THE EXPERIENCE OF SIX NON-ABORIGINAL TEACHERS LIVING AND WORKING IN REMOTE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES DURING THE 1990'S

BY

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"This project contains no material which has been submitted for examination for the award of any other degree or diploma in any tertiary institution and, to the best of this candidate's knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of the project."

Abstract

In Australia, non-Aboriginal people have been involved in Aboriginal education since the end of the 19th century. There has been ongoing criticism of non-Aboriginal involvement in Aboriginal education and a movement towards Aboriginalisation in education. This study addresses the issues faced by six non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities in the 1990's.

The purpose of this study is to explore the experiences and perceptions of non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities in the 1990's.

Through this research I found that the non-Aboriginal teachers faced difficulties living and working in remote Aboriginal communities. They talked about the distinctive lifestyle and living conditions. They reported a need for pre-service and ongoing professional development focusing on aspects influencing their lives. The discussion topics included: their living circumstances; Aboriginal world view; Aboriginal health issues; community issues; Aboriginal teaching and learning styles and school policies.

The study is consistent with previous research about non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities. It argues that pre-service and ongoing professional development is vital for the success of non-Aboriginal teacher in remote communities. Community based educational programs for non-Aboriginal teachers are needed. These programs should include non-Aboriginal teachers learning about Aboriginal culture, Aboriginal learning and teaching styles and the development and implementation of educational policies. These programmes need to include discussion of aspects of living in isolated settings. Schools and governing bodies involved need to develop closer liaison with non-Aboriginal teachers to support their living in this setting. It is also important that policies in place address the problem of the high turnover of non-Aboriginal staff experienced by remote community schools. This study also poses the question what is the future for non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities? Aboriginalisation in remote Aboriginal communities is highly recommended.

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Chapter 1.

The Problem and its Setting.

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY.

The area under investigation was 'The experience of six non-Aboriginal Teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities during the 1990s. The investigation was primarily based on two questions,

(a) What were the experiences of six non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities in the 1990s? and

(b) What reflections did they have about their experiences living and working in remote Aboriginal communities?

1.2 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

During the early 1990s I lived and worked in a remote Aboriginal community as a primary school teacher. Since this time I have been keen to explore the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers working in remote Aboriginal communities and investigate issues faced by non-Aboriginal teachers in this setting. The remote Aboriginal community where I had my experience had a number of clans and

was a multi-lingual community. The community had a large Aboriginal population of approximately two thousand Aboriginal people and a small non-Aboriginal population of approximately seventy. The community school was a bilingual school employing both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal workers. The teachers worked in teaching teams made up of Aboriginal teachers and teacher aides and non-Aboriginal teachers. The school had a community library and a Literacy Production Centre where texts were produced in English and one Aboriginal language. The bilingual program used in the school focused on maintaining one of the Aboriginal languages used by Aboriginal people in the community. Aboriginal law and culture influenced daily life in the school. One example of this was that male and female relatives were not allowed to speak once they reached puberty, except at the conclusion of particular ceremonies. Aboriginal law and culture required Aboriginal staff and students to maintain Aboriginal law, participate in ceremonies and respect kinship barriers.

Upon my return to Melbourne I wanted to explore the experiences of other non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities to see whether my experience was typical of non-Aboriginal teachers in this setting. Upon reflection I felt that I had not performed to the best of my ability. For most of my time there I did not understand the needs of my Aboriginal students therefore I inadequately addressed their educational needs. Often my time in the Aboriginal community

was preoccupied with the weather conditions and my out-of-school life, sometimes at the expense of teaching. During the time I was there I was engrossed in learning more about the lives of the Aboriginal people in the community. This motivated me to do this research. So when I returned to Melbourne I wanted to explore further the experiences of non-Aboriginal people living with Aboriginal people in remote communities. As a result this study was designed and carried out, exploring the experiences of other non-Aboriginal teachers who have had experiences living and working in remote Aboriginal communities.

There are researchers with contrasting views about non-Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal education. Some researchers are opposed to the presence of non-Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal education (Harris, 1990) while other researchers believe that Aboriginal education is positively influenced by the presence of non-Aboriginal teachers (Brandl, 1981). Considering there have been many issues surrounding non-Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal education, I believe that researching the experience of non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities is significant. Through this investigation I have studied the experience of six non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities and examined the participants' individual perceptions of their lives and work in the communities. As part of this I have explored the non-

Aboriginal teachers understanding of educational policies developed and implemented for teaching Aboriginal students in remote Aboriginal communities.

1.3 PRINCIPAL AREAS OF INVESTIGATION

The principal areas investigated were:

(a) the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers living in remote Aboriginal communities;

(b) the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers working in remote Aboriginal communities;

(c) the non-Aboriginal teachers' perceptions of their personal contributions made to Aboriginal education; and

(d) the non-Aboriginal teachers' view of Aboriginal education generally.

Although the research explored these areas, other topics emerged from the data as significant. Participants immersed themselves in discussion about the lives of the Aboriginal people, with a focus on the way Aboriginal culture influenced the non-Aboriginal teachers' living and working experience.

1.4 DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS

In this research there are a number of key terms that are used regularly, including 'Aboriginal' and 'non-Aboriginal'. The term 'Aboriginal' is used to refer to people of Aboriginal decent. The term 'non-Aboriginal' is used to mean, simply, a person with a background that is not Aboriginal. In this thesis, as in other places, the term 'Aboriginal' is used to describe a cultural heritage, world view, language, values and social system (Brandl, 1981; Fogarty & White, 1994; Harris, 1990). I explored the idea that the 'non-Aboriginal' person has a worldview and cultural heritage that is distinctly different from the 'Aboriginal' (Andrews, 1993; Brandl, 1981; Harris, 1990).

I did consider using the term 'Indigenous Australians'. Indigenous is a term that is used globally and includes Australian Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders. However, the term 'Aboriginal' was employed throughout the research. It was a term used in the early nineties and in the majority of literature available today (Christie, 1994, 1995; Fogarty & White, 1994, Mannion, 1996; Partington, 1997).

In this research the term 'Aboriginal culture' is also used. The term 'Aboriginal culture' may be interpreted in a number of ways. I have used the definition as employed by Cook (1995). The term 'Aboriginal culture' is used to mean *"those learned aspects of Aboriginal society,*

traditional, transitional, or contemporary, which are passed on from one generation to another" (Cook, p.6).

A further term used in the research is 'Remote Aboriginal'. This term is used to refer to a group of 'Aboriginal' people that lived in a geographically isolated area, for example in the Northern Territory or north of Western Australia or north of Queensland (Collins, 1993; Harris, 1990; McTaggart, 1989; Martinez, 1994).

'Remote Aboriginal communities' is also a term used regularly throughout this study. This term is used when referring to geographically isolated communities populated predominantly by Aboriginal people.

Lastly, the term 'clan' is also used regularly throughout the study. The participants in the study use the term 'tribe' or 'clan' when discussing the family group to which Aboriginal people belong.

1.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

I have identified limitations in this study. Firstly I, the researcher, am a non-Aboriginal researcher that has had experience living and working in a remote Aboriginal community. Hence I had an experience which

might bias the study in some way. The ways in which I dealt with this are further discussed in 3.2.3 'The limitations of the Researcher'.

The second limitation concerns the small number of participants in the study. There were six participants involved, limiting the range of experiences that were explored and discussed.

The final limitation that must be considered was that the main method of data collection was interviewing and the data collection process relied solely on the perceptions of the participants.

1.6 CONCLUSION

Through the research I explored the role of the non-Aboriginal teacher from the viewpoint of the participants. Researchers are able to be critical of, or complimentary about, the involvement of non-Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal education. This research was intended to give voice to the non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities and allow them to share their experiences of, and views about, non-Aboriginal teachers in this setting. This will allow me to make recommendations for non-Aboriginal teachers in the future.

Chapter 2.

A review of the literature.

2.1. HISTORY OF NON-ABORIGINAL PEOPLE IN ABORIGINAL EDUCATION.

There is a long history of non-Aboriginal involvement in Aboriginal Education (Broome, 1994). In the 1880s there was large-scale removal of Aboriginal children from their families to be Christianised and civilised under the supervision of Aboriginal Protection Boards. Between 1860 and 1940 Aboriginal reserves were set up by the various State Aboriginal affairs boards segregating the education of Aboriginal children from that of non-Aboriginal children. After 1940 Assimilation was adopted and Aboriginal education was the responsibility of the Education Minister of each state and territory (Keeffe, 1992). From 1960s to 1970s Aboriginal Education moved from Assimilation to Integration to Self-Determination and Self-Management (Keeffe, 1992). The 1980s saw the introduction of Bilingual and Bicultural Education with Aboriginal languages, cultural values and knowledge incorporated into the curriculum (Harris, 1990, chap.3; Keeffe, 1992, p.115-118). Since this time, the 1990s have brought Aboriginalisation with its focus on the training of Aboriginal teachers, teacher aides, linguists and Aboriginal liaison officers (Hughes and Wilmot in Sherwood, 1982, p.45-51). This has all taken place under the close supervision and direction of non-Aboriginal

Government administrators and teachers. Aboriginalisation is the present phase taking place in remote Aboriginal community schools (Mannion, 1996). This history of non-Aboriginal involvement is a background to my investigation of non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities throughout the 1990s.

2.2 ABORIGINAL CULTURE.

In order to provide a context for exploration of the living and working experience of non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities it is important to know what has been written about Aboriginal culture. Researchers like Ward (1985) have written about the culture of Aboriginal people. Ward's book The Peoples and their Land around Wadeye (1985) is a study of a particular group of Aboriginal people. Ward has described the distinctiveness of the Aboriginal culture through her exploration of the people of Wadeye. Ward (1985) defined Aboriginal culture as *"A Design for Living"* (p.1). She explained Aboriginal culture is *"1.A way of life. 2.Representing a total plan for living and 3.Its content is organised into a system"* (p.1). When defining Aboriginal culture Ward described the people living in a remote Aboriginal community. In this community there were a number of clans. Each of the groups had a separate language and land. They also had their own totems and dreamings. When discussing these groups, Ward used the term "clans"(p.44). She

wrote about ceremonies performed in the remote community and the different roles the clans had in the performance of the ceremonies. Although the elements of language, land, totems and ceremonies were discussed as separate elements she emphasised that they were interrelated. Ward also touched on Aboriginal law and the significance of this in the lives of the Aboriginal people. In her study, Ward also explored the importance of family and the significance of family relationships.

Educational literature available has focused on a variety of aspects of Aboriginal culture as it affects education. These areas include family, clans, language, land, ceremonies, death and the importance of relationships (Collins, 1993; Harris, 1984; Keeffe, 1992). Harris (1984) is a useful example of this. In his book, Culture and Learning. Tradition and Education in North-East Arnhem Land (1984) Harris explored the learning contexts of Aboriginal people in Milingimbi. This book is an example of a study exploring Aboriginal culture with an educational focus. Harris has highlighted distinctive Aboriginal attitudes and values in relation to learning, and Aboriginal learning strategies and communication styles.

My thesis will discuss elements of Aboriginal culture as perceived by non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities and how

they confronted this culture in the community and school settings. Exploration of the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities is a significant field and my thesis will add to the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers in this field.

2.3 GENERAL CULTURAL COMPARISONS.

Researchers have long talked about the differences between Aboriginal society and non-Aboriginal society. Through this discussion general cultural comparisons have emerged (see Table 1). Keeffe (1992) presented the list of comparisons suggested by Hughes and Andrews (1988) in Keeffe as a point of view regarding general cultural comparisons between Aboriginal society and non-Aboriginal society. Some of the key ideas presented were differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal society in terms of time orientation, relationships, communication, spirituality and law. For instance, Aboriginal time orientation *"is circular, without boundaries"* (p.99) whereas non-Aboriginal time orientation *"is linear and quantified"* (p.99). Aboriginal society is *"group oriented"* (p.99) whereas non-Aboriginal society is *"individual oriented"* (p.99). My study will discuss these and other differences as perceived by the participants, and explore how they dealt with these while living and working in remote Aboriginal communities.

Table 1 General Cultural Comparisons

Aboriginal Society	*Non-Aboriginal Society*
➢ History is timeless	➢ History is quantified and specified
➢ Engage in holistic thinking	➢ Engage in empirical thinking
➢ Time is circular, without boundaries – is past continuous	➢ Time is linear and quantified with reference points – is future oriented
➢ Spiritual views are not questioned	➢ Spiritual views are debated and questioned
➢ Being rather than doing is important – fit into circumstances that are there	➢ Try to change circumstances that are there
➢ Immediate gratification important	➢ Deferred gratification important
➢ Aboriginal society is acceptable as it is	➢ Society needs to change
➢ Group oriented – everything is for all group members	➢ Individual oriented – acquisitions are for you
➢ Kinship is important in a family unit – a person can go from home to home	➢ Kinship of far less importance
➢ Aborigines expect children to be like them	➢ Non-Aboriginal children are not expected to be like their parents
➢ Spontaneous lifestyle – do what you want, when you want to	➢ Structured lifestyle – must plan and be stable if want to succeed
➢ Uncritical of children or society because of respect	➢ Critical- everyone is judged
➢ Personal lifestyle – hard to understand an 'impersonal' person	➢ Impersonal lifestyle – people would rather be alone
➢ Basically listeners – do not speak unless it is important	➢ Basically verbalisers- think out loud, must speak
➢ Illiterate – use symbolic language	➢ Literate- use books, and very verbal
➢ Little eye contact – is impolite to do so	➢ Lots of eye contact- is impolite not to do so
➢ Indirect in questioning – talk around the point	➢ Direct questions- very much to the point
➢ Non-legislative-laws are morals and to support the group, not to isolate anyone	➢ Legislative- laws are written and offenders are isolated
➢ Accepting of others following separation for wrong doing or work	➢ Not accepting of others following separation for wrong doing
➢ A non-market economy - money not important	➢ Market oriented – money important and complex
➢ Age is respected	➢ Youth is respected
➢ Giving is important	➢ Saving is important

(source: Hughes and Andrews 1988 in Keeffe p.99)

Through studying cultural difference the term *world view* has emerged. Christie (1985) argued that the source of the conflict between the two cultures is based on the world view and behaviour of each culture. Christie believes that the *non-Aboriginal* culture and world view is based on "*purposeful behaviour*" (Christie, 1985, p.7), that is, individuals working towards goals for personal achievement; whereas the *Aboriginal* culture and world view is based on "*meaningful behaviour*" (Christie, 1985, p.6), that is, the quality of actions or relationships. Willis (1996) also discussed the growing recognition that differences in world view engenders conflict between the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal cultures.

Eckermann, Kaplan and Roberts (1994) argue that cultural differences and conflicts between Aboriginal culture and non-Aboriginal culture are present in remote Aboriginal community schools. Their research concerned the influence culture has on education and conflicts that arise in education due to differences between *"the values, traditions, language, customs and routines"* (Eckermann, Kaplan & Roberts, p.11) adopted by each culture. My thesis aims to highlight the major differences experienced by non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities.

2.4 ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY AND LIFESTYLE.

Remote Aboriginal communities refer to geographically isolated communities made up primarily of Aboriginal people (cf.1.4 Definitions of Key Terms). Educational literature available has discussed few aspects of remote Aboriginal communities, nor have they looked much at the living circumstances and lifestyle of Aboriginal people in these communities. Among these who have looked at these areas, Partington (1997) reported on the experience of non-Aboriginal student teachers completing practice teaching rounds in remote Aboriginal communities. In his report Partington discussed the living conditions of Aboriginal people, briefly describing Aboriginal housing. He reported the non-Aboriginal student teachers' contrasting attitudes towards the physical appearance of the remote communities and the schools. One student teacher commented *"the school and community is a pleasant surprise – clean and relatively orderly"* and another reported *"absolutely gob stopped at all the rubbish lying around. It's as bad as third world countries I have visited"* (Partington, 1997, p.32).

Apart from discussion focusing on the physical appearance of remote Aboriginal communities researchers have discussed the lifestyles of

Aboriginal people in communities. The lifestyle issues such as substance abuse and violence were briefly discussed in the educational research available. These topics were discussed because of the direct influence they were seen to have on the education of Aboriginal students in remote Aboriginal community schools. Crowther (1988) reported *" In cases of high alcohol use, a high level of fighting within and among families have been continually disruptive of school and family life"* (Crowther, 1988, p.7). Health issues were discussed in an educational context, focusing on the impact of poor health on the Aboriginal students' learning in the community schools and the impact of this on the standard and amount of teaching done by non-Aboriginal teachers (Collins, 1993, Crowther, 1988).

Absenteeism from school among Aboriginal students and teachers was a particular focus of educational literature when discussing Aboriginal lifestyle. Substance abuse, conflict among families and poor health were discussed as contributing factors to the poor and non-attendance of Aboriginal students in community schools (Crowther, 1988). Cultural events, such as, Aboriginal ceremonies (cf. 2.2 Aboriginal Culture) were also cited as influencing the attendance of Aboriginal students and teachers in remote Aboriginal community schools (Partington, 1997). My study will comment on some of these findings.

2.5 LIVING EXPERIENCES.

My thesis, as it developed, came to focus on the *living* experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities. Literature available on non-Aboriginal teachers *living* in remote Aboriginal communities is limited. The available research focused on limited aspects of non-Aboriginal teachers *living* in remote Aboriginal communities (Crowther, Cronk & King, 1989; Crowther, 1989; Emby, 1993). Researchers have suggested a high standard of living conditions for non-Aboriginal teachers is directly related to success in *"the quality of education"* (Emby, 1993. p.36). Emby proposed that the standard of housing, food and water, access to immunisation, communication devices, vehicles and friends and family, as well as, professional support, inservicing and appropriate allowances all contributed to the education provided by non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities.

Crowther (1988) supported the notion that aspects of living in a remote community related directly to *"success professionally"* (p.10). His research concerned isolation experienced by individuals living in remote settings, isolation from goods and services, professional resources, restricted access to family and friends and teacher resources. In an earlier study Crowther (1988) identified personal and

professional adjustments which individuals had to make to live in remote towns and communities. The issues discussed included induction, orientation, housing, professional services and support, health and stress and opportunity for promotion (Crowther, 1988). Crowther highlighted the distinctiveness of the living situation of non-Aboriginal teachers in his statement *"It is obviously difficult to understand the real situation of these teachers until one has been there and experienced it"* (Crowther, p.10). Given that Emby (1993) and Crowther (1988) shared the view that the living situation of an individual closely related to the working success of an individual, it is surprising that research in this area is limited. Literature available on non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities is mainly concerned with the working experience and educational issues related to the working experience. However, my thesis explores the living experience because of the distinctive issues faced by non-Aboriginal teachers in this setting and the relationship between the distinctive living experience and the influence this had on the working experience of non-Aboriginal teachers

2.6 OWNERSHIP OF EDUCATION.

Cultural differences have lead to many educational researchers throughout the world being apprehensive about non-indigenous teachers working with indigenous minorities. Freire (1993) is one of

these. He was concerned with the ownership of education and the empowerment and freedom gained through education. Harris (1990), like Freire was concerned with ownership of education because of the detrimental effect he saw Western leadership as having on Aboriginal education in Australia. He was concerned about the presence of the non-Aboriginal teachers in the classroom and the use of non-Aboriginal administrators and decision makers and the impact they might have on Aboriginal education and culture. This opinion was shared by other researchers, leading them to examine the relevance of non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal community schools (Christie, 1994, p.44; Folds, 1987; Harris, 1990; Keeffe, 1992; McTaggart, 1989, p.37). Folds (1987) made a stinging attack on the efforts of non-Aboriginal teachers and administrators in his book Whitefella School. This publication was a frank account of how Folds believed schools had gone wrong. He repeatedly made recommendations for Aboriginal people to take leadership because of the lack of understanding and success experienced by non-Aboriginal teachers and administrators. Keeffe (1992) was also critical about non-Aboriginal teachers and leaders in schools. He was critical about schools being a place of assimilation into mainstream society and a place of initial Aboriginal resistance towards the *"dominant society"* (Keeffe, 1992, p.90). In the school context non-Aboriginal teachers often perceived "resistance" as misbehaviour, withdrawal or non-attendance at school. My thesis will present the point of view of the non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal community schools and

share their perceptions about non-Aboriginal teachers working in remote Aboriginal community schools.

2.7 ABORIGINAL LEARNING STYLES.

Many researchers have noted the distinct learning styles of Aboriginal students. In 'Funding Priorities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education' (1984) comparisons were made between features of traditional Aboriginal learning and teaching and non-Aboriginal classroom learning and teaching. The publication suggested that Aboriginal student learns through, *"observation and imitation, personal trial and error, real life activities, context specific learning experiences"* (Funding Priorities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education, p.12). In the same publication a further suggestion was that Aboriginal students are *"people oriented"* (p. 12), whereas, the non-Aboriginal teachers' experiences of teaching and learning are ones of *"verbal instruction, verbal demonstration, practice in contrived settings, generalised principles"* (p.12). In addition the non-Aboriginal teachers are *"information oriented"* (p.12). Publications produced twenty years ago recognise these differences. The paper 'Aboriginal and Islander Education: Perspectives and Change' (1978) listed the educational needs of Aboriginal students, suggesting the same comparisons. Harris (1984) discussed these learning strategies at length in his book Culture and Learning.

Tradition and Education in North-East Arnhem Land. More recently the Victorian Education Department discuss the learning patterns of Aboriginal students in 'A Guide for Teachers of Aboriginal Children' (Education Dept Vic, 1984).

Although Aboriginal learning styles are discussed as a separate topic, learning styles relate to *Aboriginal culture*, particularly the aspect of the significance of relationships. Partington (1997) highlighted the association in his reporting of the experiences of non-Aboriginal student teachers on practice rounds in remote Aboriginal communities. The successes of the non-Aboriginal students teachers were reported when curriculum and the learning context were culturally relevant to the Aboriginal students, and also when efforts were made by non-Aboriginal student teachers *"to relate to the children socially and gain their confidence"* (p.37), establishing *"good rapport and respect"* (p.37).

Malin (1994) researched the experience of a non-Aboriginal teacher working with Aboriginal students. Although Malin focused on a non-Aboriginal teacher in an urban setting, Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal learning styles are important in her discussion. Malin discussed the attitudes of a non-Aboriginal teacher, named Mrs. Eyers, towards her Aboriginal students. Mrs. Eyers had *"low*

expectations about the students' academic and social potential [which] *created serious lack of rapport between the students and teacher"* (p.141). Malin reported that *"much of this could be avoided with responsive teacher behaviour"* (p.141). She suggested this would include an understanding of Aboriginal learning styles and Aboriginal culture.

In light of these perceived differences in culture and learning styles, various educational policies have been used in the remote Aboriginal community schools. My thesis will comment on the non-Aboriginal teachers' perception of Aboriginal learning styles and how they respond to Aboriginal learning styles in the classroom.

2.8 EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

Given the controversy about non-Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal education and the distinctive Aboriginal learning style, various policies have been developed and implemented. Researchers have extensively investigated educational policies adopted in remote Aboriginal community schools. Bilingual education, bicultural education and 'two-way schooling' have been policies employed in remote community schools (Harris, 1990; Keeffe, 1992).

2.8.1 BILINGUAL EDUCATION.

Bilingual education means students are taught their academic work in both mother tongue and English. Through bilingual education Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers are required to learn, plan and teach together, as well as develop school policies and curriculum. Mannion (1996) reported on the development and implementation of bilingual education in the Northern Territory. The Northern Territory Government chose bilingual education to address the educational needs of the Aboriginal students. The main aim was to lift educational standards among Aboriginal students, providing them with education that was *"culturally appropriate"* (Mannion, 1996, p.36). Mannion stated that the bilingual program, in the Northern Territory, was implemented in order to *"achieve more effective schooling for the Aboriginal children from traditionally oriented communities who came to school speaking an Aboriginal language"* (Mannion, 1996, p.34).

According to Mannion in order for a bilingual program to operate there are a number of necessary elements. First and foremost there should be agreement and support for the program to operate in the community school. Mannion presented what McGrath sees as other essential requirements. These were:

- agreement about which Aboriginal language
- Aboriginal teachers for instruction
- Non-Aboriginal teachers to form teaching teams
- Reading materials in the specific language
- A linguist
- Commitment from the school community
- Bilingual education as an integral part of the school (McGrath in Mannion, 1996, p.38-39).

There were many critics of bilingual education among researchers. Both Harris (1990) and Keeffe (1992) have explored the strengths and weaknesses of bilingual education. Harris believed that bilingual education is a policy employed for academic gain and it may not encourage the maintenance of Aboriginal culture. He held the view that bilingual education is a policy that, while non-Aboriginal teachers in partnership with Aboriginal teachers initially implement it, leads to giving the ultimate power to the non-Aboriginal. Keeffe believed that bilingual education is a policy that has potential to be of great benefit to students in Aboriginal communities supporting students' learning through their first language. However, like Harris, Keeffe was critical of the bilingual program because non-Aboriginal teachers implement it. Although Harris and Keeffe agreed about the use of bilingual education in remote Aboriginal community schools, they had contrasting views about two other approaches. These were bicultural education and two-way schooling.

2.8.2 TWO-WAY SCHOOLING.

Two-way schooling is a policy that requires parental and community control. It also requires the separation of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures with non-Aboriginal teachers taking on an expert role in English. The Department of Aboriginal Affairs defined two-way schooling as a policy that *"goes further than merely using the mother tongue... .It is intended as a two-way process, so the school is an integral part of the community and each culture is reasonably equally represented, with learning from the other and each having its part to play without eventually excluding the other"* (National language policy 1984, in Mannion, 1996, p.87). Harris supported two-way schooling as a policy used in remote Aboriginal community schools because of the shift he saw in authority from non-Aboriginal people to Aboriginal people. Harris believed that two-way schooling is a policy that separates the two cultures, provides choice of two cultures, and will keep Aboriginal identity strong, allowing for conscious learning. Two-way schooling has parental and community controls. He believes that two-way schooling minimises the confusion of combining the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. Keeffe (1992) did not share this view. In contrast, Keeffe believed that two-way schooling tears cultures apart rather than holding them together. Keeffe supported the policy of bicultural education, which he saw as a policy that combines the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures letting the cultures complement each other rather than contradict. He saw

bicultural education as empowering Aboriginal people. Keeffe supported the bicultural policy because *"until Aboriginal people have enough presence in the school, presence in the curriculum, to reform the school as part of their domain, schools may always be foreign, un-Aboriginal and alienating"* (Keeffe, p.126). My thesis explores the non-Aboriginal teachers' experience and perception of these various policies.

2.8.3 ABORIGINALISATION.

As said before, the discussion about the detrimental effect of non-Aboriginal teachers and teaching styles in remote Aboriginal community schools has led to discussion of Aboriginalising education (Christie, 1994, p.44, 1995, p.34; Keeffe, 1992, chapter 6; McTaggart, 1989, p.37). McTaggart (1989) summarised the issue of Aboriginalising education in her statement, *"The Aboriginalising of education in each community can only mean the development of an Aboriginal pedagogy if it is to address the perennially documented failings of the Western schools in the education of Aboriginal people"* (McTaggart, 1989, p.37). McTaggart believed that the non-Aboriginal teacher would have to accept the Aboriginal pedagogy and allow the Aboriginal community to develop and implement curriculum in an Aboriginal way without Western influence. Keeffe (1992) like McTaggart believed that through Aboriginalisation, Aboriginal

communities will be able to choose their own direction and that cultural maintenance would be enhanced. Christie (1994) supported the notion of Aboriginalising education. Christie believed that it is important for Aboriginal people to hold onto their identity.

Researchers have seen Aboriginalisation as a shift in power and leadership in Aboriginal education (Christie, 1994, p.44, 1995, p.34; Gardiner, 1996; Harris, 1990; Keeffe, 1992, p.96; McTaggart, 1989, p.37). Much discussion has taken place about the movement of leadership from non-Aboriginal teachers to Aboriginal teachers. There are many ideas about what the emerging role of the non-Aboriginal teacher in remote Aboriginal communities will be (Christie, 1994,1995; Gardiner, 1996; Harris, 1990). Christie (1994,1995) was clear about the future role of the non-Aboriginal teacher. Christie did not see it necessary to eliminate the non-Aboriginal teacher. He suggested Aboriginal community members lead the non-Aboriginal teachers. Although McTaggart (1989) was unsure about the role of the non-Aboriginal teacher, she suggested strategies for non-Aboriginal teachers involved in Aboriginalisation. These strategies included the non-Aboriginal teacher assuming an expert role, the non-Aboriginal teacher making an effort to understand the Aboriginal world and non-Aboriginal teachers *"doing as they are told"* (McTaggart, p.41), that is, taking direction from Aboriginal community members.

Gardiner (1996) shared her personal experience of Aboriginalisation and her changing view of education through Paulo Freire, Martin Buber and Hedley Beare. She explained her personal experience of holding onto her Western view of education and talked about her change in perception of non-Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal education. Gardiner explained that through the appointment of a Tiwi 'Principal-in-Training' and development of a Tiwi 'infrastructure' to support the Tiwi 'Principal-in-Training', the school was moving towards Aboriginalisation. This movement towards Aboriginalisation meant that *"non-Tiwi teachers* [were invited] *to take on more responsibility for the English Language Area"* (Gardiner, 1996, p.23). Gardiner continued *"teachers have taken full responsibility for all matters relating to the Western mode of Education"* (Gardiner, 1996, p.23). My thesis offers insights into how the non-Aboriginal teachers perceived their role in the process of Aboriginalisation of education in the remote Aboriginal community school. My thesis explores the non-Aboriginal teachers' experience of Aboriginalisation and discusses their thoughts about non-Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal education.

2.9 TRAINING OF NON-ABORIGINAL TEACHERS.

Given that the role of the non-Aboriginal teacher has prompted extensive debate, it is not surprising that the discussion of the training

of non-Aboriginal teachers for remote Aboriginal community schools has also prompted discussion. There has been discussion about the training of teachers for minorities for over twenty years. For example Binnion (1976) shared the view that different skills and knowledge are needed for teaching minorities than those needed to teach in a mainstream school. Andrews (1993) used her study of six teachers to explore attitudes and beliefs influencing academic performance of Aboriginal students. She strongly recommended the training of teachers for minorities. My thesis comments on the training of non-Aboriginal teachers teaching in remote Aboriginal community schools.

Although research concerning training of non-Aboriginal teachers for remote Aboriginal community schools is limited, most educational authorities have publications for non-Aboriginal teachers working in remote Aboriginal community schools. In his article, Darvall (1991) briefly outlined a program for new appointees to Aboriginal communities in South Australia, with the recommendation of continuation of the program. The South Australian Aboriginal Education Curriculum Unit has continued the program with an annual assessment and made the publication available to all new teachers in Aboriginal community schools. Topics that were covered by this type of publication included: living in an Aboriginal community; building relationships with the community; school organisation; building relationships with students; Aboriginal education workers and training

and development of teachers (Darvall, 1991). Researchers have long talked about the importance of professional development for non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities. My thesis will comment on the professional development of the non-Aboriginal teachers.

2.10 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Non-Aboriginal involvement in Aboriginal education is well documented, particularly discussion about ownership of education and the development and implementation of educational policies in remote Aboriginal communities. The influence of cultural difference in Aboriginal education is also well documented. Cultural difference has been identified as a source of conflict in Aboriginal education and specifically in remote Aboriginal community schools. Differences are seen between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal values, beliefs and understanding of knowledge and education.

The distinct learning and teaching styles of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are also well documented. Educational policies have been developed as theorists have developed an understanding of the distinctive learning styles of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Bilingual education, two-way schooling, bicultural education

and Aboriginalisation are policies based on these ideas. In all of them the role of the non-Aboriginal teacher is still being discussed.

In view of the specific educational needs of Aboriginal students, professional development for non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities is vital. General publications are available and individual educational bodies provide professional development for non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities. My thesis will discuss the non-Aboriginal teachers' experience of, and perceptions about, professional development.

My thesis will provide an insight into the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities during the 1990s. This study will discuss themes raised by the participants, and share the personal perspectives of the non-Aboriginal teachers about their experiences. Although each participant has had specific experiences and has certain perceptions about their experiences, commonalities about the participants' lives in remote Aboriginal communities will be explored. In addition, contrary experiences will be discussed and explanations for these will be offered. Literature available related to the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities will be discussed, with a focus on related and contrasting issues. My thesis

will discuss findings that may be applicable to other non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities and recommendations will be made for further study.

Chapter 3.

The Research Methodology.

3.1 INTRODUCTION.

The main aim of this study was to explore the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities. The participants were invited to share their experiences of living and working in remote Aboriginal communities. The research method employed was interviewing.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN.

3.2.1. DISCUSSION OF METHODOLOGY.

The research methodology employed in this study, interviewing, is a qualitative communication research method. Interviewing is a frequently employed qualitative research method (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990). *"This has lead to considerable diversity in the form and the style of interviewing as well as the products of such an approach"* (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995, p.153). The process allows experiences to be explored and patterns to develop. As the researcher I have compiled a collection of personal stories relating

the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities using open-ended interviews. An interview can be defined as conversation with purpose. It is an excellent tool for data collection. It allows for the exploration and articulation of areas of interest. An interview is an evolving process that can allow for unstructured and open-ended discussion. During an interview the researcher is able to prompt the participant to clarify areas of interest. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) discussed the aim of an unstructured interview. *"The aim of an unstructured interview is to provide for a greater and freer flow of information between the researcher and subject"* (Hitchcock and Hughes, p.162). The interview process takes the researcher beyond observation, allowing for perceptions to be explored supporting and strengthening the collection of data (Lindlof, 1995).

Lindlof explained *"narrative interviewing is based on the premise that the events of our lives, and the events of groups and organisations, are communicated through story telling... The narrative genre utilizes story telling as an empirical technique"* (Lindlof, 1995, p.172-174). Through the interview process the participants spoke about specific aspects of their lives, living and working in remote Aboriginal communities. The interviews were open-ended discussions allowing participants to discuss their experiences and perceptions in the ways that they saw relevant.

3.2.2. THE ROLE OF THE RESEARCHER.

I began the interviews with the statement "Tell me about your experience as a non-Aboriginal teacher living and working in a remote Aboriginal community". This allowed the participants to share their personal perspectives on their experiences in remote Aboriginal communities. When entering the interview situation Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest,

> *"It is... important when using the unstructured interview...to consider before hand the nature of the encounter and the kinds of general areas the researcher wishes to explore. The researcher might work a rough checklist of ideas or areas she wants to explore in the interview but will be prepared to let the interviewees 'travel' wherever they like"* (Hitchcock and Hughes, p.163).

Through using the unstructured interview participants were able to discuss any topic within their experience of living and working in remote Aboriginal communities.

3.2.3. THE LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCHER.

Borg and Gall (1989) alerted us to the problems that may be encountered when using interviewing as a methodology. They advised the researcher to be clear about the use of this methodology, remembering that the interviewee provides the researcher with a

wealth of information. The researcher must allow discussion to develop and ignore personal agendas that can influence the interviews. Although I had ideas about the topics that might be discussed in the interviews, I endeavored to allow the interviews to develop and proceed without interruption. While I had some general areas of interest, I did not direct participants in their discussion of topics. My participation in the interview process was to clarify statements made by the participants and to further question the participants about topics they initiated.

Despite my efforts there was an issue of bias in the research. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) stated *"whatever kind of interview is used the fact that an individual, the researcher or the interviewer, is directly involved with another individual means, inevitably, that the presence of the researcher will have some kind of influence on the finds or data"* (p.164). The fact that I have had experience living and working in a remote Aboriginal community and I conducted the research means that the data and results will be exposed to bias. However, this can also be interpreted in a positive manner. My experience living and working in a remote community can enhance the discussion because of my understanding of the distinctive experience of the participants. The issue of researcher bias is also addressed in 3.4.4 'Validation of Category Headings'.

3.3 DATA COLLECTION PROCESS.

3.3.1 PRIMARY DATA SOURCE.

The primary data source was recordings of individual interviews. The interviews were taped, recording the participants' and the researcher's participation in the interview. The participants' interviews were tape-recorded with permission, allowing for accuracy in collecting the data. I could have taken notes but the method of recording was chosen in order to achieve accuracy and completeness in the collection of data. One shortcoming of using a tape recorder is that the participant may be self-conscious and alter responses because of presence of the tape recorder (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). However, as the interviews proceeded the participants appeared relaxed and were focused on discussing their personal experiences. These recordings were transcribed as soon as possible after the interviews, generating transcripts.

3.3.2. THE CHOICE OF PARTICIPANTS (SAMPLE).

The participants chosen for the study were non-Aboriginal teachers. The participants were chosen subject to availability. The sample consisted of six non-Aboriginal teachers; three were male and three were female. The participants were required to be non-Aboriginal

teachers who had lived and worked in a remote Aboriginal community during the 1990s for a minimum of two years. The participants were chosen because of the expert insights I hoped they would bring to the study.

Some unexpected similarities emerged because it happened that all the participants had worked in remote Aboriginal community schools that were implementing bilingual programs. Bilingual education was a policy available to remote Aboriginal communities for language maintenance of an Aboriginal language. As a result, all participants were able to speak about their experience in the development and implementation of bilingual education. Given that Aboriginal English is spoken in some remote Aboriginal communities, it cannot be assumed that bilingual education is the policy employed in every remote Aboriginal community. As bilingual education involves co-operation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal school staffs, discussion about the participants working with Aboriginal teachers and teacher aides emerged as a significant similarity between the participants.

The location and time for interviews was negotiated with individual participants. The location chosen always provided privacy and was uninterrupted.

3.3.3. THE ROLE OF THE PARTICIPANTS.

The participants were asked to devote approximately three hours to the project, consisting of two one hour interviews and approximately one hour for reading a transcript of their first interview. The purpose of having two interviews was to give the participants an opportunity to discuss their experience and also to reflect upon their experience. Interview one focused on discussion of their experience and interview two on the reflection about their experiences. The value of the first interview transcript was that it enabled the participants to reflect on their experience which was a topic of discussion in interview two (cf. 3.3.4 The interview process).

In the transcripts participants were given pseudonyms. Anonymity was ensured by renaming all participants and the tape recordings are all securely stored separately from the transcripts. The names of the remote Aboriginal communities have also been withheld. The participants lived and worked in a variety of remote Aboriginal communities. The community names have been withheld because the focus of the study was the experience of non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities and not a study of non-Aboriginal teachers from any specific communities.

The participants were all required to sign a "Written Consent Form" declaring their willingness to participate in the research and that they had a clear understanding of the project and the commitment they were making to the project (See appendix). The participants were advised that they were able to withdraw from the study at any time without notice or explanation.

3.3.4. THE INTERVIEW PROCESS.

The broad topic of discussion for interview one was the participants discussing their experience of living and working in a remote Aboriginal community. The broad topic of discussion for interview two was the participants reflecting upon their experience in terms of their contribution to Aboriginal education. The interviews were scheduled about one week apart allowing for transcripts to be typed and then read by the participants. This also gave the participants an opportunity to reflect on the way they had characterised their experience of living and working in a remote Aboriginal community. Themes raised by the participants in interview one were also followed up by the researcher if they needed further explanation, allowing for verification of data collected in interview one.

3.3.5. BROAD TOPICS OF DISCUSSION.

As said, interview one commenced with the participants responding to the statement "Tell me about your experience as a non-Aboriginal teacher living and working in a remote Aboriginal community." Interview two began with participants discussing any aspect of interview one that they thought required further discussion. The participants' views of the purpose of Aboriginal education and the role of the non-Aboriginal teacher in Aboriginal education were also explored in interview two. At the conclusion of the second interview participants were asked to reflect on their experience and discuss their contribution to Aboriginal education.

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS.

3.4.1. DATA ANALYSIS TECHNIQUE.

The purpose of the data collection process was to allow themes to emerge from the data, forming patterns. The primary data that I collected during my study consisted of transcripts of interviews. The patterns of discussion were selected as they emerged from the participants' interviews. As the patterns emerged they were also related to contemporary research and relevant theories. These patterns of discussion were sorted under category headings, each

representing a topic discussed. These categories would then be used in my discussion about the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities.

3.4.2. CATEGORISING THE DATA.

Once all the participants had been interviewed and the 12 interviews were complete, the process of sorting the data under category headings began. This process began when the six participants had been interviewed and the twelve transcripts were typed. This process began at this stage because of the need for the patterns of discussion to emerge from the participants themselves and not the researcher. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) stated that once interviews are completed *"specific categories and meanings can be generated... avoiding the tendency of the researcher to impose categories on to the materials at an earlier stage"* (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995). Had this process commenced during the collection of the data a preconceived list of category headings may have altered open-ended questions and topics of discussion to be used at each interview.

The transcripts were read a number of times before category headings were formed and finalised. Hitchcock and Hughes strongly supported the need for the researcher to have a *"thorough familiarity"*

(p.173) with the data. Hitchcock and Hughes stated, *"This process of familiarization then is a fundamental prerequisite to the successful analysis of these kinds of materials"* (p.173)

Upon completion of the twelve interviews, two copies of each transcript were produced for the purpose of forming the category headings. The process of forming categories was performed twice. Upon reading the transcripts for categorising the data for the first time, tentative headings were written by the researcher next to the corresponding quote.

After an interval this was repeated with the second set of transcripts so that consistency in the naming of category headings emerged. As has been stated, this allowed for a consistency in category headings to emerge before finalising the list. Once a list of categories had emerged from the data the next step was cutting and pasting the quotes under the category headings. This process produced over one hundred category headings.

Originally the computer was utilised for sorting the data under the category headings. However, this method was abandoned, as it was too cumbersome. A manual method of cutting and pasting was

chosen over computer filing in the sorting of data. Quotes were pasted under category headings next to a label. An example is shown below.

Aboriginal children cultural difference Participant's name: *Frances* Interview No: *2* Page No: *7* Line No: *46* Related Topics: *Aboriginal law*	The other barrier is that at home there is no focus on learning in a western sense. They might be learning skills about relationships. They might be able to explain who is their aunty seven times removed and she lives seven camps away. They know from such a young age how they are related to a certain person which is very, very complex yet they might not be able to read the back of a soap packet by the time they are fifteen. Those things aren't important. The things that are important are their family. And family rules like they are not allowed to speak to their brother because they have reached a certain age, or have been initiated or have reached puberty.
Aboriginal teacher assistant Participant's name: *Timothy* Interview No: *2* Page No: *2* Line No: *4* Related Topics: *Aboriginal law*	The first time I met my teacher aide, he had an Aboriginal name that couldn't be used because someone with his name had died in the community.
Aboriginalisation Participant's name: *Matthew* Interview No: *2* Page No: *8* Line No: *3* Related Topics: *Aboriginal law*	It is the policy of the various education departments that the Aboriginal people, the indigenous people should be running their own schools. ...The problem in a place like the community I was based is that, because of all the cultural problems related to violence, alcohol, rape, women's role in society, men's role in society, in culture... but when it was law, it was law. They would all have to disappear for three months, that is no good for the running of a school.

The labels were created to link the participants' interview number, page number and line number with the associated quote. Throughout the thesis this notation is also used, the above examples would be written as (Frances 2:7:46), (Timothy 2:2:4) and (Matthew 2:8:3). The purpose of recording these particular details was for contextualising quotes. Any question about the relevance of a quote in the context of the interview was easily addressed utilising this filing system. Although the transcripts are not attached to this thesis, they are available to be read.

3.4.3. CROSS FILING THE DATA.

Cross filing took place where quotes related to two or more categories. An index of cross-references was created to record the quote details and cross-reference details. The index is shown over. The example shows that Aboriginal law is related in some way to cultural difference, Aboriginal teacher assistants and Aboriginalisation. Although the main meaning derived from the quote was originally regarding cultural difference or Aboriginal teacher assistants or Aboriginalisation, cross-filing the quote linked it to Aboriginal law. The index served a number of purposes. The first was it saved an extensive amount of manual cutting and pasting. The second was that related topics could be reviewed at a glance without

having to reread all the data. The index of cross-references was used regularly in the writing of this thesis. As shown in the example, although quotes may reflect one main meaning, more than one meaning can be derived from the quotes. This is important for the discussion and analysis of data.

Topic: *Aboriginal law*	**Topic: *Aboriginal law***	**Topic: *Aboriginal law***
Sub –Topic: *Ab chn cultural difference*	Sub-Topic:*Aboriginal Teacher assistant*	SubTopic:*Aboriginalisation*
Page: *9*	Page: *35*	Page: *42*
Participant: *Frances*	Participant: *Timothy*	Participant: *Matthew*
Interview :*2*	Interview :*2*	Interview :*2*
Page: *7*	Page: *2*	Page: *8*
Line: *46*	Line: *4*	Line: *3*

The data analysis method generated over one hundred category headings; this prompted a need for the number of headings to be reduced. As a result 26 Major Topic headings were formed. The 100 categories were grouped under Major topic headings. Figure 1-1 lists the 100 categories that were discussed by the participants under the 26 Major Topic headings. It provides a quick reference guide to topics discussed by the participants.

3.4.4 VALIDATION OF CATEGORY HEADINGS.

Personal interpretation was used in sorting the quotes under the category headings. Suitability of category headings and quotes that

related to these headings needed to be checked and validated. A form of validation was performed by giving a section of data to an individual, with some knowledge of the field of Aboriginal education, asking the individual to match category headings with quotes.

The person was provided with the first five pages of participant one's first interview. The person was required to firstly read through the 26 Major Topic Headings and 100 category headings then read the interview pages 1-5. They were then required to record the topic number in the far right hand margin next to the associated quote. The person was advised that some quotes might have related to one topic heading only, whereas others may relate to two, three or more topics. The results provided by this person were used as a secondary source of data, purely for verification of topic headings.

3.4.5. OUTCOME OF THE VALIDATION PROCESS.

The result of this was that generally similar meanings were derived from the interview quotes using the Major topic headings 1-26 and category headings. However, the check highlighted the need for an additional topic heading. This topic heading titled 'White influence' was added making the number of Major Topic Headings 27, as seen in Figure 1-1. This was a good result in terms of validation.

1 Non Aboriginal Experience • How got the job • Arrival in community • Initial feelings, impressions • Culture shock • Advice • Return feelings • Happy worked in R.A.C	**2** Non Aboriginal Teacher Living • Non-Ab teacher travelling • Non-Ab teacher accommodation • Non-Ab community life • Non-Ab support network • Fishbowl • Services	**3** Non Aboriginal Teacher Workin • Difficulties of Non-Ab • Professionalism • Accountability • Graduates • Experienced teacher • Low expectations • Duration in community • High turnover • Contribution • Personal & professional learning
4 School facilities- resources • Classrooms-learning environment • Library • Workshop • Computers • Resources	**5** Professional development • Readings on Ab Ed • Inservicing • Networking • Prior Knowledge • Isolated professionally	**6** School policies • Bilingual • Linguist • Literacy Production Centre • Two-way schooling
7 Teaching strategies, Programs, curriculum • Planning • Preparation • Materials adapted • Reading programs • Writing programs • Maths programs • Excursion	**8** School relationship wit community • School isolated	**9** Non Aboriginal Teacher Role
10 Western values Western view	**11** Funding	**12** Mainstream teaching
13 Religion • Religious	**14** Weather • Air conditioning	**15** Time
16 Aboriginal Culture • Family relationships • Land relationships • Aboriginal law • Aboriginal ceremonies • Death • Cultural days • Bush trips • Aboriginal clans • Clan conflict • Aboriginal values • Cultural maintenance	**17** Aboriginal Community • Aboriginal housing • Aboriginal dogs • Community problems • Substance abuse • Violence • Leadership • Similarities • Differences	**18** Aboriginal Children at school • Attendance • School bus run • Discipline • Health issues • Diet • Low achievement • E.S.L. • Academic learning • School class levels
19 Aboriginal Language • Mother tongue • Language groups • Aboriginal English • Multi lingual- multi-clan	**20** Aboriginal Children Aboriginal Culture • Learning style • Discipline • Concept of shame	**21 Non-Aboriginal Teache relationship** • With students • With community socially • With community conflict
22 Outstation School • Teacher • Students • Program	**23** Aboriginal Parents	**24** Aboriginal Education • Present purpose • Future • Recommendations
25 Outstation living • Accommodation • Services	**26** Aboriginal Teachers • Teacher assistants • R.A.T.E students	**27** White Influence • Missionaries • White settlement • White impact

FIGURE 1-1

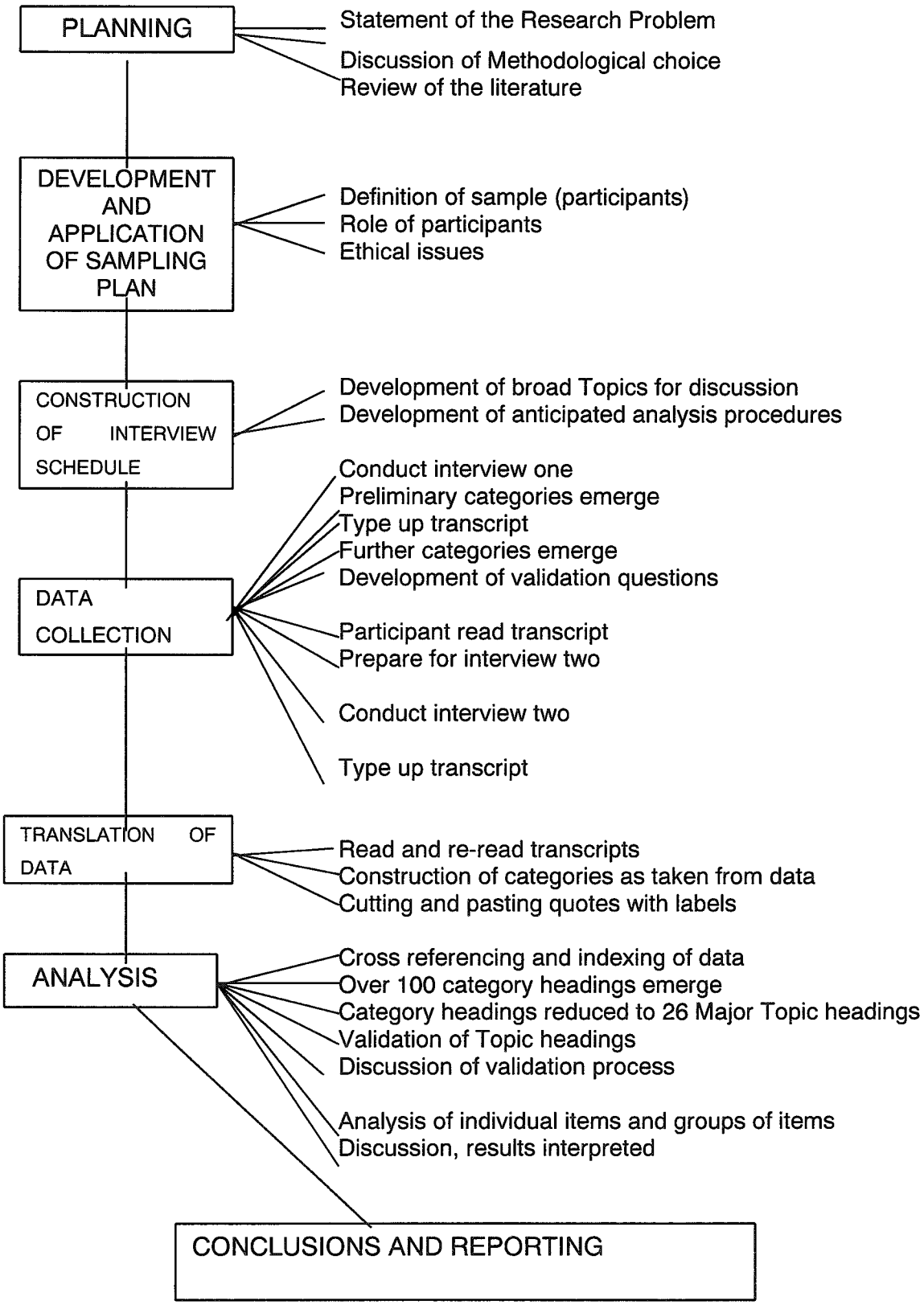
3.5 FLOWCHART OF THE METHODOLOGY.

The flowchart over the page summaries the steps used in this research. The left-hand side of the chart lists the six major steps that were taken in conducting the research. The right hand side lists the individual procedures followed in completing the research process.

3.6 SUMMARY

The methodology employed in this research project was used to allow participants to share openly and without interruption their experiences of living and working in a remote Aboriginal community.

Flowchart for the methodology.



Chapter 4.

The Participants.

4.1. INTRODUCTION.

This study is concerned with the role of non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities. The principal areas of investigation include:

(a) the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers living in remote Aboriginal communities,

(b) the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers working in remote Aboriginal communities,

(c) the non-Aboriginal teachers' perceptions of their personal contributions made to Aboriginal Education and

(d) their personal views of Aboriginal education generally.

In order to understand the role of non-Aboriginal teachers it is essential to understand personal experiences as perceived by the participants. I invited participants to share personal stories and insights about their experiences in remote Aboriginal communities.

During the interviews participants shared details about their experiences living and working in remote Aboriginal communities and talked about their personal views of their experiences overall. As has

been said, in 3.3.2 'The choice of participants', participants were required to have had at least two years experience living and working in a remote Aboriginal community. It is interesting to note, as said before, that they all had experienced teaching in a bilingual school. Before exploring the commonalities, it is worthwhile reading a summary of their individual circumstances and their reasons for moving to remote Aboriginal communities. Here is a thumbnail sketch of each participant outlining each individual's situation in their remote Aboriginal community.

4.1.1. CATHERINE.

Catherine lived and worked in two remote Aboriginal communities. Before moving to the first remote Aboriginal community Catherine had *"never met an Aboriginal person before"* (Catherine 1:1:16). She went to her first community as a graduate, in her first year of teaching. Although Catherine did not discuss her reason for going to a remote Aboriginal community, she clearly stated *"that's where I started my teaching career"* (Catherine 1:1:33). She was single and lived with another non-Aboriginal teacher in the same situation. The non-Aboriginal staff at the school consisted of young single staff and there was regular social interaction between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members. Catherine met her husband in this community. Catherine is married to Timothy who is also a participant in this study.

The Aboriginal children attending Catherine's first Aboriginal community school still had their own language and the school was a bilingual school. During her two and a half years working at the school, Catherine taught an infant class. She described the community school and the community as very isolated both geographically and professionally.

When moving to her second community Catherine was married and described herself as an *"experienced teacher"* (Catherine 1:5:13). At this stage she had two and a half years teaching experience in a remote Aboriginal community and three years teaching experience in mainstream schools in Melbourne and London. The non-Aboriginal staff in her second community consisted of older married couples. There was not a great deal of interaction between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members socially. In the community, the Aboriginal people spoke *"Aboriginal English"* (Catherine 1:5:22). Catherine held a dual role as the learning support teacher and the teacher librarian. She used her time training teachers, implementing literacy programs, and computerising the library.

4.1.2. FRANCES.

Frances lived and worked in one remote Aboriginal community. It was a multi-clan community. Before this experience, her only experience connected with Aboriginal people was studying Aboriginal history in secondary school. She did not indicate any previous teaching experience but described her employment situation. She stated, *"I needed a job really badly and I was desperately searching for a job, I was applying everywhere. I was just applying for anything I saw"* (Frances 1:1:6). Eventually she received a phone call regarding one of her applications. Frances recalled *"Then one day the phone rang, It was this woman, a principal, and she said 'Hello I'm from such and such, I've sent you some information in the mail...would you like to come and work for us?"* (Frances 1:1:12). Frances discussed it with her family and decided to go. She described her feelings, *"I thought what have I got to lose? It was half way through the year, I could give it six months and see what happens, and so I did"* (Frances 1:1:26). When moving to the community she was single and lived by herself.

During her working time in the community, Frances taught at the preschool level and grade one level. Frances worked with Aboriginal teacher assistants at both levels. The Aboriginal culture and the life of the community had a great influence on the functioning of the school. While living in the community, Frances socialised with Aboriginal and

non-Aboriginal community members at the community club. At this time the community club was licensed to serve restricted quantities of alcohol. She reported that the community club had great impact on relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents (C/F 5.4 'Alcohol').

4.1.3. TIMOTHY.

Timothy had lived and worked in three remote Aboriginal community schools. He did not discuss his reasons for moving to a remote Aboriginal community. The first remote Aboriginal community school he taught in was a desert school. He was there as the senior boys' classroom teacher in the late 1980s. The second school was bilingual and was in a multi-clan community. The third remote Aboriginal community he lived and worked in was also multi-clan, but the Aboriginal people *"were quickly losing their language"* (Timothy 1:6:34). Timothy lived in this community with his wife Catherine. In this community, the people spoke Aboriginal English. He was the special needs teacher in that community. At the time of the interview, Timothy was the only participant still working in Aboriginal education, he was commuting three days a week from a large country town to teach Aboriginal students in a remote Aboriginal community, where he was the learning support teacher. Timothy also had experience working with urban Aboriginal students.

4.1.4. MATTHEW.

Matthew had experience living and working in one remote Aboriginal community and an Aboriginal outstation. Before he moved to the remote Aboriginal community his only teaching experience was working as an emergency teacher in mainstream schools. He had never met an Aboriginal person before he moved to the remote Aboriginal community. When moving to the community he was a graduate teacher in his first year of teaching. Matthew talked about his decision to move to a remote Aboriginal community. He stated, *"It was in 1992 and the job situation was looking grim...and it was recommended to me by a nun from my teachers college. She said, 'Why don't you try an Aboriginal community?' So I gave it a go, it was funny after not being able to get a job... I phoned up and the next day I had a job"* (Matthew 1:1:6). He was single and lived by himself. The community school was a bilingual school and he taught at a middle school level for two years.

After living in the remote Aboriginal community, Matthew moved to an Aboriginal out station 100kms south of the community. An Aboriginal out station is a station in a remote or isolated region populated with Aboriginal people from one family group or clan. He discussed his reasons for moving, *"I was asked by the principal to help start up a new school... so I thought it sounded pretty exciting...I thought that would be a challenge"* (Matthew 1:2:16). He lived there with a female

non-Aboriginal teacher and an Aboriginal family. The out station had no running water, electricity or telephone; the only contact he had with the outside world was through a two-way radio. Together, Matthew and his colleague taught a transient population of Aboriginal students. He stayed for eight months.

4.1.5. MARCUS.

Marcus lived and worked in one remote Aboriginal community for two years. He was married and lived in brand new accommodation with his wife Pauline, another participant in this study. Pauline and Marcus had visited an Aboriginal community and wanted to work there. However after applying they were appointed to another community. Marcus recalled *"we weren't really given any information about the place... it was left up to our imagination as to what it would be like"* (Marcus 1:9:46). The remote Aboriginal community was multi-clan and the community school was bilingual. The Aboriginal students spoke their mother tongue. During his time, Marcus taught post-primary boys for one year and a composite four/five boys' class for one year.

4.1.6. PAULINE.

Pauline lived and worked in one remote Aboriginal community. She had teaching experience before going to the community. Pauline was married to Marcus when she moved to the community. As has been

said, Pauline and her husband Marcus wanted to work in a remote Aboriginal community. The Aboriginal community where they lived was multi-clan and the Aboriginal community school was bilingual. The class she taught was an all girls' class at the senior level of the school. Pauline worked closely with an Aboriginal teacher assistant.

Below is a table summarising the experiences of participants in this study.

Participant's name	Catherine	Frances	Timothy	Matthew	Marcus	Pauline
Years service before entering community	Graduate	Not specified	Not specified	Graduate	Not specified	Approx. 2 years
Number of years in Aboriginal communities	5 years	3 years	6 years (at time of study he was the only participant working in Aboriginal education)	2 years then 8 months in an out station	2 years	2 years
Number of communities lived and worked in	2	1	3	1	1	1
Type of school	Bilingual school	Bilingual school	Bilingual school	Bilingual school	Bilingual school	Bilingual school
Teaching position	Infant teacher Learning support teacher & teacher librarian	Preschool teacher Lower primary teacher	Senior boys teacher Special needs & learning support teacher	Middle primary teacher Out station teacher	Post primary boys teacher Middle primary boys teacher	Senior Primary girls teacher

FIGURE 1- 2

4.2. INTRODUCTION TO NON-ABORIGINAL TEACHERS LIVING.

My thesis is concerned with Aboriginal education and understanding the role of non-Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal education, specifically in remote Aboriginal communities. Understanding the role of non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities means understanding their living and working experience.

As has been said, research available about non-Aboriginal teachers living in remote Aboriginal communities is limited. The literature available discussed some aspects of living in a remote Aboriginal community including housing, services, health and personal and professional isolation, as well as, relationships and support in communities (Crowther, 1988; Emby, 1993; Martinez, 1994). Crowther (1988) highlighted the importance of these issues in his study stating, *"many teachers point out that personality and social factors (for example, sociability) are more highly relevant to success in small community and remote schools than is familiarity with curriculum documents"* (Crowther p.3, 1988). Despite his claim that the living experience is an important aspect of teachers lives in isolated communities, most of the literature available is concerned with the experience of *working* in community schools. The literature

focuses on educational issues, cultural difference, learning and teaching styles and educational policies. However, my thesis shows that the non-Aboriginal teachers were very concerned with their living situation in remote communities. In fact the participants in this study immersed themselves in discussion about living in a remote community.

In his first interview Marcus stated *"To be a teacher in a community it is not as simple as teaching, it is a whole lifestyle" (Marcus 1:9:2).* Marcus' statement highlights that discussion regarding the living experience is as vital as discussion regarding the working experience. Participants discussed their living experience, speaking about the physical surroundings, the climate, accommodation, services and personal feelings about living in a remote Aboriginal community. Participants shared feelings about isolation, relationships, support network and *"living in a fishbowl"* (Catherine 1:2:36). Timothy was the only participant who did not speak about feelings concerning living in a community. Timothy focused mainly on his teaching experience. Despite the fact that Timothy didn't speak about his living in a remote Aboriginal community, overall for the other participants, the living experience is important.

4.3. ARRIVAL IN THE COMMUNITY.

The participants' arrival in the remote Aboriginal communities emerged as the first significant topic. All participants except for Timothy described their arrival. In discussing their arrival, participants shared their initial feelings. Pauline summed these up in her opening comment of her first interview, *"it was a complete culture shock going to the community"* (Pauline 1:1:1). The participants explained that a variety of things contributed to this *"shock"* (Pauline 1:1:1:). These were the weather, the remoteness and the physical appearance of the communities.

None of the participants gave a detailed description of the physical appearance of the communities. Instead, the participants focused on their feelings when arriving in the remote Aboriginal communities. However, to understand their experience it is important to understand what they saw. Kay Martinez (1994) shared her arrival in a remote Aboriginal community for the first time, this is only one example of a remote Aboriginal community. She described the scene,

I arrived by light plane and was equally impressed by the geographical beauty of the location. However, as we drove from the airport to the school and as I subsequently walked around the streets of the community, it was the ugliness, squalor and sense of hopelessness of the community that overshadowed its physical beauty. Houses had been built to white Australian specifications- mainly fibro and wood detached houses on separate blocks of land. Although not very old, most of these dwellings were extremely run down, often-large holes in external walls. Frequently, in vacant spaces between houses, were campfire sites obviously in regular

use. Many car wrecks lay abandoned in yards and the cars in use at Cook invariably old, rusted and in poor condition. Litter was sprinkled liberally all around the streets, especially empty alcohol containers (Martinez, 1994, p.163).

Although Martinez did not question her decision to visit an Aboriginal community, upon their arrival, Catherine and Matthew questioned their decision to go to a remote Aboriginal community to live and work. Catherine, affected by the entire experience of arriving in a remote Aboriginal community for the first time, was *"actually physically sick."* (Catherine 1:1:5). She described her initial impression, *"Flying over this tropical land that had nobody inhabiting it...flying over the community for the first time and realising that we weren't going to keep going - this was it... it looked like a couple of houses."* (Catherine 1:1:8). The remoteness of the community and climate distressed Catherine, *" the further and further away from the main city we flew...the heat and just everything got to me"* (Catherine 1:1:12). Upon her arrival, she felt overwhelmed, *"It was just the shock of everything* [that] *affected me."* (Catherine 1:1:22). At this time Catherine questioned her decision to go to a remote Aboriginal community. She thought, *"What am I doing? How am I going to get through this?"* (Catherine 1:1:18).

Matthew too was surprised at the geographical remoteness of the desert community he went to. He revealed its remoteness through his description of his first journey out to the Aboriginal community.

"We hopped onto our little chartered aeroplanes, our little eight seaters and ten seaters.... We flew out to the community, our first long three-hour flight on a little aeroplane, with its turbulence and chronic airsickness.... I remember just flying across the vast expanses of the outback and it was just all red, red and it didn't change... You look forever... and it didn't change.... It was as hot as hell." (Matthew 1:1:28).

Upon his arrival in the remote Aboriginal community Matthew momentarily came to question his decision to move to a remote Aboriginal community. *"Oh my God! What am I doing here?"* (Matthew 1:1:32). He was stunned at the entire experience, *"everything was just coming* [at] *a thousand miles and hour".* Matthew was so shocked when he got to his accommodation, he *"sat down and thought"* (Matthew 1:1:32). The accommodation was an ATCO mining caravan that was run down and sparsely furnished. He recalled, *"I can remember sitting down for ten minutes and thinking. 'Well here I am, four thousand kilometers from home, I can't turn around and go back now. I'd like to.' Then I remember about ten minutes later thinking, 'Right here I am I may as well make something of this', and from that point on I never looked back"* (Matthew 1:2:2).

Frances described her arrival in the community, *"The first thing I remember was the plane coming in. We flew in and it landed and there was nothing there, there was no building to the airport, there*

was just a blank" (Frances 1:1:30). Like Catherine she thought she had landed in the middle of nowhere. Frances was shocked by various experiences. This was characteristic of her first six months. *"It was a shock, yes some of the things that happened were a shock initially, yeah so the first six months were quite hard"* (Frances 1:5:41).

Marcus also experienced *"shock"* (Marcus 1:1:12) upon his arrival in a remote Aboriginal community. He anticipated he would be living in a desert community, *"We expected to be moving into an old run down house and a school out in the desert"* (Marcus 1:1:8). Unlike the other participants his *"shock"* was due to being pleased about his arrival in a tropical setting. His description of his flight to the community revealed the landscape, *"we flew over the meandering creeks and rivers and it was very green"* (Marcus 1:1:10), he had moved to a tropical setting. The physical appearance of the community was also a source of *"shock"* for Marcus, specifically the poor housing of Aboriginal compared to the good housing of the non-Aboriginal community members (cf. Chapter 5 'The Aboriginal Community & The Aboriginal Culture').

Timothy was the only participant who did not describe his arrival in a remote Aboriginal community. Timothy opened his first interview by

discussing his first day in an Aboriginal community school. Perhaps the reason for this difference is that he had lived and worked in remote Aboriginal communities over a period of six or more years. Apart from Catherine who had five or six years experience, the other participants lived and worked in remote Aboriginal communities for just two or three years.

4.4. THE WEATHER.

Weather was a topic discussed by all participants. Participants discussed the type of weather and spoke of the effect weather had on the lives of community members. Although the participants lived in distinctly different environments, a tropical, or a desert setting, weather emerged as an important topic of discussion. Literature available on weather and the effect weather has on the lives of non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities is not available. This is surprising since weather was an important issue for all of my participants.

Matthew moved to a desert setting and experienced extreme weather conditions, from 40 degrees days to zero degree nights. Matthew gave the most vivid description of the weather upon his arrival at his accommodation in the remote Aboriginal community. *"The rain hadn't*

started, it was about forty degrees and ninety eight per cent humidity.... I unlocked the door and it was like an oven inside" (Matthew 1:2:1). When moving to an out station, the extremes of weather were highlighted for Matthew through the lack of services. Matthew had no water, electricity, or telephone. He stated, *"I remember thinking this is what I've come back to, it's thirty eight degrees at the end of January... It was frightfully hot with humidity"* (Matthew 1:2:25).

Frances described the discomfort experienced because of hot weather, specifically during the *"build up season. It would be so hot and so hard at times. You would be dripping in perspiration, the children would be dripping in perspiration and it was just so uncomfortable"* (Frances 2:4:18). Frances recommended air conditioning in every classroom. Timothy too, described the weather conditions he experienced at school. *"It would be a stinking hot day and you would lose all your enthusiasm, the children would turn up and you would feel so drained. The fan would be clicking above your head and it would hardly be giving you any kind of breeze. You would feel so sluggish and unmotivated"* (Timothy 1:6:2). Marcus shared the same view. The weather conditions were also recognised as a contributing factor to children's attendance (cf. 6.2.1 'Reasons for poor attendance').

Catherine described the influence the weather had on how she operated in the classroom. *"I think a lot of things you do in the tropics is to keep the students cool because it is just simply so hot"* (Catherine 2:10:20). She discussed how *"you set your day up to be able to cope with the weather"* (Catherine 2:10:20). Timothy reiterated this view through his criticism of the present structure of the school day, *"these white people didn't structure their school day around ...* [the weather], *we have school during the hottest part of the day"* (Timothy 2:5:21). Timothy recommended rescheduling school in response to the extreme weather conditions.

Apart from discussion about the negative affect the weather had on the school lives of people in remote Aboriginal communities, Frances talked about social activities resulting from the weather conditions. " *The wet season...was good because people down the end of the street had a truck. You could go out in the truck and...go swimming. You could see the Aboriginal kids out there enjoying themselves too. The social life of the wet season is basically swimming and fishing"* (Frances 1:6:17).

4.5. THE ACCOMODATION.

Apart from discussing the extreme weather conditions, participants discussed accommodation. Contrary to the discussion on weather, participants had different experiences of their accommodation, both positive and negative. Literature available on non-Aboriginal teacher's accommodation and the effect of particular accommodation is limited. Crowther (1988) briefly discusses housing for non-Aboriginal teachers and the quality of furnishings, and also access to furniture and housewares. Emby (1993) also discusses the importance of good standard housing and suggests that the working performance of non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities would improve if they were, among other things, provided with quality housing to improve their standard of living. Participants made no suggestion of an association between the standard of housing and work performance but discussed their housing to give a picture of their living circumstances.

Matthew described his first accommodation as ugly. *"I was put into... a typical mining ATCO....It was like an oven inside and quite ugly"* (Matthew 1:1:45). Once moving to an Aboriginal outstation Matthew was given weekend accommodation in the Aboriginal community. *"I had this little unit that was an in built verandah. It had a sink and*

fridge at one end and a TV and a bed at the other, but anyway it was better than what we had put up with in the outstation community" (Matthew 1:3:21). Matthew also described the accommodation of the religious people in the community, *"their accommodation was very meager, and they had to live in communal situations"* (Matthew 1:8:37). He reconsidered his situation and decided his accommodation was *"the absolute lap of luxury"*(Matthew 1:8:37).

After expecting to be living in a desert setting and arriving at a tropical setting, Marcus was surprised. In contrast to Matthew, when Marcus saw his accommodation Marcus was shocked *"It looked like a brand new home on stilts. And it was just beautiful, it had an air conditioner in each room and a fan. It was not what we expected"*(Marcus 1:1:16). The *"shock"* was due to the high standard of living for non-Aboriginal teachers.

4.6. SERVICES.

Another topic that emerged as important was the services available to the participants. This too, had a significant impact on the lives of the participants. Access to telephone, water, power, and food all were topics of discussion. Participants used the term 'services' when they

discussed utilities available to them. In contrast, literature available used the term 'services' when discussing access to health services and professional support (Crowther, 1988; Crowther, Cronk & King, 1989). Crowther, Cronk and King (1989) discussed services in regard to community services available, i.e. personal and professional support.

For example, Matthew discussed services available to non-Aboriginal teachers at length. After living in a remote Aboriginal community, Matthew moved to an Aboriginal outstation. He described the out station as extremely isolated geographically and his description of his access to services supported this claim. He recalled *"Three weeks after we got there the generator blew up because no-one was maintaining it... and the bore seized up and so there was no water in the community"* (Matthew 1:2:25). His problems did not stop here, he continued *"Then the satellite telephone didn't work because the kids wrecked it.... No power, no water, and no telephone. My only contact with the outside world... was through the Flying Doctor Service two way radio based in the car"* (Matthew 1:2:25). Matthew was the only participant to live in an out station and the sacrifice he made appeared to have had significant impact on his perception of the most significant aspects of his living and working in a remote setting. While all the participants engaged in discussion about their living

experience Matthew focused mainly on this aspect of his life in a remote community.

Catherine and Marcus both discussed the importance of telephone contact with family and friends outside the community. Marcus told of his circumstances regarding a telephone, *"it took us twelve months to get a phone"* (Marcus 1:9:30). This did concern him. Marcus talked about the significance of maintaining relationships outside the community in order to stay healthy (cf. 4.9 Support networks beyond the community).

Apart from access to water, power, and telephone, Matthew discussed his *"access to a store"* (Matthew 1:3:14). While living in an outstation, he did not have access to shopping facilities. These were only available in the Aboriginal community. In contrast, Catherine did have access to a store but found that *"the store...was pretty shocking. It didn't sell milk or bread or that much fresh fruit or vegetables"* (Catherine 1:8:28). Consequently Catherine ordered her food *"in the city"* and it would be *"flown out"* (Catherine 1:8:28) by plane once a fortnight. Marcus talked about his access to food. He stated *"The barge comes once a month and brings all your food"* (Marcus 1:9:2). Marcus pointed out the distraction this caused in the functioning of the school when the barge's arrival coincided with a

school day, *"The teachers don't turn up to school, they all go down to get their food.... And that takes hours"* (Marcus 1:9:2). This helps illustrate the direct effect the living circumstances have on the working lives of non-Aboriginal teachers.

4.7. ISOLATION.

When discussing living in a remote Aboriginal community Catherine and Matthew talked about isolation. Crowther, Cronk and King (1989) suggested four aspects of isolation. These were

(a) geographical isolation; *"perceived by teachers in terms of distance from"* (p.3)

(b) professional isolation,

(c) social isolation and

(d) isolation from resources and services.

Although Catherine and Matthew were the only two participants to speak about isolation, they had different perceptions about isolation. Catherine spoke briefly about social and geographical isolation. She described being away from her family and the geographical isolation of living in a remote Aboriginal community. She said, *"I guess community life is being isolated from your family. Community life is being in a certain area in an isolated region"* (Catherine 1:8:28).

Being in a Catholic school Matthew talked about the social isolation that he experienced when living in a remote Aboriginal community. He stated *"I always felt isolated...as a lay teacher...I found that one of my biggest frustrations. I found that there was a big rift, a big divide between the lay teachers, the white non-Aboriginal teachers in the school and the white non-Aboriginal religious people in the school"* (Matthew 1:7:25).

Matthew also experienced isolation from resources and services as discussed earlier in 4.6 'Services'. Professional isolation emerged for others as an important topic of discussion (cf. 7.4 'Professional development').

4.8. RELATIONSHIPS.

Relationships between non-Aboriginal teachers emerged as an important topic discussed by the participants. Literature available on the significance of relationships between non-Aboriginal teachers in remote settings is limited. Crowther, Cronk and King (1989) discussed relationships as they related to social isolation in remote community settings. *"There's no escaping the fact that once 3:30 comes you're on your own. It's up to you to get out and mix or you die from loneliness"* (p.7). In an earlier study Crowther (1988) discussed

relationships as they related to *"success"* (Crowther, 1988, p.3) in a community setting. He stated *"many teachers pointed out that personality and social factors (for example, sociability) are more highly relevant to success in a small community and remote school than is familiarity with curriculum documents"* (Crowther, 1988, p.3). In my study the participants did not draw these conclusions, although some of the participants in my study discussed difficulties they encountered when forging friendships and cited rifts between non-Aboriginal staff. However, Catherine found friendship and believed the non-Aboriginal community to be a source of support and understanding. Later in this study another aspect that is discussed is the significance of the relationship between the non-Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal people (cf. 5.12 Relationships). Considering the geographical isolation, Marcus discussed the importance of establishing and maintaining healthy relationships. He suggested, *"be nourished by very good friendships"* (Marcus 2:6:13). Although he made this suggestion he talked about the difficulties of establishing new friendships. He stated, *"When there is only forty... non-Aboriginal living in a community it's very difficult to find someone who you are going to click with and they are all there for different reasons. So, it is very difficult to find a friend who you are going to get along with"* (Marcus 2:6:13).

Frances also raised discussion regarding friendships. She talked about how she felt about building new friendships. *"Getting to know everyone it's really difficult in the sense of you get to like the Aboriginal people more than the white people... The first six months were really, really hard for me because there was only a couple of people that I really liked..."* (Frances 1:5:30). Marcus shared the view that it was difficult to make friends with other non-Aboriginal teachers in the community. Frances continued,

"Some [people] *made attempts* [to be friends] *but most were leaving. Something like six to eleven people left all in one whack... So the next year arrived and I was old by then. I had six months more experience then anybody else. So I sat back and didn't try to forge any friendships with anyone. I was just going to wait and see because in lots of ways it's a very hard situation to be in, in a sense of 'I'll be your friend because you're here. Not because I want to be your friend or because we have got something in common'"* (Frances 1:5:30).

Pauline also pointed out the problems she encountered trying to build personal relationship with other non-Aboriginal teachers,

"It was very hard to mix in with the white culture, it was very, very challenging.... Because there was only a few of us, they began to know your ins and outs, and there wasn't anything new when you met them.... If someone annoyed you that was your first impression, you were... stuck with these characters that you would never ever mix with" [otherwise] (Pauline 1:2:1).

While Marcus, Pauline, Matthew and Frances talked about the difficulties they encountered in forging new friendships Catherine shared a different view. In contrast, Catherine believed the non-Aboriginal community members were a great source of support.

"There was a great support network in the place where we worked, in that ... you always had somebody there who understood what you were experiencing" (Catherine 1:2:34). She was the only participant to express this view.

4.9. SUPPORT NETWORKS BEYOND THE COMMUNITY.

Crowther, Cronk and King (1989) and Emby (1993) discussed the importance of maintaining relationships with family and friends outside the community. Aside from maintaining personal health and healthy relationships in the remote Aboriginal community Marcus talked about support networks beyond the community.

"I think it is so important for a non-Aboriginal in an Aboriginal community...that they have connections and an outlet as support networks, such as a phone. It took us twelve months to get a phone. For us to not have it was a depressing thing, because you need to have connections with your own family because you are living in a culture that is not your own" (Marcus 1:9:30).

Apart from talking about maintaining relationships Marcus also suggested personal interests as a source of renewal. Marcus said, *"you have to find something that inspires you and gives you life and energy to keep on going and to renourish you"* (Marcus 2:6:13). He continued *"So whatever it is, whether it is reading or study as long as it's not draining and you know you have to get out of the community and renourish yourself as well"* (Marcus 2:6:13).

Matthew tried to study to fill the void of isolation but he was unsuccessful; *"I tried to study... a number of times and I pulled out, I still don't know why"* (Matthew 1:7:32). This was not a source of renourishment for him.

4.10. LIVING IN A FISHBOWL.

The term 'living in a fishbowl' was a term Crowther, Cronk and King (1989) used when they described problems arising from living in a remote community. The term implied that living in a community is isolating for some people. Catherine also used this term to describe living in a remote Aboriginal community.

"It was also very much like living in a fishbowl.... You couldn't really get out. Nobody there had a car, we didn't have a telephone. If you wanted to get out, sometimes you had to physically walk yourself out of the town to feel like you were leaving the place.... Friendships become very intense because it's that fishbowl environment. You work together, you live together, you eat together, you see each other every day" (Catherine 1:2:36).

Pauline did not use the term fishbowl but shared the sentiment;

*"So it was just an amazing experience very, very remote... I know that we got this booklet to go to the community, and the very back page had in bold print, '**There is no escape**'....I thought what is this meant to mean? ...I did go there to teach but I came back with a lot more"* (Pauline 1:2:25).

Pauline found herself not only in contact with Aboriginal culture, which was new and challenging, but she was also in an environment

that was distinctive and removed from any environment she had experienced.

4.11 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.

This chapter has highlighted many of the issues faced by non-Aboriginal teachers living in remote Aboriginal communities. It is apparent that living in a remote Aboriginal community was a significant aspect of the participants' discussion of living and working in remote Aboriginal communities.

The participants' arrival in remote Aboriginal communities for the first time emerged as the first significant topic of discussion. It is significant that the participants were so unprepared on a personal level. The issue of being unprepared professionally was also a problem for the non-Aboriginal teachers (cf. 7.4 'Professional development'). The initial sense of shock experienced by participants upon their arrival in the remote communities speaks volumes about their naivete about the situation of living and working in a remote Aboriginal community.

The weather had great influence on the lives of the non-Aboriginal community members. The participants discussed the type of weather and the influence of the weather. Participants recommended air-

conditioning in the classrooms and changing the school timetable to accommodate exhausting temperatures. The participants also experienced living in an environment with limited access to services and resources. This all contributed to their life experience.

Not only was the physical climate something new and challenging for non-Aboriginal teachers but the development of new relationships and maintaining existing relationships was a feature of their life. The participants found themselves in a situation that required they establish relationships with those around them, both as work colleagues, and social contacts while not at work. In most jobs moving into a new working environment does not require individuals establishing entirely new social relationships.

It is indisputable that the living situation of non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities is distinctive. While the participants engaged in discussion about the living situation, further aspects are the Aboriginal community and Aboriginal culture and these are discussed in Chapter 5 ' The Aboriginal Community and the Aboriginal culture'.

Chapter 5.

The Aboriginal Community & The Aboriginal culture.

5.1 INTRODUCTION TO THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY.

As has been said, this thesis is concerned with exploring the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in remote Aboriginal communities. The previous chapter has shown that for non-Aboriginal teachers *living* in a remote Aboriginal community was very significant. Another aspect of their living experience was their perceptions of the living conditions and lifestyle of Aboriginal families in the communities.

During the interviews participants discussed their perceptions of Aboriginal housing, Aboriginal dogs (a surprisingly significant feature), community issues and substance abuse in remote Aboriginal communities. The biggest of these was substance abuse and the effect of substance abuse. These issues impacted on the living and working lives of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members.

5.2. ABORIGINAL HOUSING.

Educational research available on Aboriginal housing is limited. Partington (1997) made reference to Aboriginal housing in his research of non-Aboriginal student teachers on teaching rounds in Aboriginal communities and stated:

"The contrast between the lifestyle of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people was quite marked...Aboriginal people lived in a variety of accommodation ranging from makeshift dwellings to housing of a similar nature to non-Aborigines. In general, most Aboriginal housing was much more basic than the non-Aboriginal accommodation" (Partington, 1997, p.31).

Like Partington (1997) Marcus noted a marked difference between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal housing. When describing his arrival in a remote Aboriginal community for the first time Marcus commented *"And when we arrived the houses were a big shock, the houses the Aboriginal people lived in"* (Marcus 1:1:7). Pauline shared the same view, *"I remember arriving in the community and seeing the houses and the blackness of the people and thought, 'Oh my God, where am I?"* (Pauline 1:1:4). Frances reported houses in disrepair and problems with overcrowding. Frances shared her experience of Aboriginal housing, *"I just couldn't believe that these people could live like this...How many in your house, seventeen? Yes there might be seventeen in the house and ...seventeen dogs"* (Frances 1:10:13) Frances suggested that due to the problem of overcrowding *"houses would fall into ill repair... ... ... And when you've got so many people*

in the house, of course, it's wear and tear on the house. And there didn't seem to be enough houses for them" (Frances 1:10:25).

5.3. DOGS IN THE COMMUNITY.

An aspect of difference between the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal community members was their different attitudes towards dogs in the communities. Dawson (1974) commented on the dogs in a remote Aboriginal community in her personal reflection 'The experiences of a first-year teacher in an Aboriginal school'. Dawson wrote *"The large number of dogs owned by the people frightened me; many underfed mongrels that look fearsome"* (Dawson, 1974, p.51). Crowther (1988) reported the significance of dogs in the life of an Aboriginal family and the effect this had on non-Aboriginal teachers:

"In some communities the sacredness of the dog was difficult for Whites to accept. When dogs abound in the school-yard, clutter door-ways to classrooms, and soil verandahs and grounds, it requires an especially tolerant White teacher to work with continual disturbance, for harsh treatment of a dog can result in severe retaliation" (Crowther, 1988, p.9).

Frances discussed her experience of dogs in an Aboriginal community. Frances recalled, *"The first day was marked by the fact that I couldn't bear the dogs coming in the classroom... ... they were the most disease-carrying, looking mongrels you had ever seen on earth"* (Frances 1:2:36). The Aboriginal people valued the dogs like a

member of the family and the dogs followed the family members everywhere. At the end of the first day some of the dogs *"had still hung around, they hadn't clasped onto their family and gone roving back to the camps"*. Frances was alarmed because *"they came into the room, I just about died... ... I got up and I growled and I grabbed something and I chased them out of the room"*. An Aboriginal elder was walking past and misunderstood *"and came to the door, very threatening and yelled and screamed and... ... did a really good abuse job on me"*. She was devastated and just *"burst into tears"*. As it turned out he thought she *"was growling at the kids"*. Although the Aboriginal man was protecting the children and not the dogs this story highlights the distress caused to a non-Aboriginal by community dogs in the school.

5.4. ALCOHOL.

Alcohol was a topic discussed by all participants. In this study the participants spoke about alcohol as an important issue but their experience of alcohol and how they discussed the issue differed. Literature available discusses alcohol as it influenced education, particularly the influence it had on attendance of Aboriginal teachers and students at school (cf. 6.2 'Attendance of Children at school'). Crowther (1988) discussed the negative influence of alcohol on remote community residents. Crowther reported *"white teachers and*

their families co-existed with problems of overuse of alcohol and other substances" (Crowther, 1988, p.7). Primarily, problems of violence in the community resulting from substance abuse were discussed.

Frances lived in a remote Aboriginal community that had a community club. The club served restricted amounts of alcohol to the patrons. She discussed the community club in a positive light. She viewed the community club as more a *"neutral place"* to meet Aboriginal community members. *"The club helped you understand where people lived,... understand they had a sense of life and a sense of fun. ... It did give me an opportunity to meet people from the community. It was a good thing"* (Frances 2:1:36). However, she did state the community club *"did revolve around alcohol".* When she first arrived in the community the club was not open and there were *"alcohol restrictions on the town",* the consequence was *"the men were either out of town or in communities that had no drinking restrictions".* At this time she found it difficult to meet people in the community and believed this influenced her interaction and relationship with Aboriginal community members. It wasn't until later in her stay that the community club was operating.

Timothy talked about his experience of alcohol and the regulations related to alcohol in the remote Aboriginal communities, in which he lived and worked.

"The first community was a dry community, if you wanted to drink alcohol you had to leave the community to drink. In my second community they regulated drinking. You could only drink a certain number of cans a night at the canteen. ... At my last community it was just open slather. They just had pub hours... it was only beer there" (Timothy 1:7:4).

Although the communities had a variety of regulations for the consumption of alcohol Timothy stated, *"Even though they all had different drinking habits they all had lots of ingrained problems"* (Timothy 1:7:10). The negative impact of alcohol as it relates to school will be discussed (cf. Chapter 6 'Aboriginal children at school').

Matthew summarised some of the problems he observed as a result of alcohol abuse in the community. He stated *"All people are affected by alcohol (even if they don't drink it), by the violence, by the murder, by the car rollovers, by the corruption and the horrific living conditions and tribal warfare"* (Matthew 2:10:36). Matthew believed that alcohol abuse prompted corruption and the violence, murder and clan wars escalated as alcohol consumption increased in the community. Marcus also believed that alcohol had a negative influence. He stated there needs to be *"an understanding of how the grog affected the families"* (Marcus 1:3:40). His main concern was the *"impact it has on the kids"* (Marcus 1:3:42).

Pauline believed that this was also a problem for the non-Aboriginal community members. Crowther (1988) discussed alcohol abuse among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal families. He stated *"teachers in remote rural communities usually did not escape some of the negative influences of substance abuse, specifically excessive substance abuse"* (Crowther, 1988, p.3). Crowther suggested the problem of substance abuse was not specific to Aboriginal families. The community where Pauline lived had alcohol restrictions and non-Aboriginal community members were required to hold an alcohol licence to have alcohol consumed in their homes. Pauline talked about non-Aboriginal drinking attitudes and behaviours. *"It was a dry community but the white fella was allowed to have alcohol... ... I mean there were slabs coming off the boat, slab after slab"* (Pauline 1:7:36). As a response to the inequity Pauline and her husband decided not to hold an alcohol licence and said that 'drinking' was not their scene.

5.5 COMMUNITY ISSUES.

Matthew discussed community issues at length. He talked about the various issues he had to cope with while living and working in a remote Aboriginal community, including break-ins, community violence and substance abuse. Literature dealing with these kinds of issues as they influence the teaching experience of non-Aboriginal

teachers is available. Martinez (1994) presented the story of a beginning teacher in a secondary school in Cook in South Australia, Australia. One aspect she discussed was the participant's experience of, and thoughts about, violence in the community. *"Brian believed that the students' violent outbursts in class were symptomatic of an acceptance of violence in the wider community"* (Martinez, 1994, p.172). As has been said, community violence was a topic Matthew discussed. He blamed the consumption of alcohol and petrol sniffing. Matthew gave an account of one dangerous situation he was faced with due to violence in the community:

The most dangerous situation I was ever confronted with was due to petrol sniffing. ... a lot of alcohol had come in and it was a combination of alcohol and petrol sniffing. There were twenty-five fellows between the ages of fifteen and twenty-five who were on a rampage through another rival tribal camp. And it got out of control and spilled over into the non-Aboriginal area.
I was living next to three units where medical staff was living, non-Aboriginal medical staff. They kept the medical vehicles in a compound next to here and the men wanted one of them... I got confronted with a knife,.... That was probably my most frightening experience (Matthew 1:9:13).

Break-ins were a community issue discussed by Matthew. He stated *"when I first arrived in the community your place would only be broken into while you were away..."* (Matthew 1:9:1). When Matthew spoke about break-ins he did not seem to hold any blame towards the perpetrators of the crime. He said *"the Aboriginal people were only breaking into your place because they knew you had food, clothes and all the things they need, the basic necessities they didn't have"* (Matthew 1:9:1). Petrol sniffing was another community issue he

discussed. He explained *"another problem in the community was petrol sniffing... Petrol sniffing was a big problem and for whatever reasons the young men petrol sniff, boredom, nothing to do, bitterness, all this sort of stuff* (Matthew 1:9:1).

Matthew found himself in a situation where community problems were very significant. His working in a desert setting appeared to have provided him with a more difficult situation than those in other settings. He spoke about the community issues with a sense of acceptance. Much of his discussion about his experience in the remote Aboriginal community focused on non-school issues. Matthew, overwhelmed by larger community issues, spoke about his teaching experience as a secondary aspect to his living and working experience in the remote Aboriginal community.

5.6. INTRODUCTION TO THE ABORIGINAL CULTURE.

While discussion about the living conditions and lifestyle of Aboriginal people emerged as important, participants also engaged in discussing their experiences and perceptions of Aboriginal culture. As seen in 1.4 'Definitions of Key Terms', Aboriginal culture refers to aspects of Aboriginal society passed on from one generation to the next. Research available on Aboriginal culture is extensive. Some of

the research available discusses Aboriginal culture in an educational context. Harris (1984) explored aspects of Aboriginal culture with a focus on Aboriginal learning styles. In my research the participants discussed Aboriginal culture in light of educational needs and also discussed a personal perception of the features of Aboriginal culture that influenced their living and working lives in a remote Aboriginal community. This second aspect will be discussed first. In Chapter 6 Aboriginal culture will be discussed in regard to school (cf. 'Aboriginal children at school').

5.7. ABORIGINAL CLANS, FAMILY AND LAND.

The participants discussed the significance of family in the lives of Aboriginal people. The family from which an individual comes determines the clan, the totem, the language group, and the land to which they *"belong"* (Street. 1987, Ward, 1985). These are closely connected. The family, therefore, is the most important aspect of an Aboriginal person's life.

Marcus talked about the importance of the non-Aboriginal teachers being aware of the clan, family, and land of each Aboriginal student in their class. He explained *"You have to know their family history because it affects any student and how much the family is respected*

in the community [and] *the kinship structures in the class "* (Marcus 2:9:8). He explained if you were willing to learn from them and learn about their family, clans and culture, they in turn would be *"willing to learn from you"* (Marcus 2:9:8) and the students would *"respect you"* (Marcus 2:9:8).

Catherine summarised the importance of family, land, and language. *"Talk to them* [the Aboriginal students] *about people who...* [are] *significant in their lives and places that are significant. The land is very significant to the people. I found this in both the communities I was in. The language was very significant, very important to them. The family connection very, very important"*(Catherine 2:4:20). Catherine suggested that knowledge about a student's family and culture could *"help develop a relationship of trust and mutual respect between students and teachers"* (Catherine 2:4:16).

Frances also highlighted the importance of family *"the things that are important are their family"* (Frances 2:7:46). Her reason for this was very practical, she stated it was helpful *"knowing who is who."* In addition, Marcus also discussed the idea that non-Aboriginal teachers should have knowledge about the Aboriginal family structure and how it functions in a remote Aboriginal community. *"You needed to know how...the family structure was set up. How the dealings with*

each...member within each family structure [worked], *how their relationships existed and how there were different levels of power within those relationships"* (Marcus 1:3:15). Marcus also suggested that the non-Aboriginal teachers should understand *"the kinship structure in the class, who their* [the Aboriginal students] *relations are because that affects who they are able to discuss things with "* (Marcus 2:8:46) in the class.

5.8 ABORIGINAL LAW.

Aboriginal law also emerged as a topic discussed by the participants. In the general cultural comparisons list suggested by Hughes and Andrews (1988) listed in Keeffe (1992) Aboriginal law was discussed in a general sense stating that *"laws are morals and support the group"* (p.99). The participants stated that non-Aboriginal teachers living and working in communities needed to learn and respect the Aboriginal law in the communities. The composition of the Aboriginal law and the influence Aboriginal law had on day-to-day activities of the community members were topics discussed by the participants.

Catherine talked about the Aboriginal laws that influenced the running of the school. Primarily, these laws were regarding relationships between Aboriginal people. *"There were certain people that people*

can't talk to...because it is against Aboriginal law or culture" (Catherine 2:4:43). The non-Aboriginal school staff needed to be aware of the laws and be sensitive to these laws when working in the community schools. For example, children were not allowed to talk to certain people *"when* [they reached] *adolescence"* (Catherine 2:4:43).

Another law that had a direct effect on the community members was *"there were some people's names that they could mention and other people's names that they couldn't mention"* (Catherine 2:4:43). Timothy shared a practical example of this law in use. *"The first time I met my teacher aide, he had an Aboriginal name that couldn't be used because someone with his name had died in the community"* (Timothy 2:2:4). Catherine explained, *"it takes a long time to learn this, it doesn't happen over night. And the main way you get to know this is through the Aboriginal teachers"* (Catherine 2:4:43).

5.9. ABORIGINAL CEREMONIES.

Another topic of significance discussed by participants was Aboriginal ceremony. Ward (1985) was detailed in her discussion of Aboriginal ceremonies, discussing the elements of traditional Aboriginal ceremonies and the roles of Aboriginal clans in the ceremonies. Participants talked about traditional ceremonies, modern ceremonies,

and the influence these had on the lives of the community members. These ceremonies affected day-to-day activities in both the school and the community. Catherine explained, *"Often the children wouldn't be at school because they were involved in a ceremony. The school needed to be sensitive of this and needed to get involved where possible"* (Catherine 2:5:12). Catherine believed, *"these things were crucial to the community"* (Catherine 2:5:12). Matthew shared this view.

Frances witnessed a traditional initiation ceremony, a circumcision ceremony. She was surprised that traditional ceremonies still existed. The ceremony venue was the community clinic. This was an example of a traditional ceremony utilising modern day facilities. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members went to the clinic to participate in the ceremony, witnessing traditional singing and dancing. She explained *"for a whole week basically, the staff Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal were taken up with going down to the clinic, and that was my first experience, 'this can happen?'"* (Frances 1:5:37). Upon his arrival in his first remote Aboriginal community, Timothy witnessed an initiation ceremony. *"For the first week the elders came into the school to select boys for the next boys' initiation ceremony"* (Timothy 1:1:16).

Frances shared her experience of the Aboriginal culture incorporated into *"a graduation ceremony of Aboriginal teachers"* (Frances 2:2:46). When reflecting upon her experiences she said, *"One of the best ceremonies I remember was the graduation ceremony... .At this ceremony there was Aboriginal dancing and singing and a special ceremony particularly celebrated for honouring them"* (Frances 2:2:46).

5.10 DEATH.

Aside from family, Aboriginal law and Aboriginal ceremonies, a death in the community had great influence on the functioning of the community school. Literature available has discussed death as it influences Aboriginal students and teachers' attendance at school, *"Death...emptied some schools and resulted in brief admissions of children to others as families travelled among the communities"* (Partington, 1997, p.35). Catherine explained, *"Things that happened in the community affected the school. For example, if there was a death"* (Catherine 2:5:12). Frances highlighted the effect that a death could have on the community. *"If there was a funeral, for instance, not only would the school stop but the whole community would stop out of respect for the person that had died"* (Frances 2:3:5). When moving to an outstation Matthew discovered that an elder had died. He realised the consequence of this, *"a tribal elder had died and that*

sort of signalled that people would not be coming back for a long time" (Matthew 1:2:26).

Marcus explained the influence a death can have on a classroom, *"you can't enter a classroom because a death has been connected with that classroom"* (Marcus 1:8:30). Frances explained that a death sometimes means a house must be vacated for a period of time. *"If Grandpa dies... everyone has to leave the house, and they leave it for about a year.... When they are ready to return they smoke it and the spirit is removed"* (Frances 1:11:4). The family is able to return to the house.

5.11. TIME.

Another topic that emerged as significant was the Aboriginal sense of time. In the general cultural comparisons list in Keeffe (1992) Aboriginal time was referred to as *"circular without boundaries"* (p.99). Pauline also suggested there was a different sense of time in her statement, *"There was a different understanding and concept of time"* (Catherine 2:5:22). Timothy said that the Aboriginal sense of time was something that he admired. He stated, *"I would see them walking up the hill to school, sometimes forty five minutes late for the stinking hot afternoon session, they would come slowly into class"*

(Timothy 2:6:44). Marcus also experienced the Aboriginal sense of time. He explained, *"when you were organising something in the community to start at what ever time...and no-one was turning up and they said that they would be here and we can't start without that person. Well you don't start without that person and you wait until everyone's ready and wait until they turn up"* (Marcus 2:2:7). Marcus saw that for the Aboriginal people, people are more important than obeying the clock.

5.12. RELATIONSHIPS.

Discussion regarding relationships between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members emerged as a significant topic. Literature available on Aboriginal culture highlighted the importance of relationships (Collins, 1993; Harris, 1984; Keeffe, 1992). In the article 'Meeting the needs of Aboriginal Students' Collins (1993) discussed the idea that teachers of Aboriginal students need an *"understanding* [of] *individuals and their cultural diversity"* (Collins, p.3). One specific aspect Collins discussed was that *"Aboriginal children respond best to human, personal relationships with teachers. To the Aboriginal child, it is often more important who does the teaching than what is actually taught. The transmission of knowledge is viewed as part of a human relationship and without teacher/pupil rapport, learning will not take place"* (Queensland Department of

Education in Collins, 1993, p.3). All participants spoke about relationships and the significance of the relationships. Participants talked about the relationships they formed in the community and in the school.

Catherine talked about the importance of building a relationship with the students in the school. She stated *"probably how successful you are in being able to relate* [to them], [and] *teach them...is dependent so much on who you are as a person and how they perceive you. It was very much a relationship of trust and mutual respect that you establish with Aboriginal children"* (Catherine 1:4:7).

Timothy talked about his perception of the importance of relationship. *"You would establish rapport with the children, get to know each other. They were beautiful children... The children were very interested in having a nice relationship with you as an adult"* (Timothy 1:8:38). Marcus too discussed the importance of a relationship. *"It was a matter of developing a relationship and rapport with them"* (Marcus 1:1:34). Catherine stated *"the students are very interested in you getting to know their family and you telling them about your family"* (Catherine 2:4:16). Pauline talked about her family to the students. *"I think I told the kids about my family for about the first two or three weeks, everyday"* (Pauline 1:8:25).

Marcus added *"It was a matter of developing a relationship and rapport with them, and that was from day one"* (Marcus 1:1:34). Marcus explained what building rapport meant for him. Marcus said

"...having that great rapport with them, that they can call your name when ever they want. You can call them by their name and know their Aboriginal name... Because that is very important. And in knowing all that you are telling individuals that they are special and individual and by just knowing that information you know so much about them and how to react with them, because they are very personal things. They'll react with you and give you more answers and tell you more and share more and be willing to learn more from you because they will respect you" (Marcus 2:9:8).

5.13 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has highlighted the experiences and perceptions of non-Aboriginal teachers in regards to the Aboriginal lifestyle and Aboriginal culture. It is evident that the participants were faced with a lifestyle and culture, very different from their own, that directly influenced their living and working experience in the remote Aboriginal community.

Although Aboriginal housing did not directly influence the lives of the non-Aboriginal teachers, it was significant. Some of the non-Aboriginal teachers had a negative perception of Aboriginal housing, particularly Marcus. Marcus was overwhelmed by the Aboriginal standard of living. He noted a marked difference between the housing of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members. Given that

Marcus discussed the living conditions of Aboriginal people in this way, it clearly had some influence on him, however it isn't clear whether it affected his behaviour.

Alcohol and substance abuse had great influence on the lives of the non-Aboriginal teachers because the participants were living and working in the communities. The participants did discuss alcohol and identified the associated problems, particularly Matthew. For most of them substance abuse magnified social problems. This reiterates discussion that people living in remote Aboriginal communities are faced with substance abuse and the impact it has on the everyday lives of people in remote Aboriginal communities. Although the participants were there to teach, these issues emerged as influencing their day to day lives. The fact that the interviews focused on aspects of living, and on social problems, suggests that the participants may not have been as effective in their teaching role as they would have wanted. To some extent they were dominated by their living circumstance.

This chapter also discussed the non-Aboriginal participants' perceptions of Aboriginal culture. Literature available on Aboriginal culture makes broad general comparisons between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. The participants reinforced in their discussion

of Aboriginal culture that there are significant differences between the two cultures. One conclusion that may be drawn is that living and working in a community is an opportunity to learn about Aboriginal culture and cultural differences. Marcus recommended that non-Aboriginal teachers have an understanding of the features, and the significance, of Aboriginal culture. The participants' discussion of culture included the importance of the family, clan and land, Aboriginal law, Aboriginal ceremonies, and death. While in a community the participants were able to learn about the particular community and specific cultural traditions that are relevant to the living and working experience and apply their learning appropriately. Other aspects that were discussed included the Aboriginal perception of time and the importance of relationships. It is apparent that discussion regarding the Aboriginal community and Aboriginal culture was important to the participants. More particularly discussion regarding the lives of Aboriginal people emerged as a significant aspect of their experience in remote communities and dominated their interviews. The next chapter explores the participants' experiences and perceptions of Aboriginal children at school.

Chapter 6.

Aboriginal Children at School.

6.1 INTRODUCTION.

Having looked at the participants as they experienced the wider community and culture, this chapter presents the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers *working* in remote Aboriginal community schools. This chapter discusses community and cultural issues as they influenced the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in the school setting. When talking about their *working* experience the participants discuss larger issues of attendance and health as significant, as well as the impact of cultural issues in the classroom. Discussion regarding Aboriginal learning styles also emerged with a focus on the implications of these on non-Aboriginal teaching styles.

6.2. ATTENDANCE OF CHILDREN AT SCHOOL.

The attendance of children at school emerged as a significant topic that all the participants discussed. The main focus of this discussion was the poor attendance of Aboriginal children. The reasons for poor attendance, the influence of poor attendance (on both the teachers and children), as well as the way the teachers, the parents, the

schools and the communities addressed the issue of poor attendance, were all topics of discussion.

Literature on attendance of Aboriginal children at school is available. Writers discuss poor attendance as an outcome of personal and social circumstances. Crowther (1988) reported *"poor diet and consequential health problems among children cause problems for teachers through pupil absenteeism"* (Crowther, 1988, p.9). Partington (1997) also discussed attendance and stated *"I am able to support the view that resistance certainly has been a significant cause of non-attendance but... a major cause was the influence of cultural events. Death, law business and important meetings on the future of the communities emptied some schools"* (Partington, 1997, p.35). Martinez (1994) discussed attendance and suggested it was *"a major problem, but...teachers had no choice but to accept it"* (Martinez, 1994, p.165). Keeffe (1992) also discussed absenteeism as a form of *resistance* towards non-Aboriginal teachers in schools. Partington (1997) concluded *"whatever the explanation, the variations in attendance had chaotic effect...on some days a student teacher would be confronted with two children, and the next day six...in one school there were no children present for several days because of a funeral"* (Partington, p.35). In my study the participants spoke about attendance and related issues at length. The discussion about attendance was a good example of how topics can be closely related.

Participants spoke about attendance related to health issues, cultural issues and larger community issues. Of all of the topics discussed by the participants this was one of the most comprehensively discussed, with participants giving many examples and reasons for attendance problems in the school.

6.2.1. Reasons for poor attendance.

Weather conditions in remote Aboriginal communities were noted by a number of the participants as a significant contributing factor to poor attendance. Frances commented: *"Unfortunately I think one of the reasons why attendance was so poor was because of the heat"* (Frances 2:4:14). This was a common view among the participants. Timothy commented: *"Factors affecting the children attending school and their ability to perform at school, one would be their lifestyle, again, one would be the heat"* (Timothy 2:5:20). Pauline also commented: *"the weather ... can affect attendance"* (Pauline 1:11:46). Living in a desert setting Matthew was the only participant that discussed both hot and cold weather and the influence this had on the attendance of the Aboriginal students:

When it got colder towards the middle of the year, when it often got down to zero degrees at night time and up to a nice twenty five to thirty degrees during the day. The bell would go and you'd be lucky to have two or three children at the school and there were seventy children at the school (Matthew 1:6:7).

Cultural issues were also discussed as significant in influencing the attendance and non-attendance of the children. Crowther (1988) reported *"Teachers in many communities in which there is a high proportion of Aboriginal people reported that it was common to have to deal in school with inter-racial and inter-group animosities"* (Crowther, p.7). Marcus suggested that alliance to individual clan was a major contributing factor to the attendance of children at school. Marcus explained:

"I always regret finding out, probably about twelve months later (I was teaching the post-primary boys) ...[there were] forty boys on the roll probably about fifteen turned up regularly. You would get the other boys now and then but not regularly... It wasn't until the end of that first twelve months that I realised that my teaching assistant was a relation to all those boys who were regularly coming. And he was in the same family grouping or clan as those boys...All the other boys that didn't come regularly were all the boys that didn't come from or belong to that same grouping. So you know if I had of known that I could have worked with getting the other boys there. My assistant told me they don't come because they never come, but they don't come because he is there, he is in the room" (Marcus 1:2:24).

The fact that the Teacher Assistant was from a particular clan meant that he shared origins in land, language and family with a certain number of students in the class. Therefore Marcus concluded that there was a connection between the teacher assistant and certain students that attended school. One topic of discussion that emerged from this issue was clan conflict in the classroom (cf. 6.4 'Cultural issues in the classroom').

Catherine talked about the influence of Aboriginal ceremonies on school attendance, *"Often the children wouldn't be at school because they were involved in a ceremony"* (Catherine 2:5:12). Frances too discussed the influence of an Aboriginal ceremony on the school community, *"There was a ceremony...it was the first initiation boys' ceremony.... For a whole week basically, the staff, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, were taken up with going down to the clinic"* (Frances 1:5:37). Upon his arrival in remote community for the first time Timothy was faced with an initiation ceremony. So Timothy experienced student absenteeism in his first week of school.

Timothy discussed high absenteeism among Aboriginal teachers and teacher aides. He stated "there was also a high absenteeism of Aboriginal teachers and teacher aides. Aboriginal teachers may be away because they are sick, or they may have family commitments or they may have just decided not to turn up for one day" (Timothy 2:1:31). Participants suggested that absenteeism among Aboriginal teachers and teacher aides influenced the effectiveness of educational policies in remote Aboriginal communities. This was particularly significant in the bilingual program. Fundamental to the implementation of a bilingual program is an Aboriginal speaker to instruct in the nominated Aboriginal language. Absenteeism meant that an Aboriginal speaker was often not present in the classroom (cf. 2.4 'Problems with Bilingual Education').

Substance abuse was also noted as a contributing factor to poor attendance. Timothy explained, *"In the last community there was a lot of drinking and a lot of suicides, high absenteeism at the school, hardly any kids at school while I was there"* (Timothy 1:7:10). Matthew discussed community problems as a contributing factor to poor attendance, *"The community was an excessively violent community. Alcohol, petrol, tribal related violent issues.... The children won't have come to school because of the violence that's happened during the night"* (Matthew 2:2:44).

6.2.2. The influence of poor attendance.

Participants talked about the influence poor attendance had on the lives of the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal students. Catherine and Timothy suggested attendance related to academic achievement. Catherine suggested good attenders were more likely to have better numeracy and literacy skills. Catherine stated, *"In the year 6/7 class there were the children that had been coming to school since they started, they had been consistent through their six or seven years of education. They could do some reading and maths"* (Catherine 2:2:41). However, in contrast she suggested *"there were the children that were poor attenders, they had been coming on and off throughout their school years and they*

couldn't even write their names when they came to school" (Catherine 2:2:41).

Timothy talked about attendance in regard to acquisition of the English language. He provided his own explanation for poor acquisition of English among some Aboriginal students. Timothy talked about learning French to illustrate his point. He stated, *"if I enrolled in a French course for five years and you asked me 'Did you learn French?' and I said 'No'...you* [would write] *the story 'Poor man signs up for French class for five years and can't speak French'* (Timothy 1:8:9). Timothy continued *"But if you asked me the question 'how many classes did you turn up to?' and I said 'six', you'd think no wonder you didn't learn to speak French"* (Timothy 1:8:9). Timothy explained that it was the same for his students, a lot of Aboriginal children were not attending school.

Timothy looked beyond the fact that attendance was poor and explored the influence this had on non-Aboriginal teachers' performances. Timothy explained that *"it gets very hard for teachers to be motivated in a classroom where there are few children, eventually you think, if I only had eight children in my class I would be doing wonders"* (Timothy 2:6:14). Timothy revealed *"I think there comes a point in time, a critical point in time, where a certain number*

of children [and the classroom dynamic] *falls away, a critical part of the dynamics of the classroom go, and things just don't have a zap any more* (Timothy 2:6:14). Timothy was conscious of the student to teacher ratio resulting from poor or non-attendance of Aboriginal students. He stated *"At times I felt really uncomfortable because I would be in the classroom... .A teacher sitting next to an Aboriginal teacher, sitting next to another teacher aide, sitting next to another teacher aide and you would then have a special needs teacher, there would be five teachers and only eight kids"* (Timothy 1:7:29). It is apparent that non-attendance of Aboriginal students at school concerned Timothy.

Catherine discussed attendance in relation to funding: *"In terms of school funding it's always good to get lots and lots of students at school because they get extra funding. That means they can get more teachers, they can do more training, develop their resources and build better facilities available to the students"* (Catherine 2:6:47).

6.2.3. Aboriginal parents' view of children's attendance.

Participants spoke about community resistance in relation to attendance of Aboriginal students at school. Partington (1997) reported a lack of support for non-Aboriginal teachers among

Aboriginal families, resulting in non-attendance of students at school. Pauline discussed the Aboriginal community attitude regarding attendance of Aboriginal children at school. She said, *"It wasn't a rule the Aboriginals believed in because they would have been sending their kids... it was... the white fellas saying one thing and believing one thing and Aboriginal* [people] *coming from a totally different outlook"* (Pauline 2:7:7). Catherine too discussed the views of Aboriginal parents regarding Aboriginal children's attendance at school. Catherine said, *"It has to be a drive from the parents and the caregivers whether the children come to school. Because nobody can force you to do something you don't want to do. It has to be something the community values"* (Catherine 2:6:2). Marcus also commented on the parents' view, "b*ecause I suppose Aboriginal kids have to want to come to school, because their parents don't really encourage them a lot. If they have slept in the parents don't wake them and say 'hey, off you go to school'. The kids have to want to go and they come of their free will"* (Marcus 2:10:31). Timothy talked about Aboriginal parents' view of the value of school education. He explained Aboriginal children did not attend school *"because the parents didn't value education because education basically in real terms had no value to them and they thought it would alter their lives very little* (Timothy 2:5:27). The participants reinforced the idea that there are significant differences between Aboriginal parent and non-Aboriginal teacher attitudes toward Aboriginal students' attendance at school.

But not all participants had this view. In contrast, Catherine discussed one community's response to children's poor attendance at school. She explained *"I have heard that the community has passed a bylaw that the magistrate can fine parents if the children don't attend school"* (Catherine 2:6:2). This contradicts the view that Aboriginal communities are not concerned with student attendance at school. Although the community has enforced attendance by creating a bylaw, Catherine reiterated the view of all the participants *"the decision as to whether the children attend has to come from the parents and the caregivers... It has to be something the community values"* (Catherine 2:6:2).

6.2.4 Responses to poor attendance.

Clearly, poor attendance of Aboriginal students and teachers was an issue for the participants in this study. Pauline explained the influence poor attendance had on planning and preparation. Partington (1997) reported problems associated with the lack of continuity in student attendance, *"continuity of lessons was disrupted and preparation of resources problematic because of fluctuations in attendance"* (Partington, 1997, p.35). Pauline addressed the attendance issue in her classroom by adapting to the circumstances she faced. She stated, *"teaching was not just talk and chalk or setting homework, it was actually looking at where the kids were at and going from there"*

(Pauline 1:1:31). Pauline explained it *"was important because the kids came and went and you could have six in your class one day and fifteen the next. So if a girl came once a month you could just turn the page, I actually had to start making booklets so that when they came... they would just turn the page and go on"* (Pauline 1:1:31). Marcus too had strategies that he used to address poor attendance, he commented *"teachers have to cater for spasmodic attenders by having students on individual programs"* (Marcus 2:10:31).

Timothy also discussed the strategies his school used in response to poor or non-attendance. Timothy explained "we *did a lot of finding out who were the children in the school, of the kids who do come to school regularly, who are lagging a bit. Get a list of those kids' names and we would find out what they were lagging in and prioritise them"* (Timothy 1:10:48). Due to the issue of poor attendance, the school made a conscious decision regarding good attendance. He explained, *"We would send the support teachers, or the teacher aides and focus on those children"* (Timothy 1:10:48). The school wanted to use their resources effectively. He continued, *"A lot of time was wasted on children who would come for a week and then they would go. So...you could be ineffective with your resources. So... we would try to focus on the students that did come regularly and needed help"* (Timothy 1:10:48).

Catherine and Matthew talked about the way their schools addressed the issue of poor attendance. Catherine explained "in the first community I was at, the principal would drive the school truck around the community beeping the horn picking students up to come to school" (Catherine 2:6:2). Attendance was also an issue in her second community. She stated "They also had a truck that would come around the community and pick up any students that wanted to come to school" (Catherine 2:6:2). And this community also addressed the problem in another way. Catherine explained "one of the ways we tried to address that was we had a homework centre that was open in the mornings (Catherine 2:6:2). Even though Matthew's school had a school bus run "we provided a bus run and we would go and pick up the kids and bring them to school" (Matthew 1:6:10), he questioned his prompt attendance at school, "Sometimes you would say what am I doing? Why do I bother turning up at half past seven every morning when I know the children are not going to arrive until half past eight? Even with the truck run we had" (Matthew 2:4:36).

Timothy talked about his experience of the lack of response by the Education Department to the issue of poor or non-attendance. He stated, "*what I really noticed about this is if you go to the education department and you said that there* (were) *no kids at the school they don't want to hear it*" (Timothy 1:7:19). He summarised his

experience of teaching in Aboriginal schools, he said *"my experience of teaching in Aboriginal schools is that there weren't any kids at school... ... ... And anyone who doesn't agree I don't understand, people shake there heads and say, 'Oh no not really.' ... ... There were few children at the three schools I was at, over all there were few kids at the schools* (Timothy 1:7:19). Literature available also stresses the non-attendance of Aboriginal students at school. Participants in this study discuss non-attendance of Aboriginal students at school as a difference between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultural values. However, Keeffe (1992) discussed the issue of non-attendance as a manifestation of resistance towards non-Aboriginal schooling.

It is apparent that the discussion regarding attendance focused mainly on the topic of nonattendance. However, Frances talked about good attenders and suggested that the good attenders *"will grow up and have power in the community. And most of them who will have the power will be women because they are the good attenders...the men are the ones growing up to be illiterate because they barely go to school"* (Frances 2:9:15). She commented on the school being a link to the *"outside world"* (Frances 2:9:20) because the Aboriginal students, particularly the girls attended secondary schools in the major centres. She stated *"they will have a much better understanding of the non-Aboriginal world through literacy and their*

experience of the non-Aboriginal world in major towns" (Frances 2:9:24).

Overall, attendance emerged as a very significant topic of discussion among the participants. Literature available discussed the same issues related to poor attendance, including health issues, cultural events, resistance and other community issues (Crowther, 1988, Martinez, 1994, Partington, 1997). In this thesis, the participants suggested reasons for poor attendance and also discussed how the issue of poor attendance was being addressed in the classroom, in the school and in the community. Given that attendance was such a significant issue for the participants, apart from responding to their immediate situation (e.g. devising individual programs), participants appeared powerless. Catherine, Pauline, Timothy and Marcus shared the view that the issue of attendance lies in the attitude of Aboriginal parents. They shared the view that Aboriginal parents need to value a *school education* in order to send their children to school. The issue of non-attendance is one aspect of resistance suggested by Keeffe (1992). It seemed that non-attendance was an issue for the participants although they did not describe it this way.

6.3. HEALTH ISSUES FOR ABORIGINAL CHILDREN.

Aboriginal children's health was a topic of discussion that all of the participants discussed except for Pauline. The main focus of health issues concerned nutrition, illnesses, personal hygiene, and hearing deficiencies. Despite the fact that my focus is on education in remote Aboriginal communities, Aboriginal health was a particular focus of discussion for the participants in this study. The participants spoke about Aboriginal health issues and the influence of these on Aboriginal students in remote Aboriginal community schools. Discussion regarding poor health among Aboriginal students is as significant as when Dawson (1974) wrote about Aboriginal education over twenty-five years ago. In her personal account of 'The experience of a first-year teacher in an Aboriginal school' Dawson reported the students are *"likely to be malnourished and have poor health. Many children suffer from chronic chest complaints, ear and eye infections and boils. There is significant hearing loss in a number of children"* (Dawson, 1974, p.52). Over ten years ago Crowther (1988) reported, *"Teachers in the early years of primary school commonly dealt with matters of personal health and hygiene for children"* (Crowther 1988, p.9). More recently Partington (1997) reported on the health problems of Aboriginal students in remote communities, particularly runny noses, sores, hearing problems, lethargy and generally poor health.

Some of the participants found that they needed to address health issues on a day to day basis. The type of health problems and the influence these had on the lives of the Aboriginal students were topics discussed by the participants. Catherine summarised: *"I found that the Aboriginal children were affected by... so many health issues, such as malnutrition, different bronchial infections, just plain tiredness. ... These little kids would see-saw between, ... starving some days, and I think it affected their concentration levels, sometimes I think they probably couldn't even hear me"* (Catherine 1:4:35).

6.3.1. Nutrition.

Nutrition was a topic discussed by Catherine, Frances, Matthew and Marcus. Matthew talked about the poor diets of the students: *"often they were very malnourished and had shocking diets"* (Matthew 1:6:14). Frances discussed how the school she worked in dealt with the issue of diet. She explained, *"the children are given their lunch... by the school. The lunch varied each day... A lot of these children come from homes where they had not had any breakfast and the way to keep them going at school is to give them something to eat"* (Frances 2:5:4).

6.3.2. Personal Health and Hygiene.

The topic of personal health and hygiene was a topic discussed by participants. In literature available Partington (1997) discussed Aboriginal personal health and hygiene. He reported that there was a demand for *"cleanliness and neatness, with children being showered and dressed in 'school clothes' prior to entering school"* (Partington, 1997, p.26). Partington questioned the purpose of this and stated *"is it to ensure good health, or does it make the children acceptable to the teachers' cultural preferences?"* (Partington, 1997,p.26).

Personal hygiene was a significant issue for Matthew. Although Partington (1997) questioned whether students taking showers was influenced by non-Aboriginal expectation of cleanliness Matthew was clearly concerned with his students' health problems. He discussed his concerns regarding Aboriginal students' health. He presented a typical start to his day. He recalled *"the first thing that the kids were to do each day was to have their showers"* (Matthew 2:2:3). He spoke about the Aboriginal students being covered with boils, he said *"they couldn't sit down, they couldn't lie properly, they were in great pain"* (Matthew 2:2:8). He reported that often the start of the day was used to address health issues and he stated, *"while you are doing that you are unable to attend to the teaching of children in the classroom,*

which was always a bit of a dilemma" (Matthew 2:2:14). Although he was employed to teach, he was faced with the predicament of whether to address significant health problems or not.

6.3.3. Hearing deficiencies.

Catherine and Timothy concerned themselves with hearing problems experienced by their Aboriginal students. Collins (1993) wrote about the health problems faced by Aboriginal students, specifically hearing problems. He stated *"ear malfunctions are perhaps the greatest complaint amongst Aboriginal people. In fact, it has been suggested (Hayhurst, 1991, p.13) that as much as 25-50% of all Aboriginal children in schools at some time suffer from hearing loss"* (Collins, 1993, p.10). Catherine discussed school facilities is relation to Aboriginal children's hearing problems: *"initially* [the classroom] *wasn't carpeted so there was a lot of noise, which was no good for children with hearing problems"* (Catherine 1:4:48). Timothy spoke about significant hearing problems among Aboriginal students. He talked about action taken by one of the schools to address the issue of hearing problems. He reported *"sound systems put in the room... There were four speakers in the classroom one in each corner and the teacher would wear a roaming microphone. This would increase the volume of the teacher's voice so the Aboriginal children could hear what was going on"* (Timothy 2:5:10).

6.3.4. The influence poor health has on the children.

Marcus questioned the appropriateness of education with the lack of basic needs being met. He stated *"A lot of Aboriginal student's basic needs are not being met so therefore education is not appropriate until their basic needs are being met. And that can be health issues, psychological issues, there are a number of intellectually impaired* [children]" (Marcus 2:14:18).

Although participants spoke only briefly about Aboriginal health issues, it seems it was a significant aspect of their teaching experience in remote Aboriginal community schools because of the impact it had on the lives of the Aboriginal students. Participants reported a variety of health issues including nutrition, personal hygiene, and hearing deficiencies among Aboriginal students. Literature available discussed Aboriginal health in relation to Aboriginal learning and the standard of non-Aboriginal teaching. Participants reinforce the idea that health among some Aboriginal students is poor and this does have a significant impact on daily routines in the school.

6.4. CULTURAL ISSUES IN THE CLASSROOM.

In chapter 5 'The Aboriginal community and the Aboriginal culture' the participants' perceptions of elements of Aboriginal culture were discussed. The participants also discussed various cultural issues as they related to the school. The Aboriginal students brought to school a worldview that influenced interaction in the classroom. The differences in worldview influenced the participants' and the Aboriginal students' experience of school. The participants' idea of discipline emerged as a different one to the students they were teaching.

Collins (1993) discussed cultural issues, language differences, and learning differences in the classroom. His research aimed to *"identify a number of cultural, social, environmental and economic factors which can affect an Aboriginal child's learning"* (Collins, 1993, p.15). Some of these were topics discussed by the participants.

6.4.1. Discipline and Shame.

An aspect of difference between the participants and the Aboriginal students was the understanding they had of the concept of *shame*. In his second interview Marcus helped to define the concept of *shame,*

he stated "n*on-Aboriginal teachers must be aware of...the concept of shame. Aboriginal students* [can be] *embarrassed to the point of being shamed and withdrawing and they hang their heads down low"* (Marcus 2:7:30). When Marcus first began teaching he wasn't aware of the concept of *shame.* He recalled when he started teaching he would verbally discipline students in front of the other students. He explained this type of discipline caused Aboriginal students to feel *shame.* He explained *"I might have raised my voice at a child and even said, "No, that not the way you do it." And immediately their heads went down, everyone else in the class just shut up and I could see this kid's self esteem just drip away with the words that I said"* (Marcus 2:7:39). Marcus addressed this aspect of his teaching and chose a more culturally appropriate form of discipline. Discipline was not the only source of *shame* but praising Aboriginal students could also be a source of *shame*. Marcus explained, *"It is also important not to single out with praise.... Even saying, 'Oh, look that was a fantastic goal, you really kicked that well'. That could have the same effect. They could hang their head down low, not talk to you or respond to you and not even turn up to school for a couple of weeks. It can get to that point, a simple praise or reprimand"* (Marcus 2:8:2).

Catherine also talked about the concept of shame, she stated *"It's very rude to discipline an Aboriginal child in a harsh way."* However, she explained that when a person is disciplining an Aboriginal student

"They believe that you're the shamed one, because you've stepped over the mark if you discipline them harshly. You need to be very sensitive about this..." (Catherine 2:9:24). Catherine also talked about the importance of not singling out students. She explained *"You would pose a question to a group rather than singling out one student. So that the group can come to some answer. When getting to know Aboriginal students I would always address the entire group or question the entire group, I would never single out one student"* (Catherine 2:3:44).

As has been said Marcus addressed the cultural difference by adapting his teaching style and suggesting how to avoid *shaming* students. *"Effective teaching strategies to avoid shaming but being able to praise them include quietly mentioning to the student, ...going up to them and whispering...or giving them an eye wink or what ever or a nod of the head so it doesn't bring attention from everyone else"* (Marcus 2:8:6). (cf. 6.6.2 Literacy in the community schools).

Marcus discussed the advantages and disadvantages of the teacher assistant disciplining students in the class. He stated that generally the Aboriginal teacher assistant was *"essential in terms of discipline. If there were ever a problem the Aboriginal assistants would just step in straight away and just discipline the child"* (Marcus 1:4:36).

However, Marcus discovered this was not always the case. Marcus explained sometimes *"it would be an insult to that child if a person from the same family were to discipline them.... So it was really touchy, a very sensitive issue on how they disciplined and whom they disciplined"* (Marcus 1:4:40). Marcus found that the Aboriginal teacher assistant did not discipline students from other family groups either. He said *"One of the boys and he was a really big problem for me.... My assistant would never help out he would always squirm his way out of the room if this kid was ever playing up because obviously there was a bit of history there and this person was not allowed to discipline that family, there was to be no communication* (Marcus 1:4:36). Marcus reinforced the idea that non-Aboriginal teachers need to be sensitive to the worldview that the Aboriginal students and teachers bring to the classroom environment.

6.4.2. Clan conflict in the classroom.

In the previous chapter 'The Aboriginal Community & The Aboriginal Culture', Marcus talked about the significance of language, land and family and the way family origins have significant impact on classroom dynamics. It is because of these differences in family origins that conflict occurs in the classroom. In 'Research in rural education: Problems in Teacher Personal and Professional adjustment to remote area teaching and living', Crowther (1988)

reported that *"it was common to have to deal in school with inter-racial and inter-group animosities which had their origins in adult conflicts outside the school"* (Crowther, 1988, p.7). All the participants except for Timothy discussed conflict in the classroom.

The participants explained that when the students enter the classroom they bring their cultural heritage. One aspect of this was their affinity to their family group. Any conflict in the community was brought into the school environment. Marcus discussed family fighting as affecting the school, *"Anything that happens in the family or the community happens in the school, it has an effect on the school, it was essential that you understood what was happening in the community. Some days I would come home and say to my wife, ' there is something really bad happening in the community' and she would say the same thing.... You know it might be two families ...fighting* (Marcus 1:5:7).

Matthew introduced his discussion by giving an explanation of the source of conflict. He stated *"There were three tribes living in the community. These tribes were... opposed to living together. They wanted to go back to their homelands but weren't able to... the access to these places was impossible"* (Matthew 1:6:20). Matthew talked extensively about problems in the community resulting from

clan conflict. He described the form conflict took in the classroom, *"there was rarely ever a day ...that some child gestured to another child or said something to another child... .It might be a wink or a movement of the lip or a movement of the finger, which was designed to insult that particular child from another tribe, or insult a member of the family"* (Matthew 1:6:20).

Catherine also talked about clan conflict in the classroom. She explained *"that could really affect the dynamics of the classroom...Some groups in the community they didn't get along with other groups.... Sometimes those conflicts would spill over into the classroom. And they were a source of children getting upset"* (Catherine 2:4:29). Catherine learned to identify clan conflict in the classroom, *"After two years in the prep classroom I could tell through body language and through what they were saying what was going on. I was able to pick up if there was going to be a dispute between children"* (Catherine 2:2:23).

Clan conflict was significant also to the relationship between the Teacher Assistant and students. Earlier Marcus spoke about discipline problems he encountered as a result of family or clan origins (6.4.1 'Discipline and Shame'). Frances also discussed the influence conflict had on the relationship between the Aboriginal

teacher assistants and the Aboriginal students. She explained, *"sometimes there were children there that they didn't particularly take to... it might be that they weren't a relation or a favourite family. Or it might have been a family that they were having a feud with over something. ... A lot of the Aboriginal people fight"* (Frances 1:8:14). Frances would ask her teacher assistants to discipline students from other family groups, she explained *"And when they did they were quite rough... with some children more than others at times, not always, or they laugh.... Sometimes you could tell that that child wasn't their favourite child, they had no real feeling for that child" (Frances 1:8:14).*

As said before, the students were not the only source of conflict in the classroom. Matthew also talked about the teacher assistants being a source of conflict. He explained that *"some of these, especially the men they used to like to antagonise the kids from the other tribes, and they used to get the kids from their own tribes to fight the kids from the other tribes"* (Matthew 2:8:18). Conflict in the classroom was significant for the non-Aboriginal teachers. It is evident that the participants were faced with a very different classroom environment. The participants needed to be aware of the Aboriginal students' and teachers' family groupings because of their significant impact on the classroom dynamics.

6.5. CULTURAL LEARNING STYLES.

This thesis is concerned with Aboriginal education and the educational needs of Aboriginal students, specifically in remote Aboriginal communities. The Aboriginal students in remote Aboriginal communities generally come from traditionally oriented background (Buschenhofen, 1980, p. 3-11; Harris, 1984, p. 130-132). Research available suggests that traditional Aboriginal students *learn through observation and imitation, personal trial and error, real life performance, context specific skills, personal group oriented and learn wholes rather than parts*. Marcus spoke about these learning styles at length. He summarised *"Remote Aboriginal students are brought up in an environment and culture that demands different approaches to teaching to facilitate meaningful learning"* (Marcus 2:12:1). Marcus was the only participant to directly discuss the various learning styles suggested in contemporary research literature. It is surprising that Marcus was the only participant to discuss the Aboriginal learning styles, as this is seen to be vital knowledge for teachers of Aboriginal students (Buschenhofen, 1980; Collins, 1993; Harris, 1984). The other participants discussed Aboriginal learning styles only incidentally.

Marcus, Pauline, Catherine and Frances all talked about the students *learning through observation.* These participants shared anecdotal stories of using modeling or demonstration as a teaching method and experienced positive results in the classroom. Catherine observed her teacher assistant using modeling as a teaching method allowing the Aboriginal students to observe activities. *"They modeled a lot of activities, they would show the children what to do. The children picked things up very well"* (Catherine 2:2:2).

Marcus suggested that Aboriginal students require non-Aboriginal teachers to *"increase modeling for students"* (Marcus 2:11:14). Marcus shared a story about making paper mache masks. Firstly Marcus used verbal instruction as his teaching method when explaining the construction of paper mache masks. The students unenthusiastically cut and pasted producing *"balls with happy faces"* (Marcus 2:11:14). Marcus was hoping for a better outcome. *"But reflecting on it, I did it a couple of weeks later and I brought in an example of a finished product...and they said now we can see what you want"* (Marcus 2:11:14). Marcus was extremely pleased at the results and concluded *"modeling was the way to approach it rather than instruction and telling them about the possibilities".*

Marcus shared another story of witnessing his students *learning through observation.* Marcus took his class *"out bush"* to learn how to light a fire without using a match. Marcus explained *"We took an elder with us and she was teaching the boys the correct wood to find...we spent an hour doing that... ...There was not much language...going on but there was a lot of listening, a lot of watching"* (Marcus 1:6:11). The elder said a couple of words and the boys sat on the ground and started to copy her. Marcus watched and added *"they had the wood and they were copying what she was doing".* Marcus witnessed his students learning through observation and not verbal instruction.

Catherine and Marcus both talked about their students *learning through personal trial and error* where the students were not set up for failure or under the scrutiny of others. Marcus used this as a teaching method. He explained *"that's when the kids would throw their whole selves in, and that's when they started talking and sharing ideas"* (Marcus 1:7:8). He said this allowed the students to make errors and not feel embarrassed or shamed. This was especially true when completing maths activities. Personal trial and error allowed students to develop confidence in manipulating calculators and completing computations.

Marcus also discussed that *"for the Aboriginal students most learning is achieved through real life performance rather than practice or contrived settings"* (Marcus 2:12:1). Marcus found that contrived situations were irrelevant to the life experiences and educational needs of his students. An example he used was teaching telephone skills. Aboriginal students in remote Aboriginal communities generally don't have telephones in their homes and the only access they have to a telephone is a public phone. Therefore, using a telephone may be out of their life experience and *"practicing telephone talk in the classroom has no relevance"* (Marcus 2:12:1). In an effort to overcome this Marcus arranged students to speak on the telephone with a purpose of making an order, getting information or passing on a good wish. *"Only then can learning be meaningful, knowing that a student must phone to get information"* (Marcus 2:12:1) Marcus had his students practice and then have a real telephone conversation. He found that it was very successful because the students were *learning through real life performance.*

Another aspect of teaching Aboriginal students that emerged as significant was the students *"don't talk a lot and they don't give you a lot of feedback, they listen. It was very hard to know all the time if they were understanding what you were saying as an English speaker"* (Marcus 1:5:44). Catherine, Frances and Pauline also found that their students did not verbalise a lot in the classroom. In his

second interview Marcus reiterated this point. *"Classroom talk, verbalising and sharing with others is not a natural part of the classroom"* (Marcus 2:11:14).

Marcus and Catherine also discussed Aboriginal students had a fear of failure and taking risks. As discussed earlier (6.4.1 'Discipline and Shame') *"they fear embarrassment and shame"* (Marcus 2:8:12). Marcus explained he knew that his students *"play dumb so they can achieve success, they like to achieve success even if it is a simple thing they already know how to do without being challenged"* (Marcus 2:11:5). Pauline shared this view. Catherine also talked about the students not taking risks in their learning. She said *"you didn't set the children up for failure, you guided them through it. This way they participate and enjoy the activity"* (Catherine 2:2:2). This was an important cultural learning style that participants used in order to build trust and rapport with the students (cf. *Learning through personal trial and error*). Another cultural difference that Marcus suggested needs to be considered when teaching Aboriginal students is *"non-Aboriginal teachers also need to realise the importance of limiting eye contact with the students, for a period of time because prolonged eye contact is considered rude and intrudes their personal space"* (Marcus 2:9:34).

Marcus summarised the idea that knowledge about the students' cultural backgrounds and learning styles is important. When he arrived in the remote Aboriginal community school his initial feeling was *"I felt like the boys weren't willing to learn much"* (Marcus 2:1:19). After reflecting upon his teaching experience he said, *"I think a more appropriate response would be that I didn't know how to respond to the situation that I found myself in"* (Marcus 2:1:23). He realised he did not understand the students, he continued *"I didn't understand where they had come from and I didn't know how to direct my teaching and work with them. It wasn't that they...weren't willing to learn, it's that a white fella person...doesn't know where to begin and doesn't know how to work with them appropriately* (Marcus 2:1:29).

6.6 NON-ABORIGINAL TEACHING EXPERIENCE

Given the participants' lack of knowledge about Aboriginal learning styles, the participants discussed their teaching styles. They also talked about the curriculum and literacy and numeracy they taught in remote Aboriginal community schools. Literature available discusses non-Aboriginal teaching styles in view of learning styles of Aboriginal students (Buschenhofen, 1980; Harris, 1984).

6.6.1. Adapting curriculum.

The most common point of discussion regarding teaching styles was the participants' practice of changing and adapting curriculum to suit the Aboriginal students. Malin (1994) discussed the experience of a non-Aboriginal teacher and her negative attitude towards three Aboriginal students in an urban classroom. Malin was critical about the teacher's lack of understanding of Aboriginal culture and learning styles. The teacher's lack of understanding led to a low expectation of the three Aboriginal students. Although the participants in this thesis did not discuss a lowering of expectation or display a dislike towards their Aboriginal students, it was evident that they were not simply adapting curriculum but they were lowering expectations. Catherine explained *"A lot of it just didn't apply to these remote Aboriginal students"* (Catherine 1:5:40).

The participants shared their reasons for the modifications. Cultural learning styles, life experience, interest levels and literacy and numeracy standards of the Aboriginal students were all topics discussed. Participants did not identify their own lack of understanding as a reason for adapting curriculum. The changes made to curriculum were done due to limited knowledge and understanding. Frances discussed *"There were certain subjects that would not be covered in the classroom programs because it was out of their realm of experience"* (Frances 2:2:32).

Marcus talked about the frustration he experienced because the curriculum he was required to teach his students failed to address the skill level of his students. *"I was very frustrated that we weren't teaching them the very basics of how to read, and encouraged to give that confidence* [to the students] *to feel the success of reading a book.... We were required to skill them.... They weren't ready...even though the topic was appropriate for their age level, the skills we were required to teach were too far ahead for them, for most of the kids"* (Marcus 1:2:39).

In his second interview Marcus talked about the lack of appropriate reading programs for his post primary students. He explained *"There are a lot of phonic programs that people have been teaching but nothing that's been adapted"* (Marcus 2:5:8). Marcus taught the older students and found that they didn't have the *"basics in reading"* (Marcus 2:5:12). He found his situation very difficult, he explained *"I didn't have in the school a set of readers or books that I could give those boys that were at an appropriate interest level for their age, but were at an appropriate reading level as well. The only books that I could find at an appropriate reading level were books like this is a ball, this is a cat, the cat sat on a mat. That sort of thing"* (Marcus 2:5:8).

Pauline also discussed the need to adapt curriculum to suit her students. The school she worked in used a program named *"Foundation studies"* (Pauline 1:9:17). Although she found the program very practical and *"quite good"* (Pauline 1:9:33) she still thought that because these students were shy *"these things need to be readapted again"* (Pauline 1:9:33).

Although the participants did not recognize that they were lowering their expectations, the adapting of curriculum meant that the participants were lowering their teaching standards. Partington (1997) and Malin (1994) discussed the lowering of expectations among non-Aboriginal teachers and it seems that they are comparing Aboriginal children negatively.

6.6.2 Literacy in the community schools.

When discussing literacy in remote Aboriginal community schools all of the participants focused on the reading aspect of literacy development before dealing with any other aspect of literacy. Frances expressed a sense of hopelessness in regard to reading in her classroom. *"You couldn't send a book home, you could let them have*

access to books in preschool but you couldn't let them go home" (Frances 1:7:26). Frances believed that this was one reason as to why reading levels were low. *"Aboriginal children haven't got that support or knowledge at home about what books are about, ultimately it's going to fail...they are going to have to do something about that but I don't know what they are going to do"* (Frances 1:9:42). This sense of hopelessness was highlighted when Frances spoke about a child that moved between her school and a neighbouring school. She recalled, *"I had a child who went to another community and she came back, she had been there for a while. She picked up a book and she could read the front straight away and I though well they are doing something better. I felt, 'Well what am I doing wrong here?' "(*Frances 1:9:42). Frances spoke about how she addressed her concerns about reading levels in her classroom. *"I really wanted to do something with the reading nature of the school and I started using more of the literacy learning centre where they made books...or posters in English or the* [Aboriginal] *language"* (Frances 1:9:14).

As part of his effort to adapt curriculum Marcus developed his own reading program in the classroom for his year four/five class, utilising *"a phonetic approach"* (Marcus 2:15:8). He used books from a variety of existing reading programs, *"there were lots of books that I had pulled out from the library and set up my own scheme. A lot of different topics so that they could choose"* (Marcus 2:15:36). He set

up a reward system encouraging students to reach small goals. At first the students were motivated to reach the goals in order to receive a prize. Marcus made the prizes more difficult to obtain and witnessed *"the reward started to become an intrinsic reward from their progress"* (Marcus 2:15:25). As he discussed earlier students experienced *'shame'* when given unwanted attention (cf. 6.4.1 'Discipline and shame'). In response to this Marcus developed a culturally sensitive system of praise and encouragement. This required the students to include relatives in their reading progress as illustrated in this story:

"Another good thing was when they reached certain points...they were to go home straight away and no matter what time of the day it was and get one of their relatives and bring them back. Normally it was a male because it was an all boys class. And the male would come back and that child would go outside on their own with their uncle or who ever it was and read the book to them.

It was pretty basic when you think about it, but it brought a lot of elements that would work for them. So they weren't being given a lot of attention from everyone else, they weren't shamed but they were getting praise from their uncle" (Marcus 2:15:42).

In concluding his discussion regarding reading in the classroom Marcus reported *"It was a good experience to have them read and some of them had never read a book in their life. Towards the end of the year they had read sixteen books and that was just an amazing experience for them and just watch them grow and learn so rapidly was just a fantastic experience"* (Marcus 1:2:3). Marcus was extremely happy about his decision to create a reading program in his classroom. It is important to note that he was clear about Aboriginal

learning styles and he was sensitive to the students cultural needs. He did not use an 'ad hoc' approach in creating the reading program.

Catherine and Timothy both spoke about reading and writing programs that they used in their schools. Catherine helped to introduce the reading and writing programs in her second community school. Catherine said, *"When I got to the school there was no sort of one to one reading program happening. ... ...Other programs had been started like the year before but the Aboriginal teacher aides didn't really take it on... ...so this 'Support a reader'* [program] *seemed like a really good program"* (Catherine 1:6:2). Catherine spent much of her time inservicing the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff about the program and helped with the implementation of the reading program in the school. She also introduced an intensive writing program in the school called *"Yes Write On"* (Catherine 1:6:32).

6.6.3 Numeracy in the community schools.

The participants discussed mathematics in the curriculum briefly. Catherine talked about the mathematics curriculum used in the classroom. *"In terms of numeracy we followed the Western Australian syllabus. It was not adapted for Aboriginal students, so that had to be adapted"* (Catherine 2:3:22).

In relation to participants adapting curriculum in order to make it relevant to the Aboriginal students Marcus stated, *"I suppose you have to work with what you've got"* (Marcus 2:3:41). Given that Aboriginal students learn through real life performance or experience as discussed in, 6.5 'Cultural learning styles', Marcus looked to the local store for teaching mathematical concepts. He suggested *"you check out the prices of the food and ...the weights of the different foods...You use the people at the registers to talk about the money that they are handling"* (Marcus 2:3:41).

Pauline shared her personal view of the value of teaching mathematics to her Aboriginal students. She stated, *"but as far as things like maths...one, two, big mob. That was all their counting"* (Pauline 1:4:22). Pauline said that she felt certain mathematical concepts were irrelevant to the lives of the Aboriginal students. She suggested metric measurement was irrelevant to the lives of Aboriginal students.

6.7 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This chapter has presented the non-Aboriginal teachers' experience of Aboriginal children at school. Usually, the primary concern for any teacher would be the educational needs of their students. However, the participants in this study immersed themselves in discussion focusing on other issues that influenced their teaching experience. The participants concerned themselves with health, attendance and cultural issues that shaped their teaching experience.

Poor attendance of Aboriginal students at school was a topic discussed by all participants. Participants offered a number of reasons for poor attendance ranging from cultural issues in the classroom, community problems, to the weather and poor health. As has been shown, participants easily identified the causes of poor attendance and the results of poor attendance, they even discussed responses to poor attendance but a resolution for the issue of poor attendance eluded all participants. The participants concluded that the attendance of Aboriginal students at school directly related to the attitudes of Aboriginal parents regarding a *school education* for their children. There is limited literature available on attendance issues and limited solutions offered to non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities.

The participants also discussed a range of health problems experienced by the Aboriginal children in the community schools. The non-Aboriginal teachers were faced with circumstances that required them to address health issues on a day-to-day basis. Literature available discussed Aboriginal health issues. However, the participants in this study illustrated the impact of health issues and the disturbance this caused on a daily basis.

In order for participants to be able address cultural issues in the classroom an understanding of the Aboriginal culture was essential. In hindsight the participants identified features of the Aboriginal culture that directly shaped events in the classroom, including the significance of rapport between the Aboriginal students and the non-Aboriginal teacher. Malin (1994) and Partington (1997) discussed the significance of non-Aboriginal teachers building a rapport with their Aboriginal students and the significance of cultural issues in the classroom. Now having had the experience, participants could also give examples of cultural issues in the classroom.

In view of these larger issues, the participants then discussed educational needs, specifically Aboriginal learning styles. When discussing the Aboriginal children at school it is surprising that the participants as a group did not share an extensive knowledge or

understanding of Aboriginal learning and teaching styles. Malin (1994) researched the experiences of a non-Aboriginal teacher and her ignorance about Aboriginal culture and learning styles. It would seem that fundamental to teaching Aboriginal students is an understanding of Aboriginal learning styles. However, like the participant in Malin's study (1994) the participants in this study had a limited knowledge of Aboriginal culture and learning styles, the only participant to discuss Aboriginal learning styles to a great extent was Marcus. Marcus appeared to have reflected on his situation and rather than blaming his students for their lack of achievement, he changed his own behaviour to address teaching his students in a culturally responsive way. Participants spoke about the strategies they used in teaching Aboriginal students. Students' *learning through observation* was a learning style that four of the participants discussed, highlighting a distinctive Aboriginal learning style. Sensitivity regarding other Aboriginal learning styles, such as, *learning through personal trial and error* and aspects of Aboriginal culture, such as, not *shaming* the students was discussed by Marcus, Catherine and Pauline but the depth of the participants understanding seemed limited.

When talking about teaching in the classroom participants shared their experience of adapting curriculum in order to address the educational needs of these Aboriginal students. The reasons given

for adapting curriculum were the lack of suitability and relevance of the content of curriculum and differences in the skill level of the Aboriginal students, however it may be suggested that the participants had low expectations of their Aboriginal students. The participants seemed to blame the Aboriginal students for their lack of ability rather than considering their own level of understanding of Aboriginal learning styles. It seemed that the participants just worked 'ad hoc' responding to the situation rather than being equipped to deal with the situation they faced. The participants did not report a great sense of achievement regarding their teaching experiences. This emphasises the need for the non-Aboriginal teachers to be educated in Aboriginal learning styles.

In view of the specific needs of Aboriginal students educational policies have been developed and implemented in remote Aboriginal community schools throughout Australia. The next chapter discusses the participants' knowledge of and perceptions about educational policies in remote.

Chapter 7.

School Policies & Professional Development.

7.1 INTRODUCTION.

As has been said, an aspect of the non-Aboriginal teachers working experience is the distinctly different learning and teaching style of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. In the previous chapter, in 6.5 'Cultural learning styles', discussion about learning styles took place. Participants discussed Aboriginal learning styles and shared anecdotal stories describing their experience of Aboriginal students learning through observation, personal trial and error, and real life performance. The participants also discussed the aspects of the Aboriginal culture that influenced their personal teaching style, for example limiting eye contact with students as this can be perceived as rude.

Given distinct differences in learning and teaching styles, as discussed in literature available, various policies have been developed and implemented in remote Aboriginal community schools.

This chapter discusses the participants' perceptions of educational policies that have emerged as a result of the distinct teaching and learning styles of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Policies discussed by the participants were bilingual education, two-way schooling and Aboriginalisation. Another aspect of the non-Aboriginal teachers working experience was professional development. Professional development is significant in the participants' learning about educational policies. The participants' discussion of policies led them to discuss professional development. The participants talked about their experiences and views about the professional development prior to and while working in remote communities. In conclusion, the participants' perceptions of their contribution to Aboriginal education and individual recommendations are discussed.

7.2 BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Bilingual education was a school policy discussed by several of the participants. Through bilingual education Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers are required to plan together and teach each other, as well as draft and develop school policies and curriculum. Mannion (1996) reported fundamental to any bilingual program are *"agreement and support of the community"* (McGrath in Mannion, 1996, p.38) and *"agreement and co-operation of the school Principal and his staff"* (McGrath in Mannion, 1996, p.39). Marcus encountered

problems with the Aboriginal community and non-Aboriginal staff not supporting the bilingual program. Researchers of Aboriginal education also discussed a lack of support for bilingual education. There are many critics of bilingual education among researchers (Harris, 1990, Keeffe, 1992). Harris (1990) and Keeffe (1992) were critical about bilingual education and the role of the non-Aboriginal teacher in the development and implementation of such a policy. Although the school Marcus worked in was bilingual, not all of the school staff or the community supported the bilingual program. Marcus talked about teachers working in the school not supporting the bilingual program, *"they haven't got the same viewpoint as to what the school's trying to do"* (Marcus 2:13:42). Marcus was the only participant to discuss this aspect.

Mannion (1996) discussed the fact that bilingual education allowed students to develop initial literacy in their mother tongue or alternatively allowed students to develop literacy in English using their mother tongue to support their learning. Pauline explained the theory of bilingual education utilised in her community school. *"The theory behind the bilingual school was that they* [the students] *learnt their language and English from preschool. And the* [Aboriginal] *teacher was empowered to teach most of the lessons in the language of the land"* (Pauline 2:2:9).

Timothy also shared his knowledge of bilingual education. He discussed the model of bilingual education used at one of the remote Aboriginal community schools where he worked. He explained *"they taught English and the native languages...Aboriginal children in year one, year two, year three... would be taught in their tribal language 100%, and as they got to grades four, five and six they would slowly introduce English... And they would teach subjects in English"* (Timothy 1:3:22).

Timothy reflected *"I think they found to get the best results they had to teach their tribal language in years one, two, three and four and they had to delay the introduction of the English language. So they would delay the introduction of English until the children had a better understanding of their own language.* (Timothy 1:3:22). Timothy's description of bilingual education illustrated bilingual education as reported by Mannion (1996).

7.2.1. Aboriginal teacher and teacher assistants.

In her research Mannion (1996) reported that an integral part of a bilingual program is *"Aboriginal teachers or teaching assistants available to carry out instruction in the Aboriginal language"* (McGrath

in Mannion 1996 p.38-39). Thus the role of the Aboriginal teachers and teacher assistants is an important topic of discussion. All participants talked about the Aboriginal teachers and teacher assistants.

Marcus explained the role of an Aboriginal teacher assistant was *"to interpret and use the language to interpret"* (Marcus 2:16:16). Catherine discussed how this operated in her classroom. She explained that when taking a lesson she *"would have the teacher aides involved with me the whole time"* (Catherine 2:2:2) She would be speaking English and the Aboriginal teacher assistant *"would be talking to the children in their language. So there would be two role models for the children at the same time, one in English and one in mother tongue* (Catherine 2:2:2).

Another aspect of the bilingual program was the teacher assistant conducting language lessons in an Aboriginal mother tongue. Frances explained how a bilingual lesson operated in the classroom. The Aboriginal teacher assistant would

"read through a big book, the children used to read after them, in choral reading, or they may get a child to come out to the front to read different sections of it, usual things like children having turns turning the page. Then looking at different words perhaps a particular phonic or sound... ... Then they would have a worksheet... ... complete the worksheet and glue it into a workbook for later reference" (Frances 2:6:30).

7.2.2. The Linguist.

Mannion (1996) explained that a linguist is an important requirement of any bilingual program. *"A resident linguist or a linguist familiar with the language who is readily available to provide advice and assistance when required"* (McGrath in Mannion 1996 p.38-39). The role of a linguist was to help develop and implement the bilingual program successfully, developing curriculum and texts. The linguist was also required to help Aboriginal teachers and teachers aides organise lessons and develop teaching plans and strategies. Catherine and her Aboriginal teacher assistant met with the linguist in their community school once a week. Catherine used *"to go along to their sessions with a linguist at the school."* She went to *"look at what"* the linguist *"was doing with"* the Aboriginal teacher assistant and to have *"an understanding of what they were doing with the children"* (Catherine 2:1:25). She discovered these sessions also gave her an opportunity to *"get some ideas... ...as to how to approach...teaching"* (Catherine 2:1:25). Marcus was disappointed with the linguist in his school. Marcus explained that the linguist was failing to help non-Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal teacher assistants work

effectively. Marcus stated *"There was a linguist who wasn't doing much..."* (Marcus 2:16:16).

7.2.3. Aboriginal Languages.

When establishing a bilingual program in a remote Aboriginal community school Mannion (1996) suggested there needs to be *"agreement and support for a particular Aboriginal language as a medium of instruction and a basic reading scheme in the language and supporting supplementary materials "* (McGrath in Mannion 1996, p.38-39). Frances reported working in a bilingual school situated in a multi-clan community. The Aboriginal students and teachers in the school came from different clans therefore originating from different language groups. She explained *"there were a lot of different languages in the one room"* (Frances 1:8:6). The program required the Aboriginal teacher assistants speak a nominated language that had been chosen by Aboriginal members of the community and the school. She explained *"They were supposed to speak one language in the school"*. Frances used the term *"pure language"* to describe the nominated language of the bilingual school. Having ascertained that the teacher assistants might have spoken another language at home, she wondered whether the teacher assistants were able to speak the

nominated language, because she noticed that some children did not seem to understand the Aboriginal language being spoken in the classroom.

Mannion (1996) also reported a need for *"a basic reading scheme and supporting supplementary materials"* in the nominated language of the school (McGrath in Mannion 1996, p.38-39). Frances complained that there were insufficient texts available to the Aboriginal teachers and students. *"There needs to be more materials produced in their own language in big book form, with good relevant text that matches the pictures, because there is not many books that are available in their own language"* (Frances 2:6:11). It wasn't until Frances had been in the school for a while that she realised there was a literacy centre where *"they made all the materials for the classrooms in mother tongue"* (Frances1:9:14). It is surprising that she worked in a bilingual school yet she didn't know where the literature was produced for use in the bilingual program.

7.2.4. Problems with bilingual education.

Some participants discussed problems with the bilingual program in their school. In Chapter 2, Mannion (1996) reported, in order for bilingual programs to function Aboriginal teachers or teacher

assistants are required to instruct in the chosen Aboriginal language. Marcus stated *"that didn't happen and that wasn't successful"* (Marcus 2:16:16). He believed that the lack of interpreting by Aboriginal Teachers and teacher assistants was undermining the bilingual program. Participants suggested the lack of interpreting was a result of the low level of support for the program, as discussed earlier and also the high absenteeism of Aboriginal teacher assistants. The participants were blaming the teacher assistant for the lack of success of the program.

High absenteeism among Aboriginal teacher and teacher assistants emerged as a significant problem in relation to the bilingual program. Timothy believed that the problem of high absenteeism among Aboriginal teacher assistants undermined the entire program. *"One of the biggest downfalls was that you had a high absenteeism...of Aboriginal teachers and teacher aides"* (Timothy 2:1:8). He explained when the mother tongue was the required language in the classroom and the teacher assistants were absent due to study commitments, illness or other circumstances, the non-Aboriginal teacher *"couldn't speak mother tongue so you spoke English"* (Timothy 2:1:8). Therefore there was no instruction in the mother tongue. Catherine explained, *" and if your teacher aide didn't turn up you couldn't, often I felt like I couldn't communicate with them* [the Aboriginal students], *because I had no translator"* (Catherine 1:5:2). Matthew accepted this

as a condition of working with an Aboriginal teacher assistant. He explained, *"And I just had to accept that this person would be there sometimes and that this person wouldn't be there sometimes"* (Matthew 2:9:15).

As has been said, bilingual education required the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers' plan together. Timothy encountered problems when his Aboriginal teacher assistant did not attend scheduled planning sessions arranged in support of the bilingual program in the school. He explained, *"one Aboriginal school I worked in had one hour set aside at the end of the day for the teachers to plan and prepare in their classroom. And all the teachers were meant to go to their classrooms and plan for the next day or a few days ahead, preparing the lessons and the worksheets"* (Timothy 2:3:46). Timothy would not attend the planning session *"because my Aboriginal teaching assistant wouldn't turn up, I would be there on my own"* (Timothy 2:3:46).

Overall, the participants had some understanding of the elements and implementation of a bilingual program. Marcus was critical about the implementation of the program and was concerned about the support of the program among Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal school and community members. Although Pauline shared her knowledge of the

bilingual program, it was not clear whether she was using bilingual education in her classroom. Despite Frances discussing elements of bilingual education she did not use the term *bilingual education* in either of her interviews. It is significant that the participants were critical about aspects of the bilingual program and at times poorly informed and reported being unsuccessful in its application. This issue of being unprepared is discussed later in this study (cf. 7.4 'Professional development'). The participants tended to blame the Aboriginal teachers and teacher assistants for the lack of success of the program. The non-Aboriginal teachers bring an ethnocentric cultural view when discussing the implementation of a bilingual program. It is with this perspective that the participants are discussing the success and lack of success of the bilingual program.

7.3 ABORIGINALISATION.

Aboriginalisation was the other educational policy discussed by the participants. Literature available on Aboriginalisation focuses on leadership and teaching roles of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal education. Mannion (1996) defined Aboriginalisation as *"a process of increasing the number of trained Aboriginal staff in Aboriginal schools... ...Positions include, principals, assistant principals, teachers and assistant teachers"* (Mannion, 1996, p.44). Partington (1997) researched the teaching

practice rounds of non-Aboriginal student teachers in remote community schools and concluded that his results *"reaffirms the value of Aboriginal teachers for Aboriginal schools. The credibility of staffing schools with teachers from the communities is much greater and cultural responsiveness is assured"* (Partington, 1997, p.38). Matthew, Pauline and Timothy spoke about Aboriginalisation as a school policy in remote Aboriginal community schools.

Matthew shared his understanding of Aboriginalisation, *"it is the policy of the various education departments, that the Aboriginal people, the indigenous people should be running their own schools"* (Matthew 2:8:3). Pauline talked about attempts at implementing Aboriginalisation. *"But I do remember there was an attempt to have three Aboriginals on a ...panel...that seemed to be a movement...for the Aboriginal people to take a bit of responsibility and be empowered to do that "* (Pauline 2:4:16). She explained that this didn't develop into anything. Pauline believed that Aboriginalisation was an appropriate policy for the community school to adopt. She *"challenged the principal why the school wasn't moving towards more Aboriginalisation"* (Pauline 2:4:27) using the example of a neighbouring community school. The school had an Aboriginal principal and a support network of non-Aboriginal staff. The response of Pauline's principal was that the Aboriginal principal was *"just a figure head"* (Pauline 2:4:27). The view Pauline took was *"if the*

people respect her" and the Aboriginal principal carried out certain tasks of a school principal then that is *"principalship."*

Timothy expressed his opinion about the need for Aboriginal teachers in the schools because of the lack of academic achievement he saw in the classrooms. Timothy said *"But my experience with Aboriginal education is that white people have been out there for years and the Aboriginal children have a low reading level and a low writing level and a low command of English. So I think give the Aboriginal people a go, let someone else have a go because we have proven to have not achieved that much, so let them have a go"* (Timothy 1:4:34)

Considering that Aboriginalisation is a contemporary issue and relates closely to the working experience of non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities it is surprising that Pauline, Matthew and Timothy were the only participants to discuss Aboriginalisation.

7.4 PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Given the cultural differences, differences in teaching and learning styles and the development of school policies, the preparation of non-

Aboriginal teachers entering remote Aboriginal communities to live and work would seem to be vital. Publications recommending professional development for non-Aboriginal teachers teaching Aboriginal students have been available for over twenty years (Binnion, 1976). More recently Darvall (1991) discussed the South Australian induction program for teachers entering remote Aboriginal communities in South Australia. Martinez (1994) also recommended professional development for non-Aboriginal teachers entering remote Aboriginal community schools. Martinez suggested *"programs of support for beginning teachers should operate at many levels.... In Aboriginal community schools, such transition preparation should be undertaken by the school, should be very thorough and involve local Aboriginal Community leaders who can provide insiders' cultural knowledge...to the new teachers"* (Martinez, 1994, p.176).

In other research available Partington (1997) explored the experiences of student teachers on practice rounds in remote Aboriginal communities. He explained that although students had attended *"familiarisation seminars"* about remote communities, the sessions could *"only mitigate some of the shocks awaiting the student teacher"* (Partington, 1997,p.32).

Teacher participation in appropriate professional development was a topic discussed by the participants in this study. Considering that four out of the six participants in this study were either graduates in their first teaching placement or had minimal teaching experience when they began in remote Aboriginal communities, appropriate professional development would seem to be fundamental to their success as beginning teachers. The remaining two participants did not indicate their prior teaching experience. Research available reported that non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal community schools are regularly graduates or inexperienced teachers. Partington (1997) reported that in his research of student teachers practice rounds in remote Aboriginal community schools *"nearly all the schools were staffed by inexperienced teachers, many of whom were in their first or second year of teaching"* (Partington, 1997, p.32). Martinez (1994) also presented the same observation *"the staff were generally young and inexperienced in black communities"* (Martinez, 1994, p.164). Crowther (1988) reported *"an ongoing aspect of recruitment into schools in the Northern Territory and especially into remote schools, has been the appointment of new graduates from teacher education institutions in other states* (Crowther, 1988, p.3). In view of this, professional development is an important aspect of the non-Aboriginal teachers' growth as teachers.

Working in two remote Aboriginal community schools Catherine had contrasting experiences of professional development. In her first community she was a graduate in her first year of teaching. Catherine discussed difficulties she experienced as a graduate teacher, namely receiving inadequate professional development. She said, *"I think* [that] *as a graduate you've got specific needs"* (Catherine 1:2:20). She suggested, *"I think that perhaps in my first position there could have been a more structured program for graduates in that school, in terms of support, in terms of inservicing, in terms of writing out your curriculum program...* (Catherine 1:2:20).

Catherine found in her second community school *" a lot of money was spent on inservicing the teachers"* (Catherine 1:5:28). Catherine spent a lot of her time being inserviced and networking with other teachers of Aboriginal students in other communities. This provided her with experience in learning about appropriate programs and the implementation of these programs to meet the educational needs of her students. After working in two contrasting situations Catherine suggested *"I think that's probably the key to Aboriginal education, for the teachers to maintain professional development and to network with each other"* (Catherine 1:7:21). This opinion was also shared in available research. In her discussion of a beginning teacher in Cook, Martinez (1994) suggested *"continuing, structured, informed feedback is vital for the newcomers as they attempt to adapt to a culturally*

different and therefore pedagogically (and sometimes personally) demanding setting" (Martinez, 1994, p. 176).

Pauline was critical about the professional development she received prior to entering the remote Aboriginal community. *"Preparation was about zero, it was a two day inservice, it prepared you for nothing"* (Pauline 1:8:7). In research available the same opinion was expressed. Martinez (1994) explained *"Brian lamented that the one day induction had been inadequate to prepare him for community school life"* (Martinez, 1994, p.165).

Marcus also felt under prepared, he explained *"you had this two-day thing they called it an inservice... ... but it had nothing to do with living and working in the* [community]" (Marcus 1:2:48). He felt ill equipped to handle the situation, *"so by the time six months went by you felt like you knew nothing about the culture"* (Marcus 1:2:48). He recommended *"a teacher moving into a community needs to be inserviced in the culture, dance groups, and how they operate, men's ceremonies... There is a lot of information that needs to be passed on and inservicing about the community you are in and the way it works"* (Marcus 1:4:10). Marcus made recommendations for ongoing professional development, in order to assist non-Aboriginal teachers to learn in context and to be able to apply their learning appropriately.

His aim was to provide a high standard of education and without appropriate knowledge about the community and the educational needs of the Aboriginal students he felt unable to do his job. He stated, *"It's so often the case that non-Aboriginal teachers arrive in community schools ready to teach in a way that they have already been trained and that's the way to teach non-Aboriginals"* (Marcus 2:7:11). He suggested that after a short time non-Aboriginal teachers experience no success in their teaching approach and as a result lower their expectations. His opinion was this is because *"they have had little or no introduction of the people the history, cultural beliefs, the values and the ways of learning of Aboriginal people, which they have to understand before they can teach well"* (Marcus 2:7:11). Marcus believed that it is essential for non-Aboriginal teachers to have an understanding of cultural differences in *"behaviour and adapt their strategies to this, in doing so the learning process for the students become meaningful and more effective. For the teacher this can be done by inservicing which is relevant and informative, prior and during their experience.* (Marcus 2:7:11).

Frances conceded the teaching situation for non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities *"is very difficult"* (Frances 2:7:20). She suggested *"there should be more exploration of approaches to literacy with Aboriginal children and what to do with the younger children to get them started in their literacy skills"* (Frances 2:7:22).

Her inability to deal with the situation and lack of preparation was apparent in her statement, *"when there is a language barrier and a cultural barrier there should be ways of dealing with them"* (Frances 2:7:26).

Matthew had a great deal of professional support and professional development. He believed one important attribute that the people providing the professional development needed was experience and an understanding of the situation of the non-Aboriginal teacher working in a remote Aboriginal community. Matthew explained *"The people who trained us as teachers... had spent a lot of their life, or part of their life in Aboriginal communities... ...I always appreciated these people because I knew they knew how these communities operated"* (Matthew 2:4:13).

As has been discussed, Marcus was critical of the inadequate professional development he experienced as a beginning teacher in a remote Aboriginal community setting and as a result he said he lowered his expectations of the Aboriginal students in his classroom. In literature available Martinez (1994) reported that *"Brian expressed misgivings about this general expectation and acceptance of standards lower than mainstream schools"* (Martinez, 1994, p.166). Malin (1994) reported on Mrs. Eyer's low expectation of Aboriginal

student's academic achievement. Marcus too was extremely disappointed with the lowering of his own expectations and the negative attitudes of non-Aboriginal teachers he witnessed in the remote Aboriginal community school where he worked. He associated the lowering of expectations of Aboriginal students with the lowering of professional standards among non-Aboriginal teachers. Marcus felt that standards among the non-Aboriginal teachers were very low, he stated *"if they weren't bad they'd let themselves slip and would become pretty bad, not that they were bad teachers but they...had bad habits"* (Marcus 1:7:30). He compared the appearance of the school with the appearance of the community. He said,

> *"It was like the classrooms were the same as the living conditions in the camps. That shocked me a lot and I was determined to maintain my professionalism. That's really important, to continue that and you can't achieve the same standards with the kids of the same age but you can still have the same standards as a teacher"* (Marcus 1:7:30).

The lowering of expectations of Aboriginal students and professional standards was a recurring topic of discussion among participants in this study. Although Matthew was happy with the level and standard of professional service he received, he also reported a lowering of expectations by himself. He stated, *"all the theory and practice in the world was fine but...if you have one small achievement it is actually a great achievement. ...It can take five years to achieve with these kids... the difference is what you teach someone who is ten years old up there* [remote Aboriginal community] *is of the same as someone*

who was in grade prep or grade one down here [main stream school]" (Matthew 1:2:46). Matthew accepted this aspect of teaching Aboriginal students without question and did not seem disappointed with this type of attitude among non-Aboriginal teachers.

However, Frances like Marcus, was disappointed about non-Aboriginal teachers lowering their expectations. Frances stated *"I think our expectations in some ways might have been a bit low. I know that mine were when I first went there and I under estimated the children so badly"* (Frances 1:9:12). Martinez (1994) recommended that professional development for beginning teachers should encourage them to *"examine critically the school's policies and practices and eventually contribute to the rejuvenating of the school and the system generally"* (Martinez, 1994, p.176). Marcus shared this view. He felt that although professional standards in the school where he worked were low, he stated *"I was determined to maintain my professionalism"* (Marcus 1:7:30). He was extremely critical about the standards among teachers in the remote community school.

Pauline also blamed the non-Aboriginal teachers for the poor professional standards and the lack of academic achievement among Aboriginal students, specifically the academic achievement of male Aboriginal students. Pauline stated *"I don't know maybe it's the*

weather [or] *it's a bit of apathy...you get the teachers who are slack and go for the easy option. The boys haven't got any skills, why haven't they got any skills because they sat in this class...and* [the non-Aboriginal teacher] *didn't come up with anything. I think that is where the white fella teacher needs to be very accountable and not just say it's the kids"* (Pauline 1:11:3).

Timothy also experienced a poor attitude among non-Aboriginal teachers. He believed that in his experience primary level teachers were very productive, but standards among teachers lowered once students were at the secondary level. Timothy's experience was a second hand experience passed on by Aboriginal students at high school. He explained

"I remember these two Aboriginal high schools students that went into high school. I spoke to these two students and said 'Hey boys do you like the schools?' ... One of them said to me, 'You know that teacher_ _ _ , he makes me tired, he makes me sleepy right from the start.' ...I knew what the statement meant, when they got to school they see these two teachers...lack of enthusiasm and drive" (Timothy 2:6:1).

The consensus among participants was that professional development for a non-Aboriginal teacher is essential. There needed to be exploration of a wide range of aspects of living and working in remote Aboriginal communities. Professional development needs to explore topics including: the Aboriginal culture and lifestyle; Aboriginal teaching and learning styles; wider community issues for Aboriginal people including health issues and substance abuse; and

personal and professional issues faced by non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities. The professional development needs to be prior to entering a community and ongoing while living and working in a remote setting. The issue of lowering of expectations may not have been as significant if the non-Aboriginal teachers were better prepared.

7.5 PERSONAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.

Discussion regarding educational policies and Aboriginalisation led to the participants talking about their thoughts regarding the place of education in remote Aboriginal communities. Participants suggested changes for Aboriginal education in the future.

7.5.1 Contracts.

Matthew suggested of long term contracts for non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities. The issue of high turnover and lack of continuity among non-Aboriginal staff and two-year stays was a topic of discussion among participants. As has been said, apart from Catherine and Timothy, the other participants were in communities for only two or three or four years. The participants did not discuss reasons for the length of their stays in the communities. Martinez (1994) reported on the detrimental effect of short-term stays *"a significant aspect of appointment policy to these schools in remote*

settings is the practice of two year appointments.... This transience generally adversely affected teachers' commitment and the community's response to teachers. In addition, resources were poorly and ineffectively maintained with no continuity" (Martinez, 1994, p.175). Crowther (1988) reported reasons for short stays, she said *"one teacher in a remote Aboriginal community school commented that in his experience two years was as long as a white person could expect to remain reasonably physically healthy in a desert Aboriginal community"* (Crowther, 1988, p.8).

However Matthew suggested, *"there needs to be more appropriate non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal role models staying in these communities for a longer period of time and basically we need appropriate people to dedicate their lives to places like these"* (Matthew 2:12:1). He said communities need *"to have a married non-Aboriginal couple, with children to spend fifteen years in a community"* (Matthew 2:12:5). Matthew felt that the transient population of non-Aboriginal teachers was problematic for Aboriginal communities. Although Matthew recommended long term contracts he admitted that he was not prepared to stay in a remote Aboriginal community. Catherine also spoke about the high turnover of non-Aboriginal teachers *"the* [Aboriginal] *people are just really getting to know you when you go, and perhaps that's where you're really starting to make in roads at the end of that time. Then you go and the*

people have to start all over again with new teachers" (Catherine 1:4:4). Marcus was specific in the problems he saw related to high turnover of non-Aboriginal staff. Marcus stated,

"the high turnover of non-Aboriginal staff is a factor that needs to be considered when keeping records. Because if a non-Aboriginal is always coming out every two years there is not going to be those who have that knowledge of the school to refer to. So we've got to keep records of what's been happening" (Marcus 2:11:8).

7.5.2 School Structure

Timothy indicated that a number of changes should be made to Aboriginal education in remote Aboriginal communities. He believed that the present education system is simply not working. He suggested *"I would change the school day, you've got to intensify and shorten the school day. You've got to have the children come for two hours....in the cool part of the day"* (Timothy 2:7:17). He saw similarities between the Aboriginal school system at present and a non-Aboriginal mainstream school and commented *"it's the same structure, the same timetable, as soon as you see that you say this can't work, and if it is working it's a miracle"* (Timothy 2:7:20). Partington (1997) shared the same view *"The imposition of the dominant culture without careful planning and consultation with the local community is a recipe for failure. The support of the family and community are essential if school is to be perceived as relevant to the children"* (Partington, 1997, p.36). As a result Timothy suggested *"be radical...just have two hours, all the kids come together, with their classes and you just do reading and the second hour you do maths or*

writing" (Timothy 2:7:22). Timothy presented this as a personal opinion and suggested the non-Aboriginal teacher could prepare and implement this program and *"invite the Aboriginal adults to participate in some of the school activities"* (Timothy 2:8:6).

In her first interview Pauline suggested that changes needed to be made in the school where she worked. The changes she suggested emerged because of the cultural conflict she saw between clans in the Aboriginal community school. She talked about the structure of the school being *"set around three dance groups"* (Pauline 1:6:3) because presently one clan was largely involved in the school, with other groups not being well represented in either attendance or leadership. She suggested dividing the school into three smaller schools, composing of the three clans. She said there should be *"a male and a female head of each of the three schools and ...multiage classrooms and they* [the students and Aboriginal teachers] *would all be related"* (Pauline 1:6:14). Pauline saw six Aboriginal people running the school. The implication of having three clans was that discipline could be addressed in a culturally appropriate manner and the aspect of family involvement would also be culturally appropriate. *"This would... help the Aboriginal people to teach their own people and the positives of that is that they can discipline them. They would have a lot more authority and they would be listened to... obviously in this situation if they* [the students] *didn't listen to the teacher it would*

get back to the elder" (Pauline 2:1:27). She believed that discipline then would take place. She suggested *"when you put an elder in front of kids from all different tribes I think it was a draw back for them"* (Pauline 2:8:50). Her proposal would have clan members working with people from their own family group. A further aspect that she discussed was the role of the non-Aboriginal teacher. The non-Aboriginal teachers would be in the school as *"assistants, and they did have* [when Pauline worked in the school] *what they called mentors... where the Aboriginal teacher would teach and the white fella would help resource and train or watch and observe"* (Pauline 1:5:45).

In her second interview Pauline once again talked about changes that could be made in remote Aboriginal community schools.

"I think fewer white teachers and only as mentors to give the responsibility fully onto the Aboriginals... and a good move for the school would be to go back to the outstations and to have ...a white fella just visit ...and stay just four weeks and then come back into town" (Pauline 2:4:44).

Pauline also suggested improvements for the induction process of non-Aboriginal teachers entering remote Aboriginal communities. She said, *"I think the teacher should be there, not on day one of the school year, but far before that, even to come the last two weeks of the year before, it's an impossible task, but you need to sit back and see just what goes on"* (Pauline 2:8:16). Darvall (1991) reported on

the South Australian Induction for newly appointed teachers in remote Aboriginal communities. In conclusion he stated *"the aspect of allowing appointees to visit their appointed school for a week prior to commencing duties needs to be duplicated throughout Australia. It is far better to know what lies ahead, instead of remaining blindfolded to possible future frustrations that often reflect individual perception"* (Darvall, 1991, p.9).

7.6 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Fundamental to teaching in any school is a clear understanding of the philosophies, theories and structures of educational policies in place. However, the participants in this study shared a limited understanding of the educational policies in place. Bilingual education was discussed by all of the participants. Although the participants all worked in bilingual schools and were able to discuss aspects of a bilingual program, none of the participants talked about experiencing success with the bilingual program. Participants shared their experience of working with Aboriginal teachers, Aboriginal teacher assistants and linguists as a part of a bilingual program. They discussed the use of an Aboriginal language in the classroom and the use of appropriate literature for the development of literacy skills in the mother tongue and English. There were a lot of questions in the minds of the participants about the implementation and success of

the program. In Chapter 2 'A review of the literature' researchers too were critical about the use of bilingual education in remote Aboriginal community schools. As has been said the participants blamed everyone else but themselves for the lack of success of the program.

Chapter 8.

Conclusions and Recommendations.

8.1 PREPARATION FOR NON-ABORIGINAL LIVING

It is apparent that *living* in a community was a significant aspect of the participants' experience in a remote Aboriginal community. The *shock* they described upon their arrival in the communities set the scene for many new and challenging experiences for the non-Aboriginal teachers. The weather extremes meant that the participants were lethargic and at times unmotivated to perform their role. Although discussion of participants' accommodation and services was limited, these experiences revealed the geographical isolation experienced by some participants. Their difficulty in developing and maintaining relationships added to the list of personal challenges they faced. It can be seen that living in a remote community presented the non-Aboriginal teachers with a life style that was very distinctive and demanding. It was evident that the participants were taken up with personal issues

while living in the communities rather than focusing on their teaching. Matthew was particularly concerned with the aspect of living.

The first point to be made is that non-Aboriginal teachers need to be better prepared for their living circumstances. The physical environment instantly challenged the participants in this study. Pre-service discussion about the physical environment and the weather conditions may assist in preparing non-Aboriginal teachers for their living circumstances. In addition, a mentor for new teachers in remote Aboriginal communities could be appointed to help the teachers deal with issues of living in an isolated community. A further recommendation that emerged from the data is for continual dialogue between the newly appointed non-Aboriginal teachers and existing non-Aboriginal school staff regarding personal issues faced by non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities. All of this may lessen the sense of *shock* experienced by the non-Aboriginal teachers.

8.2 PREPARATION FOR ABORIGINAL LIVING

A further aspect of *living* in a remote Aboriginal community is the participants' perceptions of the living circumstances of the Aboriginal people. The physical appearance of the houses influenced Marcus and Pauline's first impressions of the remote community where they lived

and worked, and the difference in attitude regarding dogs was significant for Frances. It was apparent that the participants were faced with a difficult experience. It can be seen that the presence of alcohol, and the Aboriginal culture, had an impact on the living and working experiences of the non-Aboriginal teachers. It was evident that Matthew was taken up with community issues including violence, break-ins and substance abuse. These experiences and perceptions of the Aboriginal community highlight a need for non-Aboriginal teachers to be aware of issues faced by Aboriginal people. Preparation of non-Aboriginal teachers for entering remote community settings is recommended so that they are not preoccupied with their *living* experience. One question after reading the data is: why aren't non-Aboriginal teachers better informed about issues of substance abuse, health issues and Aboriginal living conditions? Clearly the authorities are too preoccupied with just getting teaching staff. Pre-service and ongoing professional development addressing these issues in context may help non-Aboriginal teachers to deal with community issues at a local level and lead to an appreciation of these issues as they relate to teaching.

8.3 PREPARATION FOR ABORIGINAL CULTURE AND LEARNING.

This study emphasises a need for non-Aboriginal teachers to learn about the *culture* of Aboriginal people in remote Aboriginal

communities. It was apparent that the participants had a limited understanding of the Aboriginal culture *before* they began in the remote communities and their understanding only developed over time. Learning about the Aboriginal culture prior to entering a community, as shown in this study, would lead to an appreciation of the issues involved in Aboriginal education and perhaps lead to better teaching. The participants' lack of knowledge of Aboriginal *culture* had implications for understanding the people in the remote communities and the schools. The participants' experiences led us to see that an understanding of the significance of Aboriginal clans, family and land, Aboriginal law and ceremonies is essential. The participants' discussion about the Aboriginal concept of time highlighted an aspect of difference that influenced their daily lives. The importance of developing a rapport with Aboriginal students was also discussed and the implications for the students learning.

It would seem likely that the main aim of these non-Aboriginal teachers entering remote Aboriginal community schools was teaching. However, it was obvious that the non-Aboriginal teachers were taken up with a number of issues apart from teaching the students. Apart from their own living already discussed, the concerns of the non-Aboriginal teachers included problems of poor attendance, poor health and cultural issues.

The experiences of the participants, particularly Marcus, led us to an understanding of Aboriginal learning styles and the implications of these for non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities. The discussion regarding a lack of understanding about Aboriginal learning styles led us to feel that the participants were not fully prepared to deal with the cultural differences they would face in the classroom. The participants' practice of lessening curriculum content and lowering expectations in student learning outcomes substantiates this claim. Education for non-Aboriginal teachers focusing on Aboriginal learning and teaching styles would greatly assist them in the classroom.

8.4 PREPARATION FOR POLICY

It can be seen that the participants' lack of understanding of the educational policies that prevailed in the schools had far reaching implications. Although the participants spoke about bilingual education, a lack of support and effective implementation of this policy by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers resulted in problems for the teachers and students. In response to their overall experience, the participants reiterated the view that pre-service and ongoing professional development are important for non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities. The need for culturally responsive

teachers is vital for the future of Aboriginal education in remote communities. Many of my conclusions of this study are about non-Aboriginal involvement in Aboriginal education. It seems to be inevitable that non-Aboriginal people will always be involved in Aboriginal education in some way. Perhaps the recommendations of the participants in this study proposing long-term contracts (cf. 7.5.1 Contracts) or changing the structure of the school should be carefully considered (cf. 7.5.2 Structure). One of the objectives of this study was to give voice to the non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Aboriginal communities because of the expert insight they bring to the area.

8.5 CONCLUSIONS

The reader may notice that the conclusions drawn by the participants in this study are similar to those I came to after my experience living and working in a remote Aboriginal community. The participants and I spoke about the weather, the Aboriginal people and out-of-school life issues. However, there were other topics of discussion that emerged from the data, including community issues and non-attendance of Aboriginal people at school. It is important to note that the methodology employed in this study was an open-ended interview. At all times I endeavoured to let the participants discuss issues in their own way, raising issues and topics of discussion of their own accord. I was surprised that the participants shared such a similar experience to

mine. As I stated, I set out to explore the experiences of other non-Aboriginal teachers to see if my experience was typical and it does seem to resemble other non-Aboriginal teachers in this setting. Moreover, although the participants lived and worked in different settings, coastal or desert, the experiences of the participants were very similar to one another. The participants repeatedly spoke about the need for professional development and the need to be properly informed regarding various aspects of their experience.

This study has presented the experiences of six non-Aboriginal teachers, discussing a wide range of topics that contributed to their experiences. Upon reflection of these experiences this study raises more questions about non-Aboriginal teachers in Aboriginal education. Here are some questions that I consider significant:

- Whose issues define Aboriginal Education?
- What is the future for Aboriginal teachers?
- What is the future for non-Aboriginal teachers?
- What aspects of a *school education* are significant to the lives of Aboriginal people?
- What value or significance does a *school education* have to Aboriginal people?

This study reaffirms that Aboriginalisation for Aboriginal schools in remote Aboriginal communities is highly recommended. Remote Aboriginal community schools need Aboriginal teachers who are able to deal with cultural conflict and be culturally sensitive as well as be able to speak the Aboriginal language in the community and teach in accordance with cultural learning styles. The issue of ownership of education is also highlighted. As suggested by the participants in this study, Aboriginal people need to decide the place and value of a school education for their children. They need to ask and answer the big questions.

But remember I am just another non-Aboriginal person writing about Aboriginal education. I have constantly reiterated that I set out to give voice to the non-Aboriginal and was only ever giving a non-Aboriginal perspective. This is a limitation of this study.

8.6 SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study does not examine why the participants did not speak about particular aspects of living and working in a remote Aboriginal community because of the use of an open-ended interview. This study had its limitations because of the methodology but still non-Aboriginal teachers' views are significant. For example, Timothy was

the only participant to focus purely on his working experience and not his living experience further research may determine reasons for this.

One area identified in this and other studies available was the lack of continuity of non-Aboriginal staff in remote Aboriginal community schools (cf. 7.5.1. Contracts). This may be one area of exploration for further study.

Other researchers may be interested in examining what skills Aboriginal people need in order to exist in a modern world. To what extent do Aboriginal people need a *school education*?

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APPENDIX

TITLE OF PROJECT: The experience of non-Aboriginal teachers working in Aboriginal Education.

NAME OF INVESTIGATOR: Elizabeth Whiting.

PARTICIPANT'S NAME: ……

Dear ,

I am writing to request your participation in a research project titled " The experience of non-Aboriginal teachers working in Aboriginal Education." I would like to interview you about your experiences of working in Aboriginal Education.

In the research I would like to conduct there will be two one-hour interviews. The first interview will take about one hour, focusing on your experience as a non-Aboriginal teacher working in Aboriginal education. The interview will be typed into a transcript. You will then be asked to read through the transcript in preparation for the second interview. The second interview will take about one hour and will involve responding to the transcript and discussing your perception of your contribution.

In total the time required for your participation will be approximately three hours.

Through this research project I endeavour to explore the experiences of non-Aboriginal teachers in order to learn more about Aboriginal Education. The interview technique enables individuals to share their experiences. The interviews will form a basis for my data collection recording personal histories. People learn through the experiences of others enriching their knowledge of new unexplored areas.

The material from the interviews used in the study will at no time identify you, people close to you or the place of your experience.

At any time during the study you are free to withdraw consent or to discontinue participation in the research project without any explanation.

Any questions regarding the project titled "The experience of non-Aboriginal teachers working in Aboriginal Education" can be directed to

my Supervisor Dr. Josephine Ryan of the Department of Education, Australian Catholic University, Christ Campus, on Telephone number (03) 9563 3654.

The Australian Catholic University Research Projects Ethics Committee has approved this study. Should you have any concerns or difficulty with the project whether it be in your personal treatment or insufficient information provided by me please forward the complaint to the Research Projects Ethics Committee. Any complaint you have will be treated in confidence with a full investigation and you will be personally informed of the outcome. The address is:

Chair, Research Projects Ethics Committee
C/- Office of Research
Australian Catholic University
Mercy Campus
412 Mt. Alexander Road
Ascot Vale Vic 3032

If you agree to participate in this study you should sign both copies of the Consent Form, retain one copy for your records and return the other copy to the researcher to retain.

I ..... have read and understood the information above and any questions I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I agree to participate in this activity, realising that I can withdraw at any time.

I agree that research data collected for the study may be published or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

Yours sincerely,

NAME OF PARTICIPANT ..... (block letters)

SIGNATURE ..... DATE

NAME OF INVESTIGATOR ..... (block letters)

SIGNATURE ..... DATE