions contributing to their academic success. Two complimentary in-depth interview schedules were held with Aboriginal students engaged in this research, they were:

Session 1 – In-depth Interview - Brainstorm Focus Session. The first interview session with students was a 'Brainstorm Focus Session' fully described in Chapter 5 Research Methodology. In this session a series of questions were designed to be flexible and open ended to engage Aboriginal students in the research.

Interview Questions for Aboriginal Student Participants

Research Question (RQ)	STUDENT (a)
1.1 What are the personal attributes and skills which Aboriginal students and stakeholders believe have assisted the Aboriginal students to achieve successful academic outcomes?	1.1.1a Do you like school?
	1.1.2a What do you think you do that helps you succeed at school:
	1.1.3a What do you think you do well to gain good academic results?
	1.1.4a What are you good at or like doing?
2.1 What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider being important conditions that assist Aboriginal students to achieve academic outcomes in their <i>school</i> environment?	2.1.1a What do you think helps you succeed at school: - your class mates? - your teacher? - your parents? - any other? How do they help you?
	2.1.2a Does the teacher or school do anything to especially help Aboriginal students?
	2.1.3a Why do you think this is such a good school?
	2.1.4a What do you like about your best teachers?
	2.1.5a What do you think makes a good school?
	2.1.6a What do you think makes the perfect teacher?

	2.1.7a Is your community involved much in your school?
3.1 What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider as being important conditions in assisting Aboriginal students to achieve sound academic outcomes in their <i>home</i> environment?	3.1.1a Do your parents help you do well at school? How?
	3.1.2a What helps you at home to do well at school?
	3.1.3a What other activities do you do through home and out of school that helps you do well at school?
4.1 What are the common conditions which have contributed to success of Aboriginal students and how relevant are these?	4.1.1a List the conditions mentioned in priority order. (Complete this task through photograph elicited session)

Session 2 – In-depth Interview – Photograph Elicited Session. The second interview session with students was to build on the research questions and interview questions in the initial brainstorm focus session, a ‘Photograph Elicited Session’ as explained in Chapter 5 Research Methodology. This session was completely dependent on the up to 10 photographs taken by the student. The students were asked two questions. The first question was in relation to the photographs taken by the students, where students were asked to explain each photograph taken and how the item shown in the photograph contributed to the students’ academic success. The second question, related to the priority order of the conditions raised by the student in this session, students being asked to prioritise the conditions; they raised in the photograph elicited interview; in order of importance to them, and explaining why each item was placed in this order. This process was used to gain further information on what students cited as the conditions that had most impact on their achieving sound academic outcomes.

Stakeholders Participant Questions And Interview Schedule

The schedule of questions as presented in Table 4.2 (below) provides an overview of the questions as asked of each stakeholder participant through an in-depth interview, fully explained in Chapter 5 Research Methodology.

Interview Questions for Stakeholder Participants

Research Question (RQ)	PARENT / CAREGIVER (b)	TEACHER (c)	PRINCIPAL (d)	ABORIGINAL STAFF (e)
1.1 What are the personal attributes and skills which Aboriginal students and stakeholders believe have assisted the Aboriginal students to achieve successful academic outcomes?	1.1.1b What do you think Aboriginal students like about this school?	1.1.1c What do you think Aboriginal students like about this school?	1.1.1d What do you think Aboriginal students like about this school?	1.1.1e What do you think Aboriginal students like about this school?
	1.1.2b What is it about your child that assists them in gaining sound academic outcomes?	1.1.2c Why are these Aboriginal students gaining sound academic outcomes?	1.1.2d Why are these Aboriginal students gaining sound academic outcomes?	1.1.2e Why are these Aboriginal students gaining sound academic outcomes?
2.1 What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider being important conditions that assist Aboriginal students to achieve academic outcomes in their <i>school</i> environment?	2.1.1b In what way do you think the following help Aboriginal students be successful at school: - class mates? - teacher? - parents? - any other?	2.1.1c In what way do you think the following help Aboriginal students be successful at school: - class mates? - teacher? - parents? - any other?	2.1.1d In what way do you think the following help Aboriginal students be successful at school: - class mates? - teacher? - parents? - any other?	2.1.1e In what way do you think the following help Aboriginal students be successful at school: - class mates? - teacher? - parents? - any other?
	2.1.2b How does the teacher of high achieving Aboriginal students especially help?	2.1.2c How does the teacher of high achieving Aboriginal students especially help?	2.1.2d How does the teacher of high achieving Aboriginal students especially help?	2.1.2e How does the teacher of high achieving Aboriginal students especially help?
	2.1.3b Why do you think this is such a good school?	2.1.3c Why do you think this is such a good school?	2.1.3d Why do you think this is such a good school?	2.1.3e Why do you think this is such a good school?
	2.1.4b What do you like about your child's best teachers?	2.1.4c What do you identify in your best teachers in assisting Aboriginal students?	2.1.4d What do you identify in your best teachers in assisting Aboriginal students?	2.1.4e What do you identify in your best teachers in assisting Aboriginal students?
	2.1.5b What makes a good	2.1.5c What makes a good	2.1.5d What makes a good	2.1.5e What makes a good

	school for Aboriginal students?	school for Aboriginal students?	school for Aboriginal students?	school for Aboriginal students?
	2.1.6b What do you think makes the perfect teacher for Aboriginal students?	2.1.6c What do you think makes the perfect teacher for Aboriginal students?	2.1.6d What do you think makes the perfect teacher for Aboriginal students?	2.1.6e What do you think makes the perfect teacher for Aboriginal students?
	2.1.7b Does your community know much about what happens in the school?	2.1.7c Does your community know much about what happens in the school?	2.1.7d Does your community know much about what happens in the school?	2.1.7e Does your community know much about what happens in the school?
	2.1.8b What do you think you do that best supports your child in school?	2.1.8c What do you think you do that best supports Aboriginal students in school?	2.1.8d What do you think you do that best supports Aboriginal students in school?	2.1.8e What do you think you do that best supports Aboriginal students in school?
3.1 What do Aboriginal students and stakeholders consider as being important conditions in assisting Aboriginal students to achieve sound academic outcomes in their <i>home</i> environment?	3.1.1b Are you involved in the school? How are you involved?	3.1.1c How much school support do you get from the students' parents?	3.1.1d How much school support do you get from the students' parents?	3.1.1e How much school support do you get from the students' parents?
	3.1.2b How much school support do other members of your family/community give to the school?	3.1.2c How much school support do you get from members of the Aboriginal community?	3.1.2d How much school support do you get from members of the Aboriginal community?	3.1.2e How much school support do you get from other of the Aboriginal community?
	3.1.3b What have you done in the past or do now to help your child gain sound academic outcomes?	3.1.3c How do the Aboriginal community assist the school?	3.1.3d How do the Aboriginal community assist the school?	3.1.3e How do the Aboriginal community help you?

Appendix 3

UWS Human Research Ethics Committee

12 July 2011

Professor Rhonda Craven,
Centre for Educational Research

Dear Rhonda and Lynette,

I wish to formally advise you that the Human Research Ethics Committee has approved your research proposal **H8932** *“Conditions for Success to Enhance Aboriginal Education: Enabling Aboriginal Peoples' Futures through Quality Teaching Within Pro-active School Community Environments”*, until 30 December 2012 with the provision of a progress report annually and a final report on completion.

Please quote the project number and title as indicated above on all correspondence related to this project.

This protocol covers the following researchers:

Rhonda Craven, Ruth Habgood, Geoff Munns, Lynette Riley.

Yours sincerely



Dr Anne Abraham
Chair, UWS Human Research Ethics Committee

Appendix 4

SERAP Approval Letter



Education & Communities

Ms Lynette Riley
Koori Centre Building
A22 Old Teachers College
Manning Road
UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY NSW 2006

DOC 11/124389

Dear Ms Riley

SERAP Number **2008215**

I refer to your application to conduct a research project in New South Wales government schools entitled *Conditions of Success for Aboriginal Students Achievement in Primary School*. I am pleased to inform you that your application has been approved. You may now contact the Principals of the nominated schools to seek their participation. **You should include a copy of this letter with the documents you send to schools.**

This approval will remain valid until 12/07/2012.

The following researchers or research assistants have fulfilled the Working with Children screening requirements to interact with or observe children for the purposes of this research for the period indicated:

Name	Approval expires
Lynette Riley	12-07-2012

I draw your attention to the following requirements for all researchers in New South Wales government schools:

- School Principals have the right to withdraw the school from the study at any time. The approval of the Principal for the specific method of gathering information for the school must also be sought.
- The privacy of the school and the students is to be protected.
- The participation of teachers and students must be voluntary and must be at the school's convenience.
- Any proposal to publish the outcomes of the study should be discussed with the Research Approvals Officer before publication proceeds.

When your study is completed please forward your report marked to Manager, Schooling Research, Department of Education and Training, Locked Bag 53, Darlinghurst, NSW 2010.

Yours sincerely

Dr Max Smith
Senior Manager
Student Engagement and Program Evaluation
12 July 2011

Student Engagement and Program Evaluation Bureau NSW Department of Education and Communities
Level 3, 1 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst NSW 2010 – Locked Bag 53, Darlinghurst NSW 1300 Telephone: 02 9244 5619– Fax: 02 9266 8233 – Email: serap@det.nsw.edu.au

Appendix 5

Letters Of Introduction And Consent Forms For Research Participants

- 1. LETTER TO PRINCIPAL**
- 2. INFORMATION LETTER – Parents and Caregivers**
- 3. CONSENT FORM – Over 18 years**
- 4. CONSENT FORM – Students – under 18 years**
- 5. INFORMATION LETTER – Teachers and Aboriginal Staff**

Educational Excellence & Equity (E³) Research Program, CER
University of Western Sydney
Building 19, Bankstown Campus
Locked bag 1797, Penrith South DC, NSW 1797, Australia



Research Project: "Conditions of Success for Aboriginal Students"

Dear Principal,

Your school has been identified by the NSW DET, as achieving significant educational growth for Aboriginal students, based on NAPLAN reading results from Year 3 (2008) to Year 5 (2010). As such I wish to invite your participation in this research project, to add value to the information I collect. I would like to visit your school for 2-4 days and carrying out interviews with yourself, other nominated teaching staff – who are identified as successful teachers with Aboriginal students in years 3, 4 and 5; and the schools Aboriginal Education Officer (if in the school). I would like to run a focus group and hold interviews with identified Aboriginal students in Year 6, who have achieved higher than expected growth to place them in the top 10% NAPLAN reading growth data and additionally any Aboriginal students who were placed in the top 25% in your school. I would also like to hold interviews with their parents/caregivers, and to interview any AECG representatives that may be attached to your school.

As such I ask you to forward letters/ information sheets with invitation seeking these participants to be involved in this research; I have included copies in this letter, for your appraisal should you be willing to be involved in the research and for your circulation to parents of Aboriginal students in Year 6, who are in top 25% based on NAPLAN reading results; previous teachers of the identified Aboriginal students who taught them in years 3, 4, and 5; AEOs; and AECG representatives. I am asking participants to notify their willingness to be involved in the research by returning the consent forms through your office.

What would be required in the research process from participants is:

- i. Year 6 Indigenous Students: will be required to be withdrawn from class for 30-45 minutes for a focus group session; if students are willing to have an individual interview 30-45 minutes, they will be required to take digital photos, prior to this interview of items which reflect conditions which they consider have supported their education – these photos will be able to be taken either before or after school or in their morning/lunch breaks and would take a maximum of 60 minutes of the students time. A room will be required at the school where the focus group and individual sessions can be held; the room will need to be in open sight of other staff for child protection.
- ii. Year 3, 4, 5 Teachers & Aboriginal Education Officer – individual interviews 45-60 minutes, will be required to be held with teachers either in their out-of class time, morning, lunch or after school, as is convenient to the teacher. A room will be required in which to hold these individual interviews.
- iii. Principal – an individual interview 45-60 minutes in your office at your convenience.
- iv. Parent and local Aboriginal Education Consultative representative – individual interviews of 45-60 minutes duration, at their convenience, before or after school or during the day. A room at the school may be required in which to hold these interviews.

Participation is voluntary; no-one will be able to identify the school, staff, parents or students from this project, as only the researchers will have access to the information provided. If school staff, parents and students and AECG representatives agree to be involved in this project the information will lead to gaining knowledge on conditions which best support Aboriginal students in achieving improved educational outcomes.

I am currently undertaking my MEd (Hons). I have applied through the NSW DET to carry out a research project, to clarify conditions of success for Aboriginal students in the school community environment. Ethics approval has been granted for this project. I have completed a SERAP, application for my research's 'Human Ethics' clearance through the NSWDET, this has been approved (as attached). I have also completed a 'Prohibited Employment Declaration'; and had a criminality check. I have spent over 30 years working in education, being involved in making changes within the education system for Aboriginal people. Areas I have worked in are as a primary & high school teacher; at TAFE as an Aboriginal Development Manager; at the University of New England (Oorala Centre); at the State Office, Aboriginal Programs Unit; and I now work at the Koori Centre, University of Sydney. I always say I have worked at every level of education except pre-school, but I have '7' children and '7' grandchildren, so that should count for something.

I was involved in the NSWDET & NSWAECEG Aboriginal Education Review that was carried out in 2004, that review provided extremely valuable material, but I wanted to also look at successful processes. I am looking at the following area: Aboriginal students who have achieved high academic growth, what conditions have supported this high academic growth.

Whilst this project is part of my Med (Hons), I want to make sure I do something which will provide practical support to schools. Aboriginal parents and students involvement will help me do this. I sincerely ask for your time to participate in distributing the attached 'Letter of Information' to selected Aboriginal students and their parents. Participation is voluntary, and parents and their children can only participate if both agree.

I wish to hold a focus groups and interviews with Year 6 Aboriginal students who have achieved higher than expected growth from their NAPLAN reading result in Year 3 to Year 5. As such, I would like you to identify these students in your school and provide the student and their parents/caregivers the attached 'Letter of Information'. Students who are able to participate will be asked to take digital photographs, or provide a written pieces or artwork on this items they identify as having provided support to their high achievements. This will be explained to the students at an initial meeting.

The focus groups with students and interviews with you, teachers and parents will take approximately 30-60 minutes. If you want to talk to me or my supervisor further about this survey, our details are below and we would be extremely happy to talk to you and clarify what is required and the intended outcomes from this research. I would also like to tape all interviews – if agreed – to ensure accuracy of interviews.

Thank-you for your time and I do hope you can assist me in this project.

Ms Lynette Riley
Academic Coordinator
Koori Centre, A22
Manning Road
University of Sydney, 2006
Email: lynette.riley@sydney.edu.au
Telephone: (02) 93516995

Professor Rhonda Craven
Head Educational Excellence and Equity (E3)
Research Program Centre for Educational Research
College of Arts, Bankstown Campus
University of Western Sydney, 1797
r.craven@uws.edu.au
(02) 97726557

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval no. **HRECH- H8932**) and SERAP (Approval no. **2008215**). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (Tel: (02) 47 360 883). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Educational Excellence & Equity (E³) Research Program, CER

University of Western Sydney

Building 19, Bankstown Campus

Locked bag 1797, Penrith South DC, NSW 1797, Australia

Research Project: “Conditions of Success for Aboriginal Students”

Dear Parents/Caregiver,

Your child has been identified as achieving significant educational growth in the NAPLAN results from Year 3 to Year 5, for Reading Achievement. As such, I would like to talk to you and see if I can get information from you and your child which may assist in improving education outcomes for all Aboriginal students.

My name is Lynette Riley, my family comes from the Wiradjuri Nation, at Dubbo (Riley’s); the Gamilaroi Nation, at Moree (Wright’s); and my children are also related to the Bundjalung Nation. I have spent over the last 30 years being involved in making changes in the education system for Aboriginal people, in particular our kids. Areas I have worked in are as a teacher; at TAFE as an Aboriginal Development Manager; at the University of New England (Oorala Centre); at the State Office, Aboriginal Programs Unit; and I now work at the Koori Centre, University of Sydney. I always say I have worked at every level of education except pre-school, but I have ‘7’ kids and ‘7’ grandchildren; so that should count for something.

I invite you and your child to be involved in assisting me to learn what is the best way to support our kids to get a good outcome from school. This is part of my Master’s Degree, but I want to make sure I do something which will provide practical support to schools; you and your child’s involvement will help me do this. I sincerely ask for your time to participate in this project. Participation is voluntary, and your child can only be involved if you both agree. If you decide not to participate this will in no way effect you or your child.

I need you to talk to your child to explain the research project and ensure you are both happy to be involved. No-one will be able to identify schools, staff, parents or students from this project, as only the researcher will have access to the information you provide.

If you decide to be involved in this project the information will lead to providing information which will be used to establish improved understandings of conditions required to support Aboriginal students at school, which will lead to improved educational outcomes for all Aboriginal students.

I was involved in the NSWDET & NSWAECEG Aboriginal Education Review that was carried out in 2004, that review provided extremely valuable material, but I wanted to also look at successful processes. I am looking at the following areas: what assists Aboriginal children achieve successful educational outcomes; what is an effective teacher and school environment for Aboriginal students; what is required by parents & caregivers to create greater educational attainment for their children; and what contributes to building better self-reliance for Aboriginal students in the school environment.

I would require you and your child to be involved in different ways. Firstly, I want to meet all the successful Aboriginal Year 6 students together and talk to them about their successes in school (45-60 minutes), plus if agreed to hold an individual interview (30-45 minutes) with your child, for which students will be required to take digital photos, of items which demonstrate those conditions which they think has helped them gain the high academic outcomes they have – these digital photos would take approximately 45-60 minutes of their time and are to be taken either before or after school or during the students morning or lunch breaks. These photos will be used to assist in the discussion with your child in the individual interview. I will explain this task further when I meet with your child at

the initial focus group meeting. All focus groups and individual interviews are to be held at the school at a location designated by the school principal.

I would also need to access your child's school file to record the NAPLAN reading results, attendance patterns and any other support the school has provided to your child in their attendance at their school.

Secondly, with the parents/ caregivers I require an interview with either one or both parents/caregivers (for approximately 45-60 minutes), to determine what you perceive are the conditions which have supported your child's academic success. This meeting could be held at the school or at a location convenient to you. I would also like to tape all interviews – if agreed – to ensure accuracy of interviews.

To make this happen I need the attached consent form to be signed and taken back to your child's school principal. Once I have the consent form signed I will make personal contact with you; and your child through the school.

If you want to talk to me or my supervisor further about this project, our details are below and we would be extremely happy to talk to you and clarify what is required and the intended outcomes.

Thank-you for your time and I do hope you can assist me in this project.

Ms Lynette Riley
Academic Coordinator
Koori Centre, A22
Manning Road
University of Sydney, 2006
Email: lynette.riley@sydney.edu.au
Telephone: (02) 93516995

Professor Rhonda Craven
Head Educational Excellence and Equity (E3)
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NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval no. **HRECH- H8932**) and SERAP (Approval no. **2008215**). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (Tel: (02) 47 360 883). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Educational Excellence & Equity (E³) Research Program, CER

University of Western Sydney

Building 19, Bankstown Campus

Locked bag 1797, Penrith South DC, NSW 1797, Australia



Research Project: "Conditions of Success for Aboriginal Students"

I (*print full name*)

Give consent to being involved in the research project described below.

Title of the Project: "Conditions of Success for Aboriginal students".

Chief Researcher: Lynette Riley
(02) 93516995
lynette.riley@sydney.edu.au

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the semi-structured interview and the time involved have been explained to me and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I have read the Project Information Letter and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information concerning my involvement in the project with the researchers.
3. I understand that my participation in this project is voluntary; a decision not to participate will in no way affect standing or relationship with the school and I am free to withdraw my participation at any time.
5. I understand that my involvement is strictly confidential and that no personal information about me will be used in any way that reveals my identity.
6. I agree to have all interviews taped by the researcher.

Signed:

Address:

Phone: Date:

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval no. **HRECHXXXX**). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (Tel: (02) 47 360 883). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

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Research Project: "Conditions of Success for Aboriginal Students"

I (*print full name*)

give consent to the participation of my child

(*print full name*) being involved in the
research project described below.

Title of the Project: "Conditions of Success for Aboriginal students".
Chief Researcher: Lynette Riley
(02) 93516995
lynette.riley@sydney.edu.au

In giving my consent I acknowledge that:

1. The procedures required for the student's focus group, digital photos, interview and parent interview and the time involved have been explained to me and any questions I have about the project have been answered to my satisfaction.
2. I have read the Parent/Caregiver Information Sheet and have been given the opportunity to discuss the information concerning mine and my child's involvement in the project with the researcher.
3. I have discussed participation in the project with my child and my child agrees to their Participation in the project.
4. I understand that mine and my child's participation in this project is voluntary; a decision not to participate will in no way affect my child's academic standing or relationship with the school and they are free to withdraw their participation at any time.
5. I understand that mine and my child's involvement is strictly confidential and that no information about my child will be used in any way that reveals my child's or my identity.
6. I agree to the researcher accessing my child's school file to record NAPLAN Reading results, school attendance patterns and other support services provided through the school.
7. I agree to have all interviews taped by the researcher.

Signed:

Address:

Phone:

Date:

NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval no. **HRECH- H8932**) and SERAP (Approval no. **2008215**). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (Tel: (02) 47 360 883). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

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Research Project: “Conditions of Success for Aboriginal Students”

Dear Teacher/AEO/AECG representative,

Your school has been identified as achieving significant educational growth in the NAPLAN Reading results from Year 3 to Year 5, for Aboriginal students. As such, I would like to talk to you and see if I can get information from you which may assist in improving education outcomes for all Aboriginal students.

My name is Lynette Riley, my family comes from the Wiradjuri Nation, at Dubbo (Riley’s); the Gamilaroi Nation, at Moree (Wright’s); and my children are also related to the Bundjalung Nation. I have spent over the last 30 years being involved in making changes in the education system for Aboriginal people, in particular Aboriginal kids. Areas I have worked in are as a teacher; at TAFE as an Aboriginal Development Manager; at the University of New England (Oorala Centre); at the State Office, Aboriginal Programs Unit; and I now work at the Koori Centre, University of Sydney. I always say I have worked at every level of education except pre-school, but I have ‘7’ kids and ‘7’ grandchildren; so that should count for something.

I invite you to be involved in assisting me to learn what is the best way to support Aboriginal kids to get good outcomes from school. This is part of my Master’s Degree, but I want to make sure I do something which will provide practical support to schools; your involvement will help me do this. I sincerely ask for your time to participate in this project. Participation is voluntary, and you can only be involved if agree. If you decide not to participate, this will in no way effect you.

No-one will be able to identify schools, staff, parents or students from this project, as only the researcher will have access to the information you provide.

If you decide to be involved in this project the information will lead to providing data which will be used to establish improved understandings of conditions required to support Aboriginal students at school, which will lead to improved educational outcomes for all Aboriginal students.

I was involved in the NSWDET & NSWAECEG Aboriginal Education Review that was carried out in 2004, that review provided extremely valuable material, but I wanted to also look at successful processes. I am looking at the following areas: what assists Aboriginal children achieve successful educational outcomes; what is an effective teacher and school environment for Aboriginal students; what is required by schools to create greater educational attainment for Aboriginal students; and what contributes to building better self-reliance for Aboriginal students in the school environment.

I would require you to be involved through an interview of approximately 45-60 minutes, which will be held at your convenience and either at your school or a location you may prefer. I would also like to tape all interviews – if agreed – to ensure accuracy of interviews. To make this happen I need the attached consent form to be signed and taken back to your school principal. Once I have the consent form signed I will make personal contact with you through the school.

If you want to talk to me or my supervisor further about this project, our details are below and we would be extremely happy to talk to you and clarify what is required and the intended outcomes.

Thank-you for your time and I do hope you can assist me in this project.

Ms Lynette Riley
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Manning Road
University of Sydney, 2006
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NOTE: This study has been approved by the University of Western Sydney Human Research Ethics Committee (Approval no. **HRECH- H8932**) and SERAP (Approval no. **2008215**). If you have any complaints or reservations about the ethical conduct of this research, you may contact the Ethics Committee through the Research Ethics Officers (Tel: (02) 47 360 883). Any issues you raise will be treated in confidence and investigated fully, and you will be informed of the outcome.

Appendix 6

Aboriginal Student And Stakeholder Profiles

Key Codes

Codes used in all participant tables to represent the nominated school and student interviews

SCHOOL CODES

The schools have been referenced using the codes as set out below. Schools are identified by location in Metropolitan and Regional areas. Research was carried out in $n=3$ schools in the Metropolitan area and $n=4$ schools in Regional areas, with two of these Regional schools - Regional School 2 (RS2) and Regional School 3 (RS3) being in the same location. The school codes used is as follow:

Metropolitan Schools

MS1 – Metropolitan School 1

MS2 – Metropolitan School 2

MS3 – Metropolitan School 3

Regional Schools

RS1 – Regional School 1

RS2 – Regional School 2

RS3 – Regional School 3

RS4 – Regional School 4

S - STUDENT CODES

In this research there were $n=9$ Metropolitan Aboriginal students interviewed and $n=25$ Regional Aboriginal students interviewed. The students are identified as 'S' and with a number allocated to identify the number of students interviewed in each school, as such they are numbered S1 (Student 1) through to S7 (Student 7); each student is then attached to a school code (as above) to represent the Student (and their numbered place) interviewed from the Metropolitan and Regional school listed. For example Metropolitan School 3 – Student 5, is coded as MS3-S5; or Regional School 4 - Student 3, is coded as RS4-S3.

Aboriginal Student And Parent Profiles

Key:

SYOB – Student Year of Birth

SY – School Year

G – Gender : Male/Female

S – Siblings:

BO – Brother/s Older

BY – Brother/s Younger

SO – Sister/s Older

SY – Sister/s Younger

EF – Extended Family – living with
Cousins

TW - Twin

L – Live With:

B – Both Parents

M – Mum

D – Dad

G – Grandparents

PS – Pre-school attendance – ✓ or –

RC – Reading Competence Class year
student felt they became a good reader

K-6 – Attendance at same school since
Kindergarten or when enrolled at current
school

DA – Dad Aboriginal

DYOB – Dad Year of Birth

DEDU – Dad Education

DWK – Dad Work Career

MA – Mum Aboriginal

MYOB – Mum Year of Birth

MEDU – Mum Education

MWK – Mum Work Career

EF – Extended Family in
area

T – Living in Traditional
Country

NA – Not Available

✓ - Yes

- - No

Student And Parent Profiles – Full Table

SC	STUDENT & PARENTS PROFILES																
	SYOB SY	G	S	L	P S	RC	K-6	DA	DYOB	DEDU	DWK	MA	MYOB	MEDU	MWK	EF	T
MS1-S1	1999 Yr6	M	BO1	B	✓	Yr3	✓	-	1971	Yr10 Trade	Own business	✓	1970	Yr10	Admin	✓	-
MS1-S2	1999 Yr6	F	BO1 SO1	B	✓	Before Sch	✓	-	1962	Bed	Business M'gment	✓	1962	BEd	HS Teacher	✓	-
MS2-S1	1999 Yr6	M	-	M	✓	Before Sch	✓	✓	1967	Dr Medicine	Doctor Actor	-	1971	BA Fine Arts	Own business Dist Edu Teacher	✓	-
MS3-S1	2000 Yr5	F	B01	M	✓	Yr5	Yr1	✓	1972	NA	Gaol	✓	1968	Yr11 Dip Indig Health TAFE	Factory Wk Local Gov Mentor Abor Yth	✓	✓
MS3-S2	2000 Yr6	M	B03 BY2	B	✓	Yr2	✓	-	1982	Yr10	NA	✓	1982	Yr10	Bank Clerk Tourism AEO P/T	✓	✓
MS3-S3	2000 Yr6	F	BO1 BY1 SO1	B	✓	Before Sch	✓	-	1968	Yr10	Bricklayer	✓	1971	Yr10	Qantas Cust Serv	✓	✓
MS3-S4	1999 Yr6	F	B01 SO1 SY1	D	✓	Yr1	✓	-	1972	NA Not around	NA	✓	1974 Mum Died Aunt 1983	Yr11	Fast Food F/T care of chn	✓	✓
MS3-S5	2000 Yr6	F	SY1	B	✓	Yr1	✓	-	-	NA	NA	✓	1971	Yr10	Casual Admin	✓	✓
MS3-S6	1999 Yr6	F	BY2	B	✓	Yr1	✓	-	1967	Uni – Becon	Property valuer	✓	1973	Yr8 HSC at TAFE	Casual Welfare	✓	✓
RS1-S1	2000 Yr5	F	BO1 SO1	B	✓	Yr3	Yr3	✓	NA	NA	NA	✓	1966	Yr8	Assist Nursing	-	-
RS1-S2	2000 Yr5	F	TW BY1 SY1	M	✓	Yr1	✓	✓	1978	Yr12 BSc Mhealth	Home care Trainee Indig Health M'gment	-	1975	Yr12 TAFE Admin	Office Admin Family Support	✓	✓
RS1-S3	2000 Yr5	F	TW BY1 SY1	M	✓	Yr2-3	✓	✓	1978	Yr12 BSc MHealth	Home care Trainee Indig Health M'gment	-	1975	Yr12 TAFE Admin	Office Admin Family Support	✓	✓
RS1-S4	2000 Yr5	F	SO1 BY1	M	✓	Yr4	Yr4	✓	NA	NA	NA	-	1977	Yr10 Yth Wk Cert	Vol Juv Justice	-	-

RS1-S5	2000 Yr6	F	BO1 BY2 SY1	B	✓	Yr4	✓	✓	1977	Yr10	Building Indig Empl Sch- Spec Aide	-	1978	Yr10 TAFE	Hosp Admin	✓	✓
RS1-S6	1999 Yr6	M	BO1 SO1	B	✓	Yr3	✓	✓	1973	Yr12	Casual Wk HS-AEO	-	1974	Yr12 TAFE	Admin Nurse Aide Office M'ger	✓	✓
RS1-S7	1999 Yr6	M	SO1 SY2	G	✓	Yr3	✓	-	NA	NA	NA	✓	NA	NA	NA	✓	✓
RS2-S1	1999 Yr6	F	SO1	B	✓	Yr4	✓	✓	1970	Yr10	Tannery Cotton Mining	✓	1972	Yr11	Club Function Co-ord.	✓	✓
RS2-S2	1999 Yr6	M	-	M	✓	Yr1	✓	-	1971	Yr10	Truck Driver	✓	1970	Yr12	Nurse Child Care	-	-
RS2-S3	2000 Yr6	F	SO1 BY1	B	✓	Yr4	✓	✓	1976	Yr10	Various AEO	-	1977	Yr11	Barmaid Coles Admin	✓	✓
RS2-S4	1998 Yr6	F	BO1 SY1 BY1	M	✓	Yr3-4	✓	✓	1959	Yr10	Bee Keeper Own Bus.	-	1964	Yr12	Various Casual	✓	-
RS2-S5	2000 Yr6	F	SY1	G	✓	Yr2	✓	✓	NA	NA	NA	-	NA	NA	NA	✓	✓
RS2-S6	1999 Yr6	M	BY3 SY2	M	✓	Yr3	Yr4	✓	NA	NA	NA	✓	NA	NA	NA		
RS3-S1	2000 Yr5	M	EF	G	✓	Yr3-4	✓	✓	1959	Yr7	LALC AEO	✓	1964	Yr12	Forensic Invest.	✓	✓
RS3-S2	2000 Yr5	M	SO2	G	✓	Yr3-4	Yr3	-	-	NA	NA	✓	1975	Yr9	Home – Disabled Ch	✓	✓
RS3-S3	1999 Yr5	M	BO1 SO1	M	✓	K	✓	✓	1971	Yr9	Truck Driver	-	1970	Yr10	Home Duties	✓	✓
RS3-S4	2001 Yr5	M	BY1	B	✓	Yr3	✓	✓	1957	Yr9	CDEP Seasonal	✓	1966	Yr9	CDEP Disability Grp Home	✓	✓
RS3-S5	2000 Yr5	F	BY2 SY1	B	✓	Before Sch	✓	✓	NA	NA	NA	-	NA	NA	NA	-	-
RS4-S1	1999 Yr6	M	SO1 SY1	B	✓	Yr2-3	✓	-	1967	Yr12	Centrelink	✓	1972	Yr10	Centrelink	✓	✓
RS4-S2	1999 Yr6	F	BY1 SO1 SY1	M G	✓	Yr3	Yr4	✓	NA	NA	NA	✓	1977	NA	NA	✓	✓
RS4-S3	1999 Yr6	F	SO3	B	✓	Yr3-4	Yr4	-	1959	Yr11	Builder	✓	1955	Yr10	Field Wk Casual – Wm Refuge	-	-
RS4-S4	2000 Yr6	M	BO1 BY2 SY1	G	✓	K-Yr1	Yr5	✓	NA	NA	NA	-	NA	NA	NA	✓	✓
RS4-S5	1999	M	BO2	B	✓	Yr3	Yr4	✓	NA	NA	NA	✓	NA	NA	NA	✓	✓

	Yr6		BY1 SY1														
RS4-S6	1999 Yr6	F	BY1 SO1 SY2	M	-	Yr4	✓	✓	NA	NA	NA	✓	NA	NA	NA	✓	✓
RS4-S7	1999 Yr6	F	BY1 SO1 SY1	M	✓	K	Yr5- 6	-	NA	NA	NA	✓	NA	NA	NA	✓	✓

NOTE: SYOB – Student Year of Birth, **SY** – School Year; **G – Gender** : Male/Female; **S – Siblings: BO** – Brother/s Older, **BY** – Brother/s Younger, **SO** – Sister/s Older, **SY** – Sister/s Younger, **EF** – Extended Family – living with Cousins, **TW** – Twin; **L – Live With: B** – Both Parents, **M** – Mum, **D** – Dad, **G** – Grandparents; **PS** – Pre-school attendance – ✓ or – ; **RC** – Reading Competence Class year student felt they became a good reader; **K-6** – Attendance at same school since Kindergarten or when enrolled at current school; **DA** – Dad Aboriginal, **DYOB** – Dad Year of Birth, **DEDU** – Dad Education, **DWK** – Dad Work Career; **MA** – Mum Aboriginal, **MYOB** – Mum Year of Birth, **MEDU** – Mum Education, **MWK** – Mum Work Career; **EF** – Extended Family in area; **T** – Living in Traditional Country; **NA** – Not Available; ✓ - Yes; - - No

Stakeholder Profiles

Key Codes

Codes used in all participant tables to represent the nominated school and stakeholder interviews

SCHOOL CODES

The schools and students have been referenced using the codes as set out below. Schools are identified by location in Metropolitan and Regional areas. Research was carried out in $n=3$ schools in the Metropolitan area and $n=4$ schools in Regional areas, with two of these Regional schools - Regional School 2 (RS2) and Regional School 3 (RS3) being in the same location. The school codes used is as follow:

Metropolitan Schools

MS1 – Metropolitan School 1

MS2 – Metropolitan School 2

MS3 – Metropolitan School 3

Regional Schools

RS1 – Regional School 1

RS2 – Regional School 2

RS3 – Regional School 3

RS4 – Regional School 4

P - PARENT CODES

The parents are identified as 'P' and with a number allocated to identify the number of parents interviewed in each school, as such they are numbered P1 (Parent 1) through to P7 (Parent 7); each parent is then attached to a school code (as above) to represent the parent (and their numbered place) interviewed from the Metropolitan and Regional school listed. For example Metropolitan School 3 (MS3) - Parent 5 (P5) is coded as MS3-P5; or Regional School 4 (RS4) - Parent 3 (S3), is coded as RS4-P3.

Note that each parent code is aligned to the code given to their child interviewed in the research, for example: MS3-P3 is the parent of MS3-S3, to allow direct correlation between each student and their parent, as required.

T - TEACHER CODES

The teachers are identified as 'T' and with a number allocated to identify the number of teachers interviewed in each school, as such they are numbered T1 (Teacher 1) through to T7 (Teacher 7); each teacher is then attached to a school code (as above) to represent the Teacher (and their numbered place) interviewed from the Metropolitan and Regional school listed. For example Metropolitan School 3 (MS3) - Teacher 5 (T5) is coded as MS3-T5; or Regional School 4 (RS4) - Teacher 3 (T3), is coded as RS4-T3.

PR - PRINCIPAL CODES

The Principals are identified as 'PR' each Principal is then attached to a school code (as above) to represent the Principal interviewed from the Metropolitan and Regional school listed. For example Metropolitan School 3 (MS3) - Principal is coded as MS3-PR; or Regional School 4 (RS4) - Principal is coded as RS4-PR.

AS - ABORIGINAL STAFF CODES

The Aboriginal staff are identified as 'AS' and with a number allocated to identify the number of Aboriginal staff interviewed in each school, as such they are numbered AS1 (Aboriginal Staff 1) through to AS7 (Aboriginal Staff 7); each of the Aboriginal Staff is then attached to a school code (as above) to represent the Aboriginal staff (and their numbered place) interviewed from the Metropolitan and Regional school listed. For example Metropolitan School 3 (MS3) – Aboriginal Staff 5 (AS5) is coded as MS3-AS5; or Regional School 4 (RS4) – Aboriginal Staff 3 (AS3), is coded as RS4-AS3.

Parent's Interviewed Profiles

KEY:

M/F – Interviewee Mother/Father/Grandparent/Aunt	A – Aboriginal	OPA – Other Parent Aboriginal	YOBM – Year of Birth Mother	YOBF – Year of Birth Father	F-Family – Single Parent, Both Parents, Divorced, Step-Parent, Grandparent, Extended Family, Same Sex Partner
LITC – Lives in Traditional Country		YCS – Year Completed School	D/S – Daughter/Son/Twin Daughters at school		NC – Number of children
1 – Education Level: Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor Education/Arts/Applied Science		2 – Other Children Attended School	3 – Extended family at this school	4 – Reason came to this school: Principal, Siblings, Family, Good School	
5 – Current school <5 years		6 – Current school 5-10 years	7 – Current school 10-15 years		8 – Current school 15+ years

PARENTS	M/F	A	OPA	YOBM	YOBF	F	LITC	YCS	D/S	NC	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
MS1-P1	M	X		1970	1971	BP	X	Yr10	S	2		X		P			X	
MS1-P2	M	X		1962	1962	BP		Yr12	D	3	BE	X		S&P				X
MS2-P1	M		X	1971	1967	D		Yr12	S	1	BA/E		X	GS		X		
MS3-P1	M	X	X	1968	1972	SP	X	Yr11	D	2	D		X	GS		X		
MS3-P2	M	X		1966	1967	D	X	Yr10	S	6	D	X	X	S				X
MS3-P3	M	X		1971	1968	BP	X	Yr10	D	3	C		X	S			X	
MS3-P4	M/A	X		1974 Carer 1983	1972	EF	X	Yr11	D	4	C	X	X	F				X
MS3-P5	M	X		1971	-	SP	X	Yr10	D	2	C	X	X	F		X		
MS3-P6	M	X		1973	1967	D		Yr8	D	3	D	X	X	F		X		
RS1-P1	M	X		1966	-	D		Yr8	D	3	D			GS		X		
RS1-P2	M		X	1975	1978	D		Yr12	TD	3	C			GS		X		
RS1-P3	F	X		1978	1975	D	X	Yr12	TD	3	BAS		X	GS		X		
RS1-P4	M		X	1977	1971	D/S		Yr10	D	3	D			GS	X			
RS1-P5	F	X		1977	1978	BP	X	Yr12	D	5	D	X		GS		X		
RS1-P6	M		X	1974	1973	BP	X	Yr12	S	3	C			F				X

RS2-P1	M	X		1972	1970	BP	X	Yr11	D	2	C	X	X	F				X
RS2-P2	M	X		1970	1971	D/SSP		Yr12	S	1	D			GS		X		
RS2-P3	F	X		1976	1977	BP	X	Yr10	D	3	C	X	X	F		X		
RS2-P4	M		X	1964	SP1959	SP/S		Yr12	D	4	C		X	GS		X		
RS3-P1	GF	X	X	1959	1964	G	X	Yr7	GS	8	C	X	X	GS		X		
RS3-P2	M	X		1975	-	SP/S	X	Yr9	S	3	C	X	X	F			X	
RS3-P3	M		X	1970	1971	BP	X	Yr10	S	4	-	X	X	F				X
RS3-P4	M	X	X	1966	1957	D/SP	X	Yr9	S	7	C		X	F				X
RS4-P1	M	X		1972	1967	BP	X	Yr10	S	3	C			F		X		
RS4-P2	GM M	X X	X	1957 1977		G	X		GD	2				GS	X			
RS4-P3	M	X		1955	1959	BP	X	Yr10	D	4		X		F				X
TOTALS	22M 4F	20	9	1955- 1977	1957- 1978		18					13	15		2	13	3	8

Teacher's Profiles

KEY:

M/F – Male/Female	A – Aboriginal	YOB – Year of Birth		
CTT – Year Completed Teacher Training	1 – Aboriginal Education during Teacher Training			2 – Aboriginal Education through In-service
3 – Teaching Career <5 years	4 – Teaching Career 5-10 years		5 – Teaching Career 10-15 years	
6 – Teaching Career 15+ years				
7 – Current school <5 years	8 – Current school 5-10 years		9 – Current school 10-15 years	
10 – At current school 15+ years				
11 – Kindergarten-Year 2 Teacher	12 – Year 3-4 Teacher		13 – Year 5-6 Teacher	14 – Gifted & Talented
15 – Special Support Teacher				
16 – Teacher Training to Teaching		17 – Previous Career/Travel then into Teaching		18 – Prior experience with Aboriginal Students
19 – Experiences with other cultural groups, low SES, disabled students, behavioural			20 – Comes from an ethnic background other than English	

TEACHER	M/F	A	YOB	YCTT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
MS1-T1	F		1958	1979		X				X		X				X				X			X	
MS1-T2	F		1986	2007	X		X				X						X			X				X
MS2-T1	F		1973	1973	X				X		X					X					X		X	
MS2-T2	M		1958	1980		X				X		X					X				X		X	
MS2-T3	F	X	1982	2004	X	X	X				X							X			X			
MS3-T1	M		1971	1994	X					X		X				X					X		X	
MS3-T2	F		1965	1988	X				X			X					X				X		X	
MS3-T3	F	X	1983	2008		X	X				X						X			X				
RS1-T1	F		1984	2006	X	X		X			X				X					X		X	X	
RS1-T2	F		1955	1976						X		X				X					X		X	
RS1-T3	M		1952	1973	X	X				X				X		X	X			X		X	X	
RS1-T4	F	X	1968	1994		X				X				X			X				X	X	X	
RS1-T5	M		1959	1980	X					X			X				X			X		X	X	
RS2-T1	F		1981	2004	X		X				X					X					X			
RS2-T2	F		1959	1979	X					X				X			X			X				
RS2-T3	M		1955	1979						X				X			X			X				

RS3-T1	F	X	1987	2010	X		X				X					X				X		X		
RS3-T2	F		1957	1977	X					X			X			X	X			X	X	X		
RS3-T3	F		1981	2005	X			X			X								X	X			X	
RS4-T1	M		1958	1982		X				X		X							X	X		X	X	X
RS4-T2	F		1975	1996	X	X				X			X		X				X			X	X	
RS4-T3	F		1961	1982		X				X	X						X			X		X	X	
TOTALS	16F 6M	4	1952- 1987	1973- 2010	14	10	5	2	2	13	9	6	3	4	2	8	11	1	2	14	9	9	14	2

Principal's Profiles

KEY:

M/F – Male/Female	A – Aboriginal	YOB – Year of Birth		
YCTT – Year Completed Teacher Training		1 – Aboriginal Education during Teacher Training		2 – Aboriginal Education through In-service
3 – Teaching Career <5 years	4 – Teaching Career 5-10 years		5 – Teaching Career 10-15 years	
6 – Teaching Career 15+ years				
7 – Current school <5 years	8 – Current school 5-10 years		9 – Current school 10-15 years	
10 – At current school 15+ years				
11 –Teacher K-6	12 – High School Training	13 – Special Education		14 – Time in Executive Positions
15 – Principal in current school				
16 – Teacher Training to Teaching		17 – Previous Career/Travel then into Teaching		18 – Prior experience with Aboriginal Students
19 – Experiences with other cultural groups, low SES, disabled students, behavioural			20 – Has extensive involvement with an ethnic background other than English	

PRINCIPAL	M/F	A	YOB	YCTT	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
MS1-PR	F		1956	1979	X					X	X				X			7	3	X			X	
MS2-PR	F		1948	1968/ 1984		X				X	X				X			22	4	X		X	X	
MS3-PR	F		1972	1996	X	X				X	X				X			9	3	X		X	X	
RS1-PR	F		1954	1976		X				X				X		X		18	13	X		X		
RS2-PR	F		1975	1996	X	X				X	X				X			11	4	X		X	X	X
RS3-PR	F		1961	1982	X	X				X				X	X		X	1	1		X	X		
RS4-PR	M	X	1960	1982						X		X				X	X	16	5	X			X	
TOTALS	6F 1M	1	1948- 1975	1968- 1996	4	5	0	0	0	7	4	1	0	2	5	2	2	1- 22	1- 13	6	1	5	5	1

Aboriginal Staff's Profiles

KEY:

M/F – Male/Female	A – Aboriginal	YOB – Year of Birth	YCS – Year Completed School	LITC – Lives in Traditional Country
R – Role: AEO/TAS/LSO/NNP	1 – Certificate Education	2 – Diploma Education	3 – Training with NSW Education	
4 – School Career <5 years	5 – School Career 5-10 years	6 – School Career 10-15 years	7 – School Career 15+ years	
8 – Current school <5 years	9 – Current school 5-10 years	10 – Current school 10-15 years	11 – At current school 15+ years	
12 – Childcare Exp	13 – Infants/Primary Exp	14 – High School Exp	15 – Special Education Exp	16 – AEO Trained
17 – Previous Career then into School	18 – Prior experience with Aboriginal Students			

ABORIGINAL STAFF	M/F	A	YOB	LITC	YCS	R	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18
RS1-AS1	F	X	1968	X	Yr10	TAS	X	X	X				X				X	X			X		X	X
RS1-AS2	M	X	1977		Yr12	TAS	X		X	X				X					X				X	
RS2-AS1	F	X	1966	X	Yr10	AEO	X		X	X				X										
RS3-AS1	M	X	1959	X	Yr7	LSO	X		X		X				X						X		X	X
RS3-AS2	F	X	1957		Yr10	AEO	X		X				X				X	X				X	X	
RS4-AS1	M	X	1987	X	Yr12	AEO			X		X				X			X	X					X
RS4-AS2	F	X	1971		Yr12	NNP	X		X	X				X				X	X		X		X	X
RS4-AS3	M	X	1992	X	Yr12	AEO			X	X				X									X	X
TOTALS	4F 4M	8	1957- 1992	5			6	1	7	4	2	0	2	4	2	0	2	4	3	0	3	1	6	5

AEO – Aboriginal Education Officer – permanent appointment, dependent on significant Aboriginal student numbers in schools

TAS – Teacher's Aide Special – casual appointment year by year, depending on external funds

LSO – Learning Support Officer – casual appointment year by year, depends on external funds to continue the position

NNP – Norta Norta Program Tutor/Coordinator – casual staff year by year, dependent on external funding