

AN EXPLORATION OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES
STRAIT ISLANDER STUDENTS' EXPERIENCE OF
EDUCATION: A CASE STUDY OF A CATHOLIC
SECONDARY SCHOOL

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Statement of Authorship and Sources

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

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

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

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

Signature: [Redacted]

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No one who achieves success does so without acknowledging the help of others. The wise and confident acknowledge this help with gratitude.

(Alfred North Whitehead, 1979)

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Abstract

The research problem underlying this study concerns the potential of a mainstream secondary school to offer an inclusive and equitable experience of education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) students. The research explores how Indigenous students experience education at St Mary's Catholic College, Cairns.

Three specific research questions frame the organisation of this study:

1. How do Indigenous students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?
2. How do Indigenous parents experience the education of their children at St Mary's?
3. How do Indigenous students and their parents experience the implementation of inclusivity policies at St Mary's?

This study adopts an interpretivist paradigm that is underpinned by constructionist epistemology. Data are analysed from the theoretical standpoint of symbolic interactionism. A case study methodology organises the choice of data-gathering strategies. These are document analysis, focus group interviews and in-depth, individual interviews.

This study's participants are purposively selected from four stakeholder groups: Indigenous students, Indigenous parents, Indigenous support staff and non-Indigenous teachers. In total, 54 stakeholders were participants.

The research generates seven conclusions that add to new knowledge, practice and policy concerning how Indigenous students experience education at St Mary's.

First, St Mary's Indigenous students consider their identification as Indigenous to be irrelevant to their engagement in the learning process or to their achievement of learning outcomes. Further, they argue that a serious focus on school academic work is not inconsistent with honouring Indigenous culture and values.

Second, St Mary's Indigenous students consider teachers' non-Indigenous backgrounds to be no disadvantage to their learning. Instead, Indigenous students value the presence of differing cultural identities in the classroom for what they contribute to the learning experience. Similarly, Indigenous parents consider a paucity in the number of Indigenous teachers at St Mary's will not negatively influence their children's academic outcomes.

Instead, they believe interactions with non-Indigenous teachers to be beneficial learning experiences for their children.

Third, Indigenous parents believe that their decision to enrol their children at St Mary's is a way of ensuring their positive futures. This decision may incur criticism that is supposedly justified by cultural identification values, from extended family members. St Mary's Indigenous parents consider the defining and dividing of closely related people in order to maintain boundaries of inclusion and exclusion to be harmful for and divisive of Indigenous people.

Fourth, Indigenous families consider St Mary's to be an authentic, supportive and engaging place for all school community members. Parents noted that the school's respect of Indigenous peoples and cultures reflected a fundamental characteristic of Catholic education. They value the policies and practices of inclusive education that honour their cultural identities and enable them to experience belonging to an authentic community.

Fifth, Indigenous students consider it more educationally advantageous that teachers identify and address their individual learning needs rather than employ specific pedagogies considered to be preferred by Indigenous students in general. They are appreciative of reflective educators who adopt a variety of pedagogies in order to communicate authentically with all students.

Sixth, ongoing professional development that challenges teachers to become knowledgeable about the different ways of learning that are equally legitimate and appropriate in diverse teaching contexts is needed at St Mary's. This professional development would encourage teachers to employ a wide range of pedagogies that ensures quality relationships and communication with Indigenous students.

Seventh, St Mary's Indigenous support staff form an essential relationship between Indigenous students and their families, non-Indigenous teachers and the College leadership. This relationship allows for a better understanding of cultural differences that encourages positive learning outcomes for all students. Non-Indigenous teachers' valuing of Indigenous aides and elders as co-educators in the classroom is essential for the successful implementation of inclusive education policies.

List of Abbreviations

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACU	Australian Catholic University
AE	Aboriginal English
AHMAC	Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
Indigenous	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
IndigenousC	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission
CCE	Congregation of Catholic Education
COAG	Council of Australian Government
CSJT	Catholic Social Justice Theory
CST	Catholic Social Teaching
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DET	Department of Education and Training
MATSITI	More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
NCEC	National Catholic Education Commission
NICHD	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
P&F	Parents and Friends
QBTR	Queensland Board of Teacher Registration
QCEC	Queensland Catholic Education Commission
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
SAE	Standard Australian English
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning

SRC	Student Representative Council
SSI	Stronger Smarter Institute
TSI	Torres Strait Island
UWA	University of Western Australia
WHO	World Health Organisation

Glossary

Aboriginal people: Those people who have inhabited a land from the earliest known period or before the arrival of colonists. There is evidence of Aboriginal people having existed on the Australian mainland for more than 60,000 years.

Closing the Gap: An Australian government strategy that seeks to lessen disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This strategy has five foci: lifespan; child mortality; early childhood education; achievement at school; and employment outcomes.

Inclusive education: A policy of not excluding people who might otherwise be excluded or marginalized on the basis of ability, race or gender. Such a policy ensures that all students are supported to learn, contribute and participate in their education and that schools are engaging places for all community members.

Indigenous: Indigenous people are people defined in international legislation as having a set of explicit rights based on their historical ties to a particular territory and their cultural distinctiveness from other populations that are often politically dominant.

Mainstream: “Mainstream education” in Australia describes those schools that offer a curriculum as mandated by the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA). These schools are not exclusive to students of a specific cultural minority or students displaying specific learning needs.

Non-Indigenous People: Those people who have migrated to Australia who are not descendants of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.

Torres Strait Islander: People who have originated from any of the Torres Strait Islands that are geographically located to the north of Australia and south of Papua-New Guinea and/or their mainland descendents.

Chapter 1: Identifying the Research Problem

1.1 Introduction

I have been involved in secondary education for twenty-three years. After completing seven years as a classroom teacher in three different regional schools in the Queensland State education system, I transferred to the Catholic education sector. I have spent the last sixteen years in this system at three different schools in the roles of classroom teacher and school leader. Overall, I have experienced secondary education in different State education regions and Catholic dioceses, in diverse schools, across many different regional towns and cities in Queensland. Throughout these varying systems, schools and places, I have held numerous, different and challenging middle and senior leadership positions. I have also experienced teaching Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students from diverse backgrounds and developed professional and personal relationships with their families.

This research is conducted in St Mary's Catholic College (SMCC) in the diocese of Cairns. I was appointed Principal of this College in 2011, having been employed there as Deputy Principal (Pastoral Care) for the previous five years. During this time, I was the acting Principal at Mount St Bernard College, Herberton (see Figure 1.1). Prior to this, I was Deputy and Assistant Principal at Mercy College, Mackay, in the Catholic diocese of Rockhampton.

SMCC is a diverse community of many cultures. Approximately 10% of students identify as having Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage. My interest in this study was inspired by a personal experience of working with Indigenous students and families in school contexts and also by a professional commitment to ensuring a safe and supportive student learning environment. Specifically, I have a particular interest in the influence that culture may have on school learning. Thus, I decided to explore St Mary's Indigenous students' and parents' experience of education and also the implementation of inclusive education policies that may influence this experience.

1.2 Research Context

The diocese of Cairns encompasses a geographical area that stretches from Cardwell in the south to the State's western border and north to the Torres Strait Islands. There are twenty-nine schools in this diocese, eight of which are secondary Colleges that are clustered around the population centres of Cairns, the Atherton Tablelands and Innisfail. This geographical area is shown in Figure 1.1.

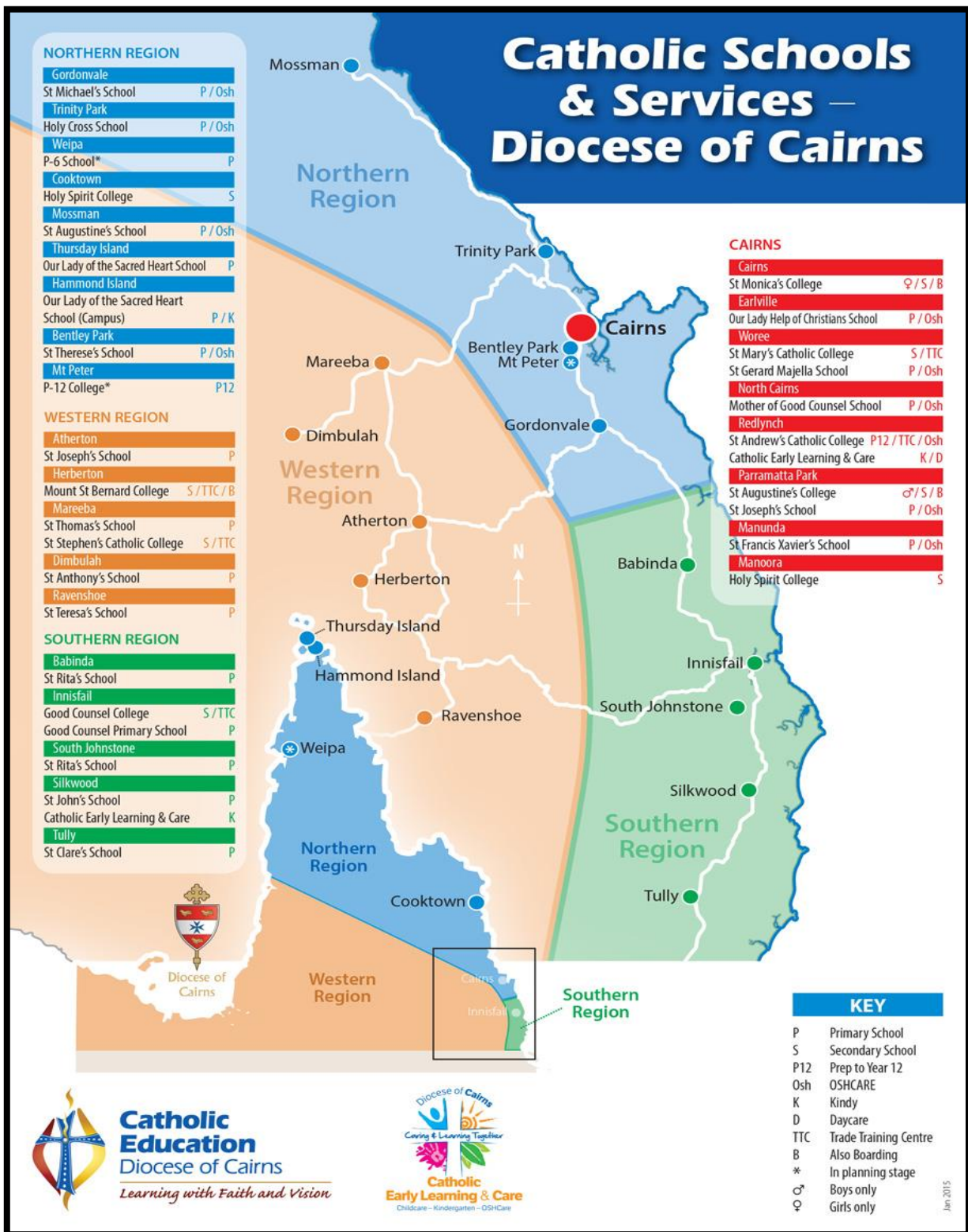


Figure 1.1. Geographical map of the diocese of Cairns (Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns. (2016b). *Catholic schools & services – Diocese of Cairns*. Retrieved from: <http://www.cns.catholic.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/CE-Schools-Services-Diocese-Map.pdf>

The College is administered by Catholic Education Services, Cairns. Approximately 50% of St Mary's students and teachers are Catholic. It was established in 1986 as the third Catholic secondary school in Cairns, the first two being long-established, traditional Mercy girls' and Marist boys' schools in the city centre.¹ Competition with these schools for student enrolments has influenced St Mary's to develop marketing strategies that promote innovation and inclusion, rather than traditionalism and elitism. St Mary's offers an authentic Catholic education that is characterised by quality teaching, respect for humanity and commitment to social justice. The SMCC website presents information about the College's vision and mission (<http://www.smcc.qld.edu.au>). Since its foundation, St Mary's students have earned a reputation for high academic achievement. More recently, this reputation has embraced vocational education and the College is a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) that educates apprentices and trainees and provides employees to local industries.

St Mary's is located in Woree, a southern suburb of Cairns and is geographically situated adjacent to two large State government schools and a private secondary school at Woree, Mount Sheridan and White Rock respectively (Figure 1.2).

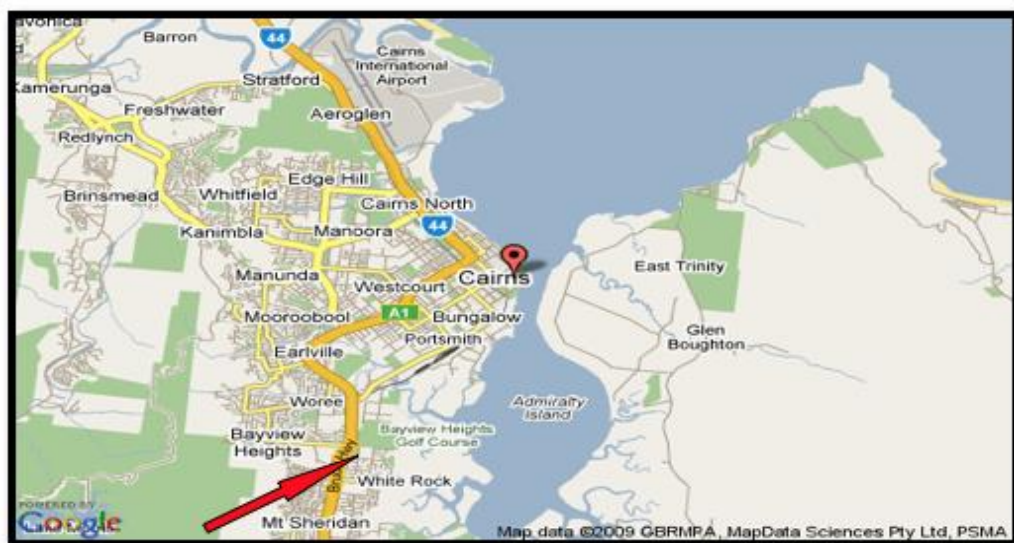


Figure 1.2. Geographical map of Cairns (retrieved 02.12.15 from <https://maps.google.com.au>). The arrow reveals the location of St Mary's.

St Mary's student enrolments are influenced by a fluctuating Cairns economy that is heavily reliant on the tourism industry. Consequently, incoming student transfers from

¹ These two secondary colleges are currently administered by Cairns Catholic Education Services.

neighbouring government schools are common and subject to household income. Additionally, outgoing student transfers to neighbouring government schools are also common, even though St Mary's has a policy of subsidising or waiving fees for needy students.

In summary, the College demographics are characterised by an increasingly transient, multi-faith and multi-cultural community of families that range from the affluent to the poor. As such, it is a microcosm of the larger society in which it is situated. The focus of this research concerns the experience of Indigenous students and parents of education within this St Mary's society.

1.3 Research Purpose, Problem and Questions

This research intends to study how Indigenous students and parents experience education at St Mary's. Chapter 2 of this study describes the research problem in detail and justifies the research purpose.

A literature review is presented in Chapter 3, from which three specific research questions are generated for this study. These are:

1. How do Indigenous students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?
2. How do Indigenous parents experience the education of their children at St Mary's?
3. How do Indigenous students and parents experience the implementation of inclusivity policies at St Mary's?

1.4 Research Design

Table 1.1 summarises the research design. Constant Comparative Analysis is the primary process of analysing data in this study. See Chapter 4, Section 4.10 for a detailed description of the data analysis used.

Table 1.1
Research Design

Epistemology	Constructionism
Research Paradigm	Interpretivism
Theoretical Perspectives	Symbolic interactionism Indigenous perspectives
Research Methodology	Case study
Participants	Purposive selection
Data Gathering Strategies	Document analysis Focus group interviews Individual, in-depth interviews

The components of this research design are briefly outlined below.

1.4.1 Epistemology.

A constructionist epistemology is appropriate for this study as it contends that truth and meaning are not objective, but constructed from engagement with the world (Crotty, 1998). How Indigenous students and parents interpret the world has been informed by their cultures and experiences with Australian society.

1.4.2 Research paradigm.

The research paradigm of interpretivism assumes that knowledge is gained through social interaction (O'Donohue, 2007) and, as such, is the adopted research paradigm for this study. Interpretivism contends that the world may be understood from the perspective of individual actors within that world (Candy, 1989). This research explores the experience of St Mary's Indigenous students and parents.

1.4.3 Theoretical perspective.

At the centre of the symbolic interactionism perspective is the understanding that human beings act toward people, events and objects based on the meanings that these entities have for them. Symbolic interactionism emphasises how social interaction influences these meanings. Further, when individuals relate to people, events and objects, they adopt an interpretive process through which meanings are modified (Blumer, 1998). The educational experience of Indigenous students is shown to be a socially interactive process whereby

students make meaning from and are influenced by their relationships with persons, cultures and contexts.

1.4.4 Research methodology.

Case study is the research methodology adopted in the study. Case study offers a holistic focus that facilitates as full an understanding of the case as possible in order to shed light on a particular phenomenon (Punch, 2005). It focuses attention on the participants' perspectives and the intricacies of each setting, and uses local knowledge and views to arrive at understandings which are insightful and persuasive (Yin, 2003). The study focuses on the experience of Indigenous students and their parents within the specific context of a secondary school setting.

1.4.5 Participants.

The participants in this study are St Mary's Indigenous students, Indigenous parents/guardians and Indigenous and non-Indigenous teaching staff. All Indigenous students, their parents and Indigenous staff were invited to be research participants. Non-Indigenous teachers were invited according to their variously expressed attitudes concerning the value of inclusive education.

1.4.6 Data gathering strategies.

Strategies selected for the gathering of information in this study are:

- Document analysis;
- Focus group interviews ($n = 54$ participants in 13 groups); and
- Individual, semi-structured, interviews ($n = 25$ participants).

1.5 Significance of the Research

Research into how Indigenous students and their parents experience education at St Mary's is important for seven reasons:

First, this research will contribute to the research on Indigenous students' engagement within the context of mainstream, secondary schooling. Understanding roles, establishing relationships with staff and other students and experiencing a sense of belonging to a school community enable non-Indigenous students to better engage in the learning process (Polit & Beck, 2004).

Second, this research will contribute to theoretical understandings about pedagogies and ways of learning that are relevant to minority groups. Educators who incorporate diverse

viewpoints into the classroom and refrain from promoting homogenous perspectives as universal beliefs, allow for students of all cultural backgrounds to achieve (Hill, 2008; Pace & Hemmings, 2007; Yunkaporta, 2009).

Third, this research listens to the views of Indigenous parents and students concerning the implementation of inclusive education policies. How strategies promoting these policies are judged by those who are most affected will determine their success.

Fourth, this research explores barriers to Indigenous student learning in secondary education and endeavours to illuminate ways that these might be reduced.

Fifth, this research explores the roles of Indigenous educators and examines their influence on the wellbeing and achievement of Indigenous students. It also explores how Indigenous educators may contribute to the ongoing professional development and learning of non-Indigenous educators.

Sixth, this research gives insight into ways of building community within a school. It endeavours to demonstrate how the celebration of cultural diversity is important in generating a positive school culture where all may experience a sense of belonging.

Last, this research explains how Catholic school culture is appreciated by Indigenous parents and examines its influence on the wellbeing of their families.

1.6 Thesis Outline

The structure of this thesis is outlined briefly below.

Chapter 1: Identifying the research problem.

This chapter introduces a personal and local context for the research problem. It provides an overview of the research design and offers reasons for the significance of the research.

Chapter 2: Defining the research problem.

This chapter offers a context in which the contemporary issues of Indigenous students in secondary schooling may be understood. It clarifies the research problem and purpose and articulates a general research question.

Chapter 3: Literature review.

This chapter offers a review of literature that is associated with issues underpinning the research problem. As such, it explores three major themes: teaching and learning; the

influence of family; and policies of inclusivity. This exploration generated the three specific research questions.

Chapter 4: Research design.

This chapter describes and rationalises the research design. It provides a theoretical framework, details the research methodology and justifies the selection of participants. It also explains data gathering strategies, the analysis of this data and ways in which they are verified.

Chapter 5: Research understandings.

This chapter presents understandings generated from participants through focus group and individual interviews. These understandings represent the researcher's interpretation of the perceived multiple realities documented in the data.

Chapter 6: Discussion of the new understandings.

This chapter provides a detailed discussion of new understandings generated by the research. It identifies themes that emerged from a synthesis of these new understandings and situates these within other research settings.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and recommendations.

This chapter identifies the research conclusions and suggests recommendations concerning policy and practice based on the new understandings.

Chapter 2: Defining the Research Problem

2.1 Introduction

In this chapter I explain the context in which to appreciate the contemporary issues of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) students in secondary schooling. This chapter aims to generate and justify the research problem.

2.2 Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework depicts the structure and sequence of the concepts explored. This is diagrammatically presented in Figure 2.1.

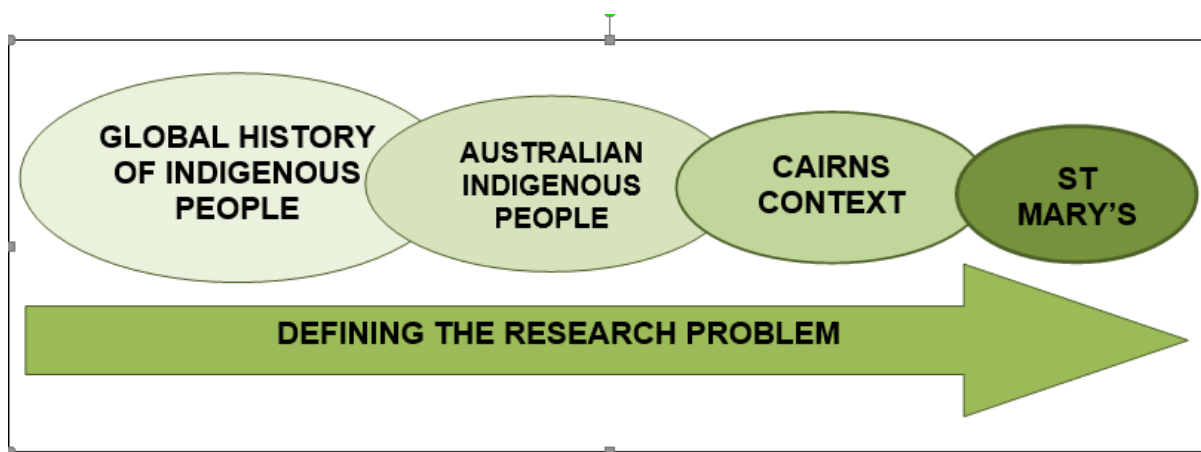


Figure 2.1. Conceptualising the research problem.

The research problem, identified in Chapter 1, is situated in a broader context than the location of this case study. The research began with an exploration of the experience of Indigenous peoples in a global context, before examining the positioning of Indigenous people in Australian society. Following this, the social, cultural and historical context of Indigenous people in the local area of Cairns and Far North Queensland is explored before concentrating on the experience of education for Indigenous students at SMCC. This experience becomes the focus of the research. The chapter concludes with an articulation of the research problem.

2.3 Global Context

Indigenous peoples of many countries have experienced the harmful effects of colonialism (Alfred, 2009). Each historical manifestation of colonialism contains three key aspects: the settlement of Indigenous lands; the exploitation of the resources of those lands;

and the subjugation of Indigenous others, supported by ideological formations of Indigenous inferiority (Said, 1994). There are commonalities and differences in the histories of different countries; however, discourses focus on the assumed inferiority of Indigenous peoples that colonial states used to justify hegemonic practices (Neu & Graham, 2006). Colonial governments ensured their authority was unchallenged through the construction of discourses promoting the colonised as “a population of degenerate types on the basis of racial origin, in order to justify conquest and to establish systems of administration and instruction” (Hight & Sampson, 2013, p. 6). Through use and repetition, discourses of Indigenous inferiority assumed the status of fact and knowledge upon which governments formulated policies and practices by which to govern Indigenous peoples. These left Indigenous peoples disempowered and disadvantaged in their homelands where colonisers did not respect their religions, languages or ways of life. Also, colonial authorities controlled the activities of Indigenous peoples (Neu & Graham, 2006). Education became the instrument for translating and implementing government programs aiming to *civilise* these populations.

2.4 Australian Context

The history of the Indigenous people of Australia is rich and diverse. They have inhabited this land for approximately 70,000 years (Dortch & Hesp, 1994). Throughout this time, Indigenous people established territories based on kinship formations and tribes. They were not socially interconnected as a unified people; however, each clan and territory had their own cultural, spiritual and linguistic heritages and traditions (Clarke, 2002). Consequently, there is no one Australian Indigenous culture.

At the time of colonisation, the number of Indigenous people in Australia is thought to have exceeded 600,000 (Clarke, 2002). However, unlike the colonised Indigenous people of other countries, the diverse clans of Indigenous people did not amalgamate, but pursued their individual cultural heritages. This resulted in an unstable relationship between Indigenous peoples as each clan believed the other to be “uncouth and not knowing how to behave properly or lawfully” (Clarke, 2002, p. 19). From the perspective of the colonisers who mistakenly theorised all Aboriginal people as belonging to one group, this cultural conflict between clans was further evidence of their primitive status. Moreover, the claim that the land had no occupants—*terra nullius*—offers a rationale for the ongoing experiences of disadvantage suffered by Indigenous people in Australia (McCarthy, 2013).

The term ‘Indigenous people of Australia’ comprises people who are of Aboriginal origin, Torres Strait Islander origin or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin. The Australian Bureau of Statistics definition of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is:

a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as being of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin and who is accepted as such by the community with which the person associates (ABS, 2014).

Traditionally, Western scientific definitions of the Indigenous people of Australia referred to terms such as ‘half-caste’ and ‘quadroon’ that indicated ‘blood percentages’ (Australian Museum, 2014). However, this one-dimensional definition is offensive to Indigenous people of Australia whose identities encompass many aspects and contexts that ultimately define them. These may include connections to place/country, language groups, family relationships, cultural beliefs, value systems and Indigenous ways of knowing and being (Australian Museum, 2014).

In this study, I am aware that cultural values and attitudes are reflected in the structures and meanings of language. This means that language cannot be regarded as a neutral or unproblematic medium and can cause or reflect discrimination due to its intricate links with society and culture. Hence, the the terms ‘Indigenous’, ‘Torres Strait Islander’ and ‘Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander’ used in this study accord with the ABS definition and also have been discussed with and considered appropriate by the Indigenous people taking part in this study.

2.4.1 Missions and reserves.

The perceived primitiveness of Indigenous people provided a lens through which they were concluded to be spiritually and culturally poor and therefore thought by non-Indigenous people to be in need of Western cultural and spiritual enlightenment. A number of religious organisations founded Aboriginal missions in central locations that were removed from traditional lands (State Library of Queensland, 2016). These missions served the purposes of:

- removing Indigenous peoples from larger settlements and towns;
- ensuring a form of cheap labour; and
- proselytising and converting Indigenous peoples to Christianity (Short, 2016; University of Queensland, 2016).

Thus, the missionaries’ goal was to bring the gospel to the people, rescue the lost souls and encourage them to embrace the ideal state (Nakata, 2007). Consequently, these missionaries, ignorant of Indigenous culture, imposed Western cultural reforms as a means of civilising Indigenous people.

The *Aboriginals Protection and Restriction of the Sale of Opium Act 1897 (Qld.)* sanctioned State government-established reserves. Subsequently, religious institutes that

conducted missions on these reserves were authorised to perform their evangelical function as well as the controlling work of the state government (State Library of Queensland, 2016). This meant that the totality of Indigenous people's lives was controlled by the state and the missionaries. Indeed, this and subsequent acts (the *Aborigines Preservation and Protection Act* and the *Torres Strait Islander Act*), denied Indigenous people their legal rights. These included the right to vote, to move about without restriction, to possess or consume alcohol, to access ancestral lands or the justice system, or marry without the consent of the State or missionaries (McCarthy, 2013). In addition, some Indigenous people were forcefully, though legally, separated from their families, experienced their children being stolen from their homes and were compelled to be employed for minimum earnings (University of Queensland, 2016).

2.4.2 The Stolen Generations.

Early Australian governments classified Indigenous people into two biological groups, namely, full-bloods and half-castes. The first term identified Indigenous people whose ancestors were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. The second term refers to Indigenous people of "mixed descent" (Short, 2016, p. 89). This means that some ancestors included non-Indigenous people. The increasing number of people from this category concerned successive Australian governments. Consequently, a policy of eugenics was adopted with the aim of "breeding out colour" (Native Administration Act, 1936; Short, 2016, p. 89). The *Native Administration Act* of 1936 prohibited sexual relations between Indigenous people and Europeans and required all Indigenous people to seek permission to be married. All Indigenous children were under the control of the government appointed Protector. As a result, those of mixed descent were forcibly removed from their families in order to undergo a program of cultural absorption and subsequently contribute effectively to society. This program, now known as the Stolen Generations, resulted in the inescapable experience of socio-economic disadvantage for Indigenous people (Flood, 2006).

2.4.3 Implications for education.

The successful referendum of 1967 to alter the Australian Constitution resulted in Indigenous people moving towards self-determination and independence (Attwood, 2007). Since then, many government and non-government initiatives have targeted equitable outcomes for Indigenous people, who yet remain and are acknowledged as the most disadvantaged group in Australian society today (Malin & Maidment, 2003). The Karmel Report on Australian Education (1975) became the catalyst for increased research on Indigenous education. Since then, a policy focus on Indigenous education has occurred at

both the state and federal levels of government. As a result of the Karmel Report, the National Aboriginal Consultative Group was established as a separate committee to review the education of Indigenous Australians (Schwab, 1995). Research, not unexpectedly, has identified major deficiencies in literacy and numeracy of Indigenous students. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2011-2014 was endorsed by each State government. This Plan outlines strategies for addressing educational disadvantage by identifying six priority areas. These are: school readiness; parent and community engagement; school attendance; literacy and numeracy; quality leadership and teaching; and pathways to post-school options (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA], 2010, p. 5).

Despite the political and social rights extended to Indigenous people as a consequence of the 1967 Referendum, the generational disadvantage experienced by them has current implications. Four indicators of inequity for contemporary Australian Indigenous people are demography, life expectancy, early childhood development and education. In all of these, Indigenous Australians compare less favourably to their non-Indigenous counterparts (ABS, 2012b, 2014, 2016; Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council, 2015).

2.4.3.1 Demography.

The resident Indigenous population of Australia in the 2006 census was 517,000 people. In the 2011 census, this figure rose to 669,900, representing 3% of the total Australian population (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], (2011). This means that between 2006 and 2011 the Indigenous population increased by 4.2% per year on average, compared with 1.6% for the total Australian population. However, these growth figures do not necessarily indicate an overall enhancement of lifestyle or improvement in wellbeing. Most of the growth in the Indigenous population is evidenced in the lower age brackets and not sustained in the higher ones (see Figure 2.2).

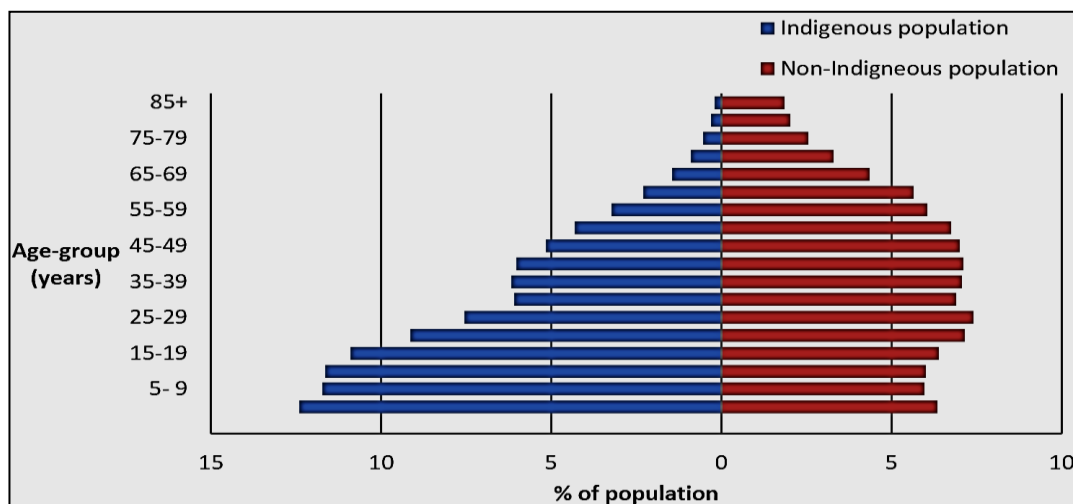


Figure 2.2. Population of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, 2011 (Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011). Infant mortality rates in Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians 1991-2010. (Cat. No. 4704.0). Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4704.0Chapter840Oct%202010>)

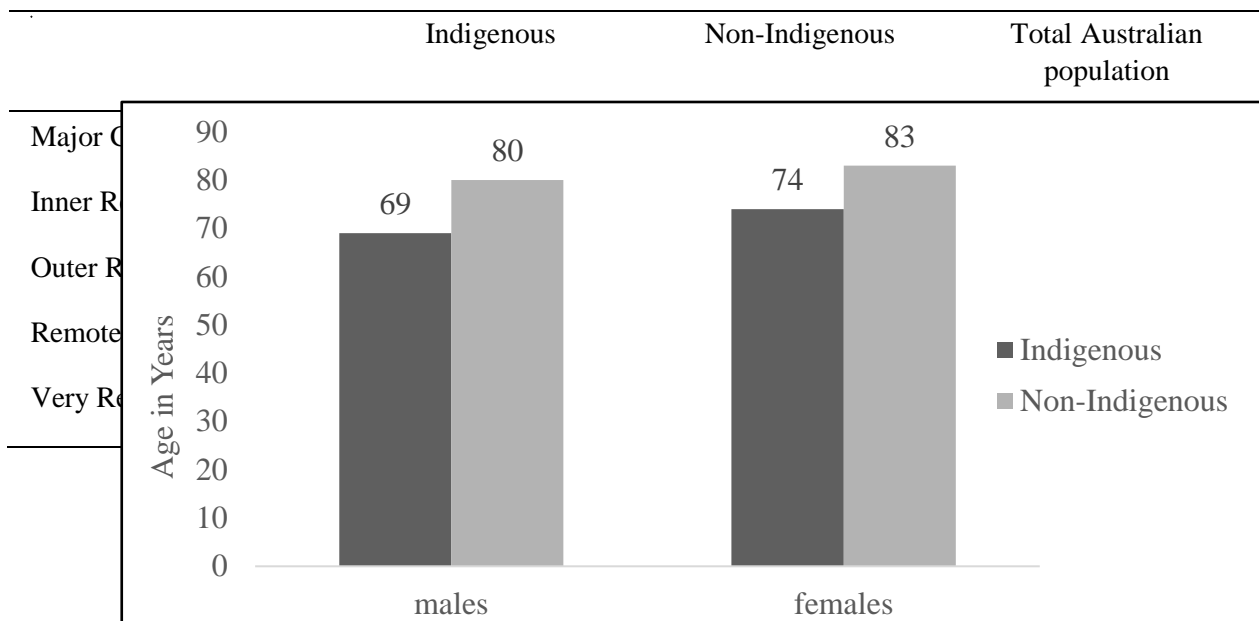
Figure 2.2 demonstrates that Indigenous people have a younger age population structure than non-Indigenous Australians. A larger proportion of Indigenous people are young people and a smaller proportion are represented in older categories. In 2011, more than one-third of Indigenous people were younger than 15 years compared to one-fifth of non-Indigenous people. Almost 3.5% of Indigenous Australians were 65 years or older, whereas the percentage of non-Indigenous Australians in this age group was 14% (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2013). The median age of the Indigenous population is 21.8 years, compared to 37.6 years for the non-Indigenous population (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, 2013). These dissimilar age profiles indicate the higher rates of both fertility and morbidity happening at earlier ages among the Indigenous population when compared to the non-Indigenous population. This indicates a poorer standard of living, particularly in relation to health.

Overall, Indigenous Australians experience poorer general health when compared to the non-Indigenous population (ABS, 2012b). Social and economic disadvantage are contributing factors, as is limited access to quality health care that is exacerbated by geographic location (ABS, 2013a). As shown in Table 2.1, 43.2% of Indigenous people reside in outer regional, remote or very remote parts of Australia (see Table 2.1).

Table 2.1

Percentage of Resident Indigenous Population, Remoteness Areas

Geographical Areas	Percentage of Resident Population (%)
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Note: The numbers represented in the ‘Total Australian population’ column are a combination of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2016). *Schools, Australia, 2013. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Retention rate, year 7/8 to year 12, Indigenous students, 2010–2015.* (Cat. No. 4221.0). Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/4221.0Main%20Features402015?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4221.0&issue=2015&num=&view=>

Figure 2.3. Expectations of life at birth for Indigenous and non-Indigenous population, 2010–2012 (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet. (2013). *Overview of Indigenous population statistics.* Retrieved from <http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au>)

As demonstrated in Table 2.1, most Indigenous people live in major cities and regional centres, however, they constitute a higher percentage of the population as their remoteness increases. Approximately 25% of Indigenous people over the age of 15 years reported experiencing difficulties accessing health services (ABS, 2014). Of these, approximately 20% had difficulties accessing dentists, 10% had difficulties accessing doctors and 7% had difficulties accessing hospitals. The greatest barriers were long waiting times or services being unavailable when required (52%). Poor social and economic circumstances affect health throughout life. This is exacerbated by the limited access to quality health facilities for Indigenous people who reside in remote areas of Australia and this influences their lifestyle and lifespan negatively.

2.4.3.2 Life expectancy.

Life expectancy is an important measure of the health status of a population. Life expectancy for Indigenous people has increased in recent years. The life expectancy for Indigenous males born between 2010 and 2012 is 69.1 years, and for Indigenous females born between these years, the life expectancy is 73.7 years. However, this compares with 79.7 for non-Indigenous

males and 83.1 for non-Indigenous females (ABS, 2014). Figure 2.3 compares the life expectancy of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia.

Indigenous people across all age groups have higher death rates than non-Indigenous Australians in specific categories. Although the overall health of Indigenous people is improving, they are still not as healthy as non-Indigenous Australians. Indigenous people are five times more likely than non-Indigenous Australians to die from endocrine, nutritional and metabolic conditions, such as diabetes. Also, Indigenous people are three times more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to die of digestive conditions (Australian Indigenous HealthInfonet, 2013). There are complex reasons for the poor health of Indigenous people, including socio-economic status and access to culturally appropriate services or support. There are sizeable deficits in all health professions that are needed to service Indigenous communities. Comparing world Indigenous populations, there is nothing unique about the disease pattern of the Australian Indigenous population. The death rate statistics above relate to treatable and preventable conditions and, as such, are unacceptable according to health indicators which measure overall societal wellbeing (Ring & Brown, 2002).

Even more than for the general population, a key indicator of a disadvantaged people is infant mortality (see Figure 2.4).

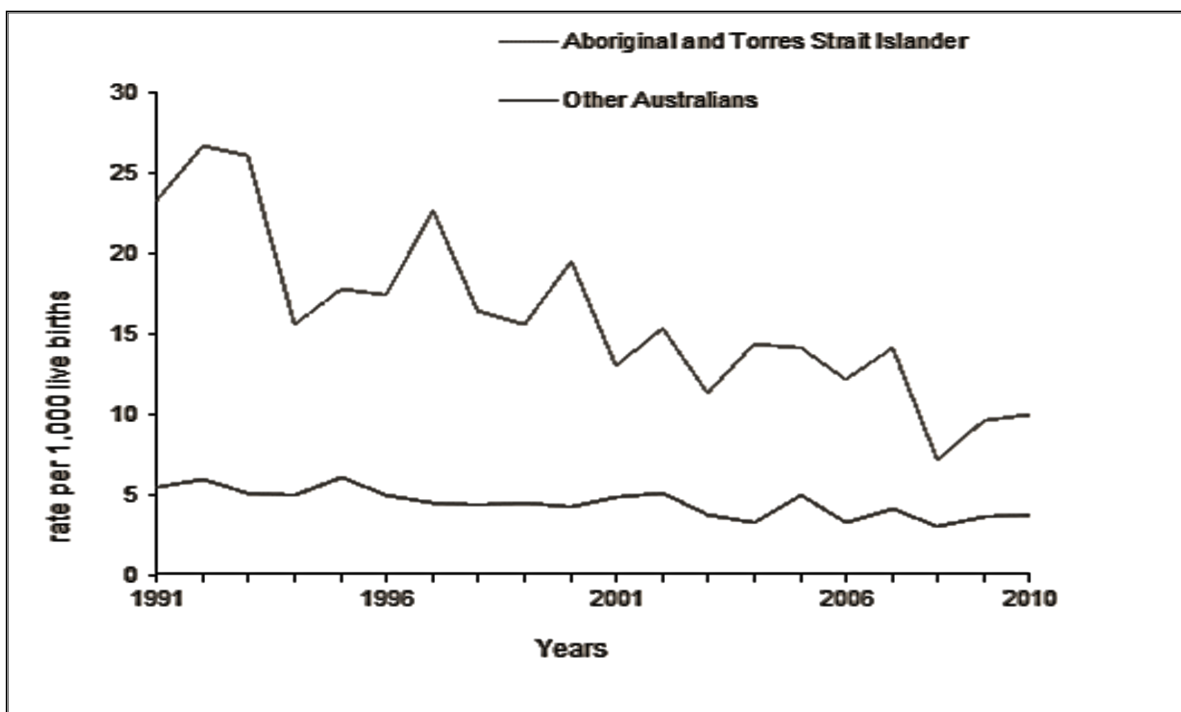


Figure 2.4. Infant mortality rates in Indigenous and other Australians 1991–2010 (Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2011). Infant mortality rates in Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians 1991-2010. (Cat. No. 4704.0). Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Lookup/4704.0Chapter840Oct%202010>)

As shown in Figure 2.4, babies born to Indigenous women are at least twice as likely to die in their first year as those born to non-Indigenous women (Australian Indigenous HealthInfonet, 2013). In recent years, the World Health Organisation (WHO) has emphasised the marked disparities in maternal and child health outcomes in low and middle-income countries (World Health Organisation, 2006). However, this has not been matched by equivalent attention to the disparities affecting Indigenous populations in high income countries. In the Australian context, Indigenous families continue to experience rates of still birth, premature birth, low birthweight and neonatal death that are 2–3 times higher than non-Indigenous families (Brown et al., 2016).

The high infant mortality rate of Indigenous people is not indicative of this nation’s poor overall health, but related to socio-economic disadvantage and the social and environmental conditions in which Indigenous children develop (Ring & Brown, 2002; Zhao, Condon, Li, Guthridge, & Chondur, 2013). In 2011, as shown in Figure 2.5, Indigenous people were over-represented in most disadvantaged areas when graded according to the ABS index of relative socio-economic advantage/disadvantage (ABS, 2013b).

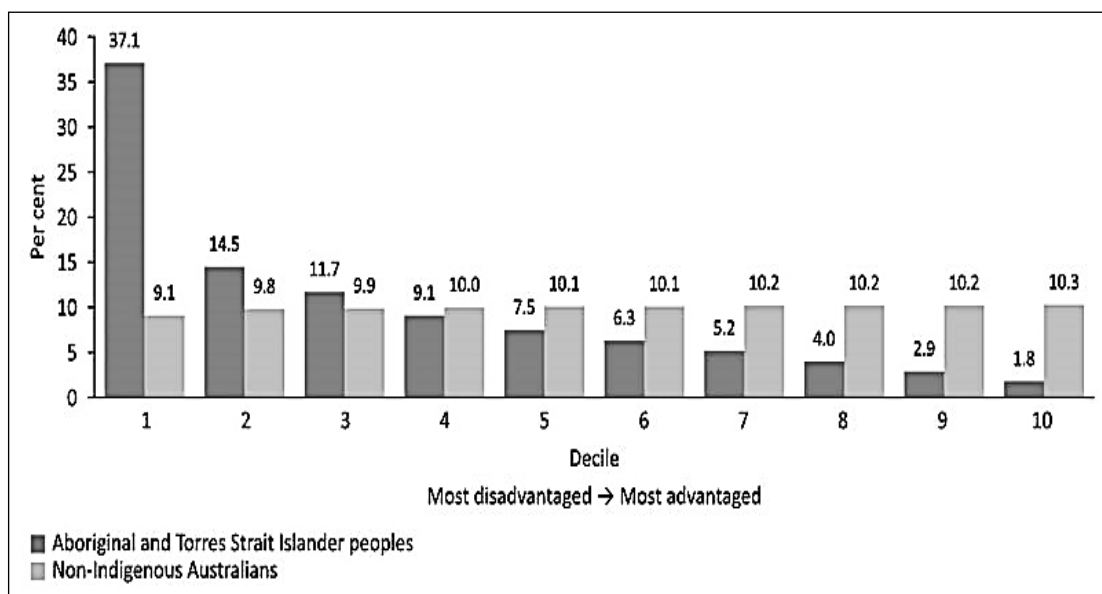


Figure 2.5. Population distribution by advantage/disadvantage, by Indigenous status in 2013. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013b) *Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, June 2011*. (Cat. No. 3238.0.55.001). Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/3238.0.55.001June%202011>

2.4.3.3 Early childhood development.

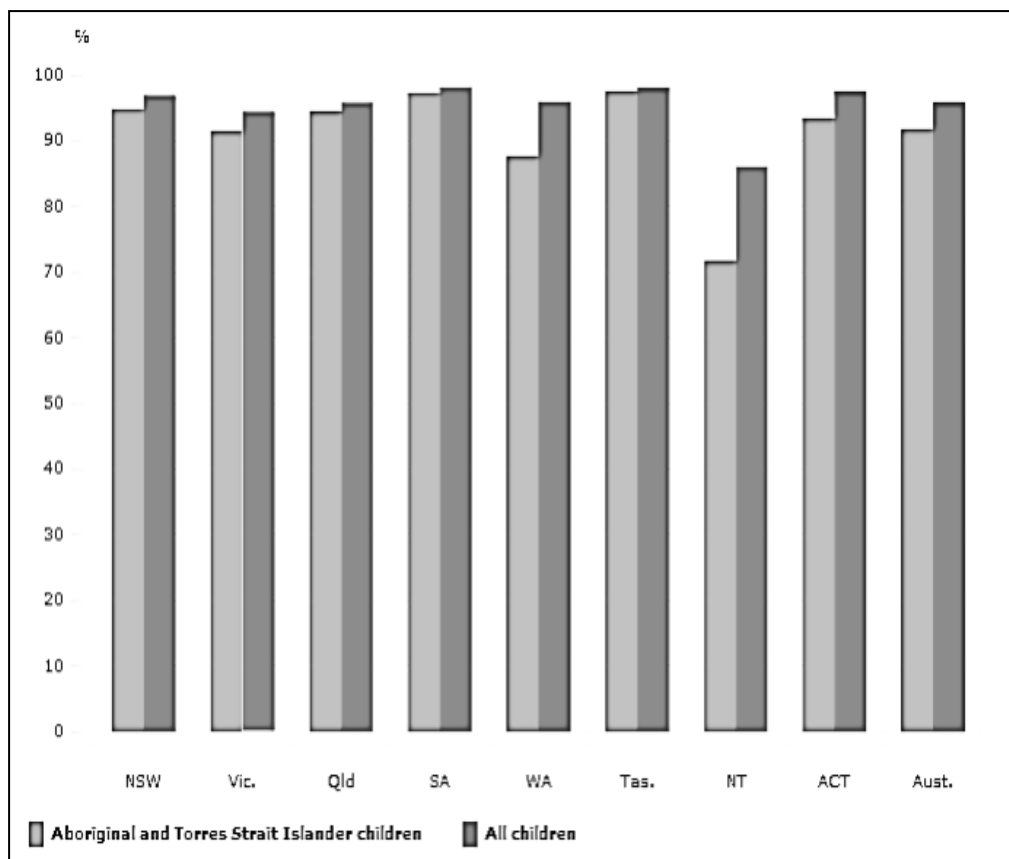
The early childhood experiences of many Indigenous children compare negatively with non-Indigenous children and have an effect on health and education outcomes in later life. Child and maternal health, quality pre-school attendance and family functionality influence early childhood development that is vital to Indigenous children and their communities.

In 2013, 6% of births registered in Australia were from Indigenous parent/s (ABS, 2014). Overall, Indigenous women had more children—2.3 births compared with 1.9 births for all Australian women—and had children earlier than non-Indigenous women. Approximately 18% of Indigenous mothers were teenagers, compared to 3% of non-Indigenous mothers (ABS, 2014).

Birth weight and premature births are influenced by the age and the overall health and behaviour of the mother during pregnancy. Low birth weight can increase the risk of a child's developing health problems. The likelihood of babies born to Indigenous mothers being of low birth weight is twice that of babies born to non-Indigenous mothers. In 2012, babies born to Indigenous mothers weighed an average of 3,211 grams, 162 grams less than those born to non-Indigenous mothers (Li, Zeki, Hilder, & Sullivan, 2013) and the likelihood of these babies being stillborn or dying within their first twenty-eight days doubled (ABS, 2011).

Children of younger mothers in Indigenous communities have demonstrably poorer outcomes in developmental milestones compared to non-Indigenous children (ABS, 2012b). Also, the prevalence of poor hearing conditions is higher among Indigenous children aged 0–14 years (10%) than non-Indigenous children (3%). Long-term ear infections and consequent hearing loss affect learning ability and are a major inhibitor of early school performance (ABS, 2012b).

Participation in quality early childhood education programs may assist in developing the social and cognitive abilities necessary to learn and achieve at school. Consequently, pre-school education is crucial for those children from disadvantaged backgrounds. However, the percentage of Indigenous children engaged in pre-school educational programs is lower than the percentage of all children as shown in Figure 2.6.



Note: The numbers represented in the ‘All children’ columns are a combination of Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians.

Figure 2.6. Proportion of Indigenous children attending pre-school in 2012-2013 from each state and territory of Australia as well as Australia-wide. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013a). Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health survey: First results, Australia, 2012–13. (Cat. No. 4727.0.55.001). Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4727.0.55.0012012-13?OpenDocument>

Safe and secure family environments protect children from physical and emotional harm. Indigenous children are over-represented in areas where child safety and security are compromised. They have higher rates of hospitalisations and fatal injuries than non-Indigenous children. They are also more likely to be victims of child abuse, neglect and sexual assault (ABS, 2013a).

Between 2010 and 2012, the hospitalisation rate for injury of Indigenous children was 1.3 times that for non-Indigenous children. The hospitalisation rate for assault of Indigenous children was more than 5 times the rate for non-Indigenous children and, in 2011, approximately 26% of all deaths among Indigenous children were due to injury (ABS, 2013a). Figure 2.7 compares the most common cause of deaths from injury for Indigenous and non-Indigenous children.

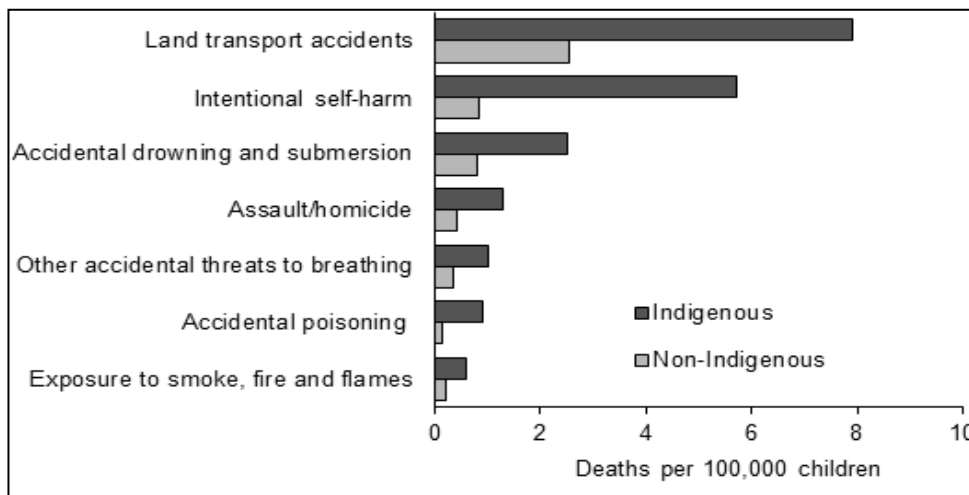


Figure 2.5. Deaths due to injury among children across Australia by Indigenous status 2007–2011. Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013a). Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health survey: First results, Australia, 2012–13. (Cat. No. 4727.0.55.001). Retrieved from <http://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4727.0.55.0012012-13?OpenDocument>

Compared to non-Indigenous children during 2011–12, Indigenous children were:

- Eight times as likely to be the subject of substantiated child abuse or neglect (42 per 1000 children compared with 5 per 1000);
- 10 times as likely to be on government Care and Protection orders (55 per 1000 children compared with 6 per 1000); and
- 10 times as likely to be in out-of-home care (55 per 1000 children compared with 5 per 1000) (ABS, 2013a).

2.4.3.4 Education.

In 2011, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) set specific targets aligned to *closing the gap* between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. These were:

1. to close the life expectancy gap within a generation;
2. to halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five years of age within a decade;
3. to ensure access to early childhood education for all four years old Indigenous children in remote communities within five years;
4. to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade;

5. to halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rates by 2020; and
6. to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade (Australian Government. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2011).

The last four targets relate to education, an area that may assist in overcoming other adversities. At higher levels of educational attainment, there is no difference in the employment rate of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Karmel, Misko, Blomberg, & Atkinson, 2014). However, Indigenous people with minimal educational achievement are apt to be poorer in health, have lower earnings and a diminished likelihood of employment (Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council, 2015).

A recent study of the disparity in school achievement outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students concluded that approximately 20% can be attributed to Indigenous students' poor attendance at school (Biddle, 2014). Further, as illustrated in Table 2.2, poor school attendance for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students increases with remoteness. In acknowledgement of this, COAG set a new target in 2014, namely, to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years (by 2018) (Australian Government. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016).

Table 2.2

Student Attendance Rates by Indigenous Status and Geographical Location, Semester 1, 2015

Students	Geographical location				
	Metropolitan	Regional	Remote	Very remote	National
Non-Indigenous	93.3%	92.4%	91.9%	91.5%	93.1%
Indigenous	86.5%	85.9%	78.6%	67.4%	83.7%

Note. Comparison of student attendance rates (per cent) for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in various locations within Australia as well as Australia-wide.

Source: Australian Government. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (2016). *Closing the Gap: Prime Minister's Report 2016*. [online] Commonwealth of Australia. Available at: <http://closingthegap.dpmc.gov.au> [Accessed 22 Mar. 2016].

However, little change has occurred in Indigenous student attendance rate from 2014 (83.5%) to 2015 (83.7%) and improvement in this rate will need to accelerate if this target is to be met (Australian Government. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016).

Research (Mahuteau, Karmel, Mayromaras, & Zhu, 2015) has concluded that when Indigenous and non-Indigenous students attain the same level of academic achievement at 15 years of age, there is no meaningful difference in reaching further educational outcomes, for example, completing Year 12 or completing university or vocational training. Therefore, the fourth specific target set by COAG in 2011 is important: to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements within a decade, that is, by 2018. This goal is possible, since, of the eight targeted areas—reading and writing in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, the 2015 results indicate that four are expected to be met by 2018. Nevertheless, the 2015 results in the other four areas were below the required projections for meeting this target by 2018. The challenge is to address these areas so that the future goal of halving the gap in literacy and numeracy may be met (Australian Government. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016).

The fifth specific target identified by COAG in 2011 is to halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2020. This target is expected to be achieved. There have been improvements in Indigenous students’ Year 12 retention rates: from 32% in the late 1990s to 60% in 2014 (Australian Government. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016). However, the proportion of Indigenous students attaining Year 12 is greater in major cities and large regional areas than it is in remote areas. Figure 2.8 illustrates demonstrable improvement in retention rates for Indigenous students.

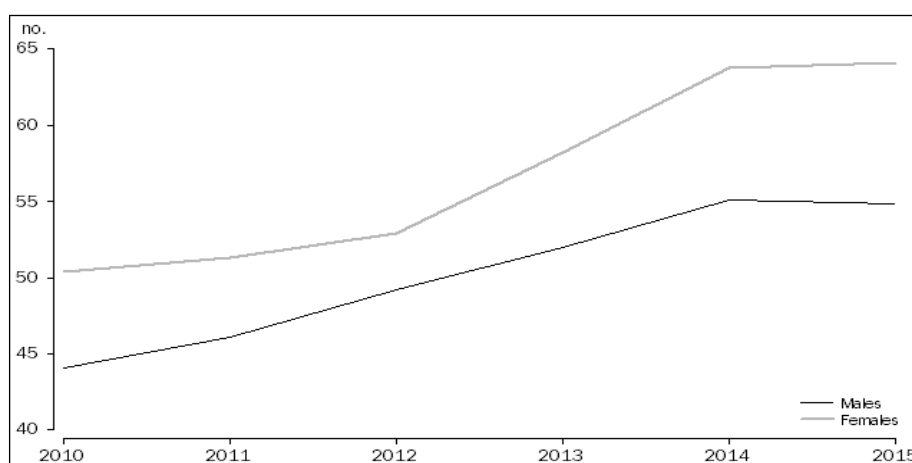


Figure 2.6. Retention rate, Year 7/8 to Year 12, Indigenous students, 2010–2015 (Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2013c). Schools, Australia, 2013: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Apparent retention rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander full-time students, year 7/8 to year 12, states and territories, 2012 and 2013. (Cat. No. 4221.0). Retrieved from

<http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/Previousproducts/4221.0Main%20Features402015?opendocument&tabname=Summary&prodno=4221.0&issue=2015&num=&view=>

The closing the gap strategy is a long-term framework that is underpinned by the respect and unity provided by the 2008 National Apology to Indigenous peoples (Rudd, 2008). It recognises that improving prospects for Indigenous Australians requires serious and sustained effort from government, private and not-for-profit sectors, as well as communities and individuals.

2.5 Local Context: Cairns and Far North Queensland

Cairns is the administrative centre of the Far North Queensland region that stretches west to the Gulf Country and north to the Torres Strait Islands (see Figure 2.9).

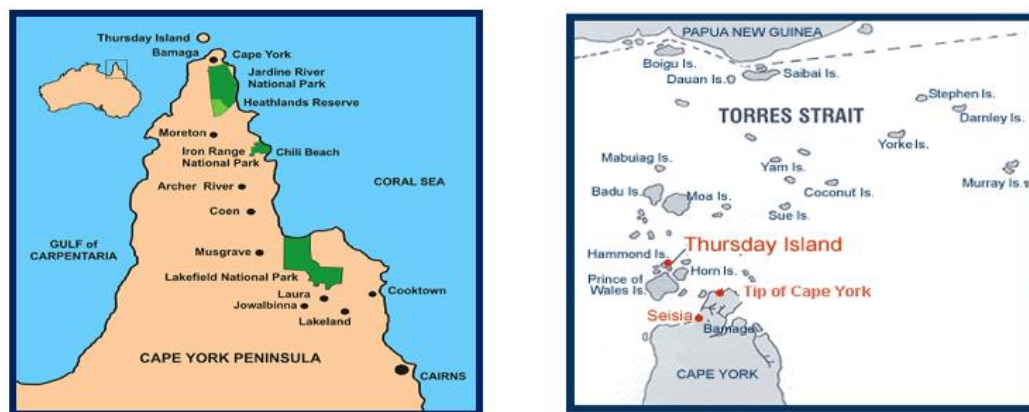


Figure 2.7. Far North Queensland region, including the Torres Strait Islands. (Google, 2017). [Cape York Peninsula] and [Torres Strait]. Retrieved December 27, 2017 from <https://google.com.au>

The region has Australia's only international border with Papua New Guinea (May, 1986) and is home to the oldest continuous cultures on Earth (Dockery, 2010). There are more than sixty Traditional Owner groups (see Figure 2.10) across the region that is inhabited by 25.6% of the State's Indigenous population (ABS, 2013b). Additionally, the Torres Strait is divided into five major island groups: Northern Division, Eastern Islands, Western Division, Central Division and Southern Division.

background is either Australian Aborigine or Torres Strait Islander, with approximately 70% sharing both cultural heritages. Indigenous students live in the local area with immediate or extended families or in off-campus residential facilities established specifically for this purpose. Indigenous staff at the College includes one teacher and three school officers.

2.5.2 Initiatives and strategies.

St Mary's has endeavoured to address the educational disadvantage of Indigenous students by implementing various strategies and initiatives. These include participation in government- targeted approaches, facilitation of teacher education programs about Indigenous cultural perspectives and the deliberate employment of Indigenous staff and elders.

In 2010, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission (QCEC) invited schools to participate in the *Focus Schools Next Steps* program. This government initiative was formulated to complement the *Closing the Gap* agenda that aimed to improve outcomes for Indigenous Australians. St Mary's proposal was successful. Consequently, the College received monetary support to participate in the national *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010–2014*.

The *Focus Schools Next Steps* program supported strategies to improve the school attendance, classroom engagement and educational achievement of Indigenous students (Indigenous Education Projects, 2014). St Mary's leadership and staff also identified the strategy of building partnerships with Indigenous parents and elders as important for the College. Accordingly, local Indigenous people were employed and trained as teacher aides to support Indigenous students. In addition, an Indigenous elder was employed to liaise with the families in the local Indigenous community.

Teachers' respectful and sensitive understanding of cultural difference has been identified as important in addressing Indigenous students' educational disadvantage (Klenowski, 2009; McLoughlin & Oliver, 2000). This area has been ignored in teacher education courses to their detriment (Gay, 2002; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Such an observation has been confirmed in research which concluded that in-service teachers have described their pre-service training as deficient in preparing them for teaching Indigenous students and Indigenous content (Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolopenuk, Robinson, & Walter, 2012). In order to address this deficit, St Mary's has endeavoured to educate non-Indigenous teachers by consulting with Indigenous support staff and elders who organise and lead teachers' professional development in Indigenous cultural perspectives. In this way, non-Indigenous teachers not only gain an understanding of cultural difference, but also are

encouraged to focus on recognising inadequacies in knowledge and ways of thinking and communicating.

The College's employment of local Indigenous elders whose role is to access community partnerships and enlist parental support and engagement in the school is a strategy based on the Catholic social justice principle of subsidiarity. The principle of subsidiarity was advocated by Pope Leo XIII (1891, para. 14) in *Rerum Novarum* [Revolutionary Change]. This principle ensures the non-absorption of lower societies by higher societies. It demands that when aid is given to a particular society, it be for the purpose of encouraging and strengthening that society. This is achieved when those persons carrying out a service are close to the challenges that may arise. In contrast, past initiatives aimed at decreasing social disadvantage in the Indigenous population have often been conceived far removed both geographically and culturally from the issues they seek to address. Influential Indigenous leaders who are spokespersons for the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership (Pearson, 2010) advocate honouring the principle of subsidiarity when considering government intervention in issues concerning Indigenous people. This is because they are pessimistic about the effectiveness of Australian social policy in regard to closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage unless this principle is followed (Pearson, 2007b). Similarly, St Mary's goal of achieving equity for Indigenous students through decreasing their educational disadvantage is dependent on the commitment of non-Indigenous teachers and Indigenous educators in the local community working together to achieve this.

2.6 Defining The Research Problem

Research confirms that the history of education for Indigenous people in Australia is one of injustice and disadvantage that has had intergenerational repercussions (Burrige & Chodkiewicz, 2012; Rigney, 2010). Educational equity has been identified as a priority for Australian education systems (Gale & Tranter, 2011; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003; Klenowski, 2009) seeking appropriate ways to improve the learning and teaching of Indigenous students (Matthews, Howard, & Perry, 2003). St Mary's has attempted to redress the educational disadvantage of Indigenous students through consultation with Indigenous people. How this has been experienced is the research problem underpinning this thesis.

2.7 Purpose of this Study

The purpose of this study is to explore how Indigenous students and their parents experience education at St Mary's.

2.8 The General Research Question

The general research question that focuses the management of this study is: How do Indigenous students and their parents experience education at St Mary's?

Chapter 3: Literature Review

3.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study is to explore how Indigenous students and their parents experience education at St Mary's. This chapter generates a literature review that assists in the generation of specific research questions.

3.2 Major Themes

A synthesis of the literature generated three themes that structured the design of this chapter. These are:

1. Teaching and learning;
2. Influence of family; and
3. Inclusivity.

The first theme is concerned with issues that influence the learning experiences of Indigenous students. Consequently, it examines the value of student/teacher relationships in promoting and enhancing learning (Davis, 2003; Frymier & Houser, 2000; Harrison, 2004) and the role of Indigenous educators in supporting Indigenous students' engagement in education (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Reid, 2004). It explores the Eurocentric content of curricula and interrogates pedagogical theories and proposed ways of learning that are considered appropriate for Indigenous students. It also critiques the perspectives of Indigenous students themselves as learners and achievers.

A literature review identified the family as a major influence in the learning experience of Indigenous students. This theme explores theories relating to cultural differences and examines the effect of these on Indigenous students' ability to negotiate school systems. Contemporary understandings of Indigenous cultural identity have been developed by shared histories and traditions, as well as shared experiences of colonisation. An investigation of the experiences at school of Indigenous parents and grandparents offers explanations concerning how these may have influenced their identity and their children's attitudes concerning education (Harrison, 2008). This theme also explores the importance of engaging Indigenous parents in the school community. In doing so, it offers two dynamics of schooling considered by Indigenous parents as essential to their children's survival. These are: an education that empowers the next generation with Western cultural knowledge to be leaders and activists;

and, in that process, honouring their Indigenous cultural heritage as well as maintaining their identity (Nakata, 2010).

The final major theme investigates the implementation of policies that ensure inclusive education. In doing so, it examines educational theories and programs that endeavour to address the educational disadvantage of Indigenous students. Moreover, it considers how non-Indigenous educators may become more sensitised to cultural differences and traditions to assist them in teaching Indigenous students. This theme investigates the complex issues of cultural diversity and cultural identity of Indigenous people. Further, it explores how educational institutions might ensure inclusiveness of Indigenous students without loss of their cultural identity. In particular, this theme examines the implementation of inclusive practices in Catholic schools by reflecting on Catholic social justice theory (CSJT) and the founding principles of Catholic education in Australia.

3.2.1 Conceptual framework.

The conceptual framework (Figure 3.1) was developed during the course of reviewing the literature that focused on the research problem. The major themes are depicted as intersecting spheres.

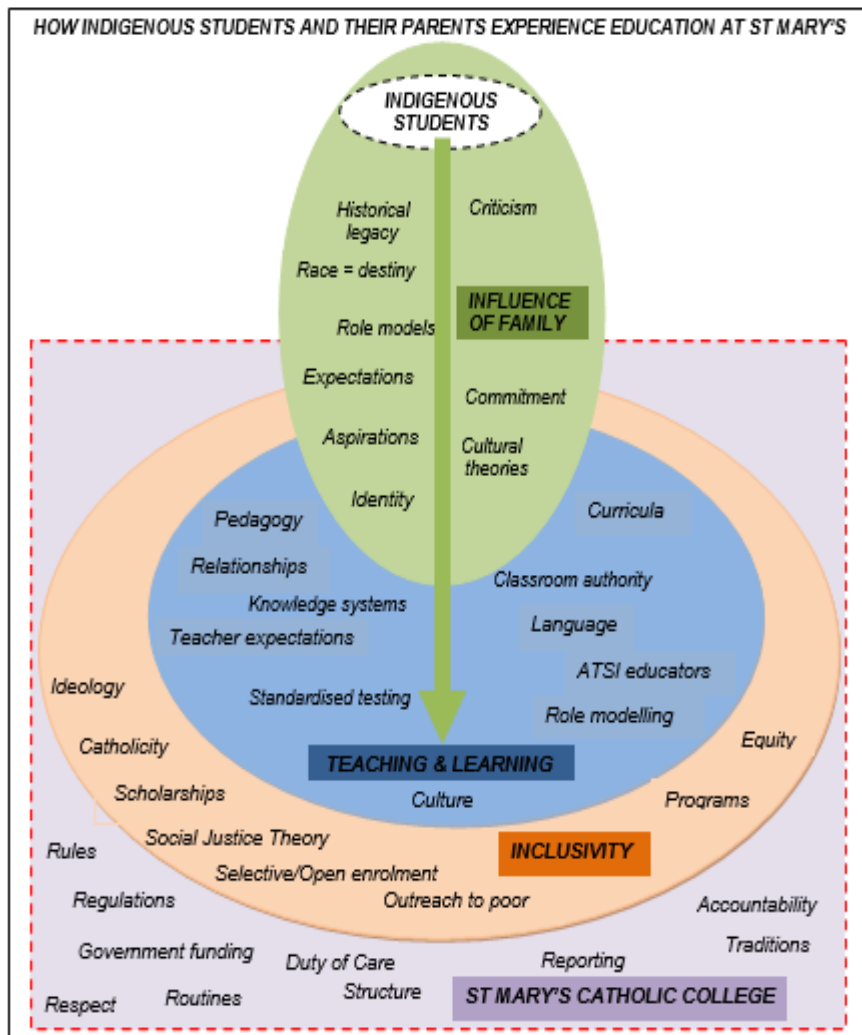


Figure 3.1. Diagram illustrating the conceptual framework of the study.

The conceptual framework in Figure 3.1 was developed during the course of reviewing the literature that was focussed on the research problem, identified at the top of the diagram. The major themes are shown in the intersecting spheres and the outlying elements indicate the institutional elements of the school. A rectangle implies a certain amount of structure, denoting the College’s institutional status that is informed by government regulations and Catholic traditions. However, the rectangle’s perforated border references the notion of Epstein and Sanders (2006) that a school is not a rigid structure but a living system that adapts to community needs (Epstein & Sanders, 2006). The sphere representing Indigenous students entering St Mary’s is also drawn with an indefinite border to suggest a distinct, yet not homogenous, group. “Influence of family” is positioned differently from the other two spheres/themes, being both inside and outside the “school rectangle”. This suggests that, unlike the other two spheres, “family” is not dominated by the school, but exists outside of

that institution. Family is where initial values are formed prior to school entry. Moreover, these values continue to influence students during their school years.

On entering St Mary's, Indigenous students enter the centre sphere of "teaching and learning" and are immersed in the school's core mission of education. It is here that they experience the complexities of teaching and learning that may challenge different knowledge and authority systems. This sphere is encompassed by the "inclusivity" sphere. It is in this sphere that St Mary's endeavours to address the culture shock experienced by many Indigenous students on entering a Western education system. Equity and social justice programs endeavour to engender a sense of belonging at the College with the intention of engaging students in the learning process.

3.3 Sequence of the Literature Review

Each of the themes generated by the literature review includes related concepts. Table 3.1 illustrates the conceptual framework interpreted as a conceptual sequence to structure this chapter.

Table 3.1

Sequence of the Literature Review

3.4 TEACHING AND LEARNING

- 3.4.1 Students' experience of school
- 3.4.2. Indigenous students' experience of school
- 3.4.3 Teachers' experience and expectations
- 3.4.4 Increasing the engagement of Indigenous students

3.5 INFLUENCE OF FAMILY

- 3.5.1 Consequences of history
- 3.5.2 Family expectations

3.6 INCLUSIVITY

- 3.6.1 Cultural identity
 - 3.6.2 Government policies
 - 3.6.3 Catholic schools
-

3.4 Teaching and Learning

The engagement of students in learning is an ongoing challenge for teachers that often becomes increasingly difficult in adolescence and the progression from primary to secondary schooling (Barr & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2009; Klem & Connell, 2004). Reviewing the literature on student engagement, Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) identify student

engagement as having behavioural, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. Measuring student engagement is useful in improving student achievement, in “understanding the connection between disengagement and dropping out” (Fredericks, Blumenfeld & Paris, 2004, p. 10), and assisting with relevant intervention programs. Student engagement predicts student achievement in school, irrespective of other phenomena such as socioeconomic status or cultural origin (Klem & Connell, 2004).

Disengagement from learning at school is not restricted to students from a particular cultural background. However, research claims that Indigenous students experience disadvantage as a racial minority that alienates them from ways of learning in Westernised classrooms (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Reid, 2004; Slade, 2001). One way to understand this is through cultural reproduction theory (Bowles & Gintis, 2001; Tzanakis, 2011). This theory asserts that schools are responsible for the transmission and legitimisation of the cultural knowledge, values and norms of the dominant culture. Subsequently, cultural reproduction theory also suggests that schools are responsible for alienating and marginalising those students who do not belong to the dominant culture, thereby perpetuating societal inequalities in the classroom.

An increase in the learning engagement of Indigenous students is dependent on schools’ valuing different knowledge systems and implementing pedagogies in the classroom that reflect students’ diverse cultural backgrounds (Perso, 2012; Yunkaporta, 2009).

3.4.1 Students’ experience of school.

As well as their engagement in the learning process, students’ dispositions towards working with others and managing in a social institution is important to their overall experience of school (Butler, Bond, Drew, Krelie, & Seal, 2005). This is often expressed in students feeling that they belong to a school community and demonstrated by their participation in school based activities. Indeed, experiencing this “sense of belonging to a school community is important in enabling students to better engage in the learning process (Beck & Malley, 2003). Committed and caring teachers who acknowledge different value systems and parents who are involved in their children’s education are positive influences that assist in establishing a sense of belonging at school.

3.4.1.1 Influence of the teacher.

Expert teachers build classroom climates where engagement is customary and students are expected to be effective learners (Hattie, 2003). Indeed, the quality of the interaction between teacher and student has been described as an essential social relationship affecting

learning in schools (Hattie, 2008). Research concludes that it is a “professional necessity for teachers to be emotionally committed to their work” (Crosswell and Elliott, p. 10). Furthermore, when this emotional commitment of the teacher is absent or not evidenced, students may choose a subculture identity (Hemmings, 2006; Johnson, 2005; Montuori, 2006). Students in these subcultures lack meaningful relationships with teachers and become disengaged and alienated from learning (Johnson, 2005; Joshi, 2015).

Teacher identity has been researched extensively from the perspective of students (Kiger, 2003; Slade, 2001). Asked to define good teachers, students responded that they were fair; who cared for and encouraged them; were enthusiastic about what they taught; and who wanted to share in their enjoyment of learning (Hattie, 2008; Slade, 2001). In summary, good teachers “display a commitment to the democratization and liberalization of the young” (Slade, 2001, p. 246) by promoting positive student identities and equity in classrooms. In doing so, they are “providing students with sufficient reason to believe in themselves, in their own judgements, and in their future (Slade, 2001, p. 247).

3.4.1.2 Authority in the classroom.

Classroom authority, as enforced by teachers, influences student engagement in learning and affects the quality of their educational experience (Hemmings, 2006; Metz, 1979; Pace & Hemmings, 2007). Establishing meaningful relationships and a system of authority in the classroom may be viewed as two contradictory expectations of the teacher. They are responsible for liberating individual human potential while simultaneously expecting acceptable behaviour from groups of young people (Beck, 2003). Depending on a variety of contextual factors, for example, student age, learning subject or student/teacher relations, classroom authority takes on different forms that are justified by and serve a hierarchical, moral order. This moral order is composed of shared purposes, principles and norms (Hemmings, 2006; Metz, 1979; Pace & Hemmings, 2007). As such, its purpose is to hold individuals together and influence the proper way of realising institutional goals (Hemmings, 2006). This is a challenge for teachers of culturally and socially diverse students who may not share the institutionalised goals of a Western education. Thus, in determining institutional goals, schools need to consider the structure and composition of their student population. This involves ongoing dialogue between teachers and students who are influenced by various institutional, cultural and societal issues that are often conflicting (Pace & Hemmings, 2007).

3.4.1.3 Competing values in the classroom.

Competing and conflicting values and norms in the classroom may impede teaching and learning. When the value system of the student is contrary to that of the teacher, then the

hierarchical, negotiated relationship concerning classroom authority is not effective (Hemmings, 2006).

Most teachers have a distinct understanding of the purpose of their profession and endeavour to share this with their students. However, for those students whose cultural framework recognises and values disengagement from learning and also challenging the hierarchical nature of the student-teacher relationship, a shared purpose of education may not exist (Montuori, 2006). In these classrooms, students act in a counter-cultural way that has negative effects on their learning potential. Indeed, teachers are challenged to maintain order conducive to learning. From the perspective of these students, disengagement from learning is not negative, but positive and valued amongst their peer group. In this cultural framework, academic achievement is not respected (Norreklit, 2006). Furthermore, students from these cultures who achieve at school are often criticised and humiliated by their peers for doing so (Lincoln & Gonzalez y Gonzalez, 2008).

The challenge to alter this perspective is problematic. It begins with teachers acknowledging the competing and conflicting values in the classroom and establishing effective relationships with students that respect different cultural understandings of teaching and learning (Pace & Hemmings, 2007).

3.4.1.4 Role of parents.

Motivation for student learning is not confined to teachers or influences within schools. Other important experiences that occur outside of school, such as the actions of parents and other influential role models, influence decisions made by students to engage or disengage with classroom learning (Butler et al., 2005; Hattie, 2008). Not surprisingly, the value that parents place on education and their involvement in their child's learning, are a major influence in this decision (Butler et al., 2005; Groome, 1995; Hattie, 2008).

However, parent involvement in schooling is often socially structured using racial, class, gender and cultural lenses (McCarthy, 2013). Parental involvement in schooling has the most influence on the educational outcomes of those students who are socially and financially disadvantaged or are members of a minority group (Norreklit, 2006). However, such parents have little involvement in schools. There are many reasons for this, including parents' perception that their own educational level, linguistic abilities and understanding of school structures inhibits their participation (Norreklit, 2006; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2009). Differences in social class, language barriers, cultural misunderstandings and the intimidating behaviour of teachers, create obstacles for meaningful involvement between home and school.

Furthermore, educators often have limiting expectations about the roles parents might play in education and schools. These ideas generally conform to the values and norms of the higher socio-economic, socially influential cultural groups to which many teachers belong (Butler et al., 2005; Irizarry, 2009). Research (Smith & Wohlstetter, 2009) suggests that educators may lack awareness and appreciation of the strategies adopted by parents who are socioeconomically disadvantaged or members of a minority group to support their children's education. These include cultural narratives and transmission of lessons through role modelling diligence (Groome, 1995; Smith & Wohlstetter, 2009). Consequently, the involvement of these parents may not be as valued by teachers and school leadership as that of middle-class white parents. Thus, parents in social or cultural minorities often view schools as environments that are unwelcoming and sometimes threatening. They respond with an apparent silent tolerance of the status quo and exhibit apparent passive resistance to school endeavours to build community (Erickson, 1987).

This behaviour provides reasons for schools to adopt different approaches to address these issues that require interconnected community planning and action. Research has identified multiple strategies that may foster partnerships between schools and parents that lead to the productive engagement of students in learning (Hill, 2008; Montuori, 2006; Williams, 1999). Many of these involve a pro-active approach by teachers and school leaders in changing school attitudes and practices concerning the differing roles parents might play in the school (Espinoza, 2012).

3.4.2 Indigenous students' experience of school

Historically, government policies relating to Indigenous people includes a legacy of deprivation, segregation and assimilation that has generated intergenerational disadvantage and trauma (Gray & Beresford, 2008). This legacy continues to impede educational progress for many Indigenous students whose family history includes experiences of schooling where the goal of education was the attainment of culture, to make Indigenous people more acceptable to non-Indigenous people (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Gray & Partington, 2012). Moreover, the systemic failure to achieve this goal was considered, not as an error in the system, but the fault of Indigenous people themselves (Gray & Beresford, 2008). Subsequently, educational marginalisation continued with Indigenous students being placed in special classes for underachievers. Not surprisingly, this categorisation eroded student confidence and belief in school as a place of achievable learning outcomes (Gray & Beresford, 2008). Indeed, the general placement of Indigenous students to the "bottom of the educational rung of educational achievers" (Gray & Beresford, 2008, p. 206) has had an

intergenerational influence, with many Indigenous people subscribing to the belief that they are not capable of achieving in mainstream schooling.

It is uncertain how a belief in the opportunity to achieve in education might be revived in Indigenous students, given their thorough and systematic denial of such opportunities in the past. The question of how education may be a means to overcome disadvantage for Indigenous people needs to be addressed by educational leaders (Phillips, 2011). Attempts to do this include the encouragement of Indigenous students to enter the teaching profession and recognition of the influential role of Indigenous teacher aides in the classroom.

3.4.2.1 Indigenous educators in schools.

Indigenous students rarely experience being taught by Indigenous teachers. In 2012, Indigenous teachers comprised 1.2% of Australian teachers. By way of comparison, Indigenous students were 4.9% of Australian students (More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative [MATSI], 2014). This discrepancy influenced the Australian government to insist that education providers engage more Indigenous staff to teach Indigenous students. The commitment to increasing the number of Indigenous teachers is aimed at improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students. It may also encourage more Indigenous students to consider teaching as a career. It is proposed that more Indigenous teachers may positively influence learning experiences for all students by honouring Indigenous histories and cultures (MATSI, 2014; McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015).

The paucity of Indigenous teachers, particularly in secondary education, is the reason that a cultural mismatch continues in the classroom (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Perso, 2012; Reid, 2004). Research (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Reid, 2004) concludes that Indigenous students experience a sense of alienation from learning that is exacerbated by the paucity of Indigenous teachers. Indigenous teachers provide culturally appropriate role models in classrooms, and engender a sense of belonging in Indigenous students. This is particularly important for Indigenous students who need to believe that they are valued as part of the school community (Watson & Beswick, 2007). An increase in the number of Indigenous teachers may therefore have a positive influence on the learning of Indigenous students.

In the absence of Indigenous teachers, Indigenous aides provide a critical contribution by establishing and maintaining relationships between the school and the community. Indigenous aides often have a cultural understanding of Indigenous students and knowledge of their family backgrounds. Additionally, because they often speak local Indigenous languages, they communicate effectively with Indigenous families (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). For these reasons, non-Indigenous teachers rely on the advice of Indigenous aides to

generate improved understandings of cultural and family issues that may influence student learning and classroom relationships.

The role of Indigenous aides in remote Aboriginal communities is crucial to engaging Indigenous students in learning. A classroom in these communities has two staff members. Typically, these are a young, graduate teacher with little classroom experience and an older, experienced Aboriginal aide from the local community. It is common for non-Indigenous teachers to transfer after two years. However, the teacher aide remains, thus providing continuity for students learning in these remote areas (Klump & McNeir, 2005).

Indigenous aides are also conduits for relevancy. They improve the learning process of Indigenous students by providing cultural understandings in a predominately Eurocentric curriculum (Hill, 2008; Matthews, et al., 2003).

However, the major challenge for Indigenous aides concerns their status. Indigenous aides are often viewed as subordinate to the teacher and their presence in the classroom may reflect negatively on Indigenous students (Irizarry, 2009). Moreover, Indigenous aides are relegated to playing minor clerical or teacher-helper roles. Indeed, this potentially valuable support to students and resource for teachers has been reduced to assistants who are solely accountable to the classroom teacher. (Demmert, McCardle, Mele-McCarthy, & Leos, 2006; Hill, 2008). Consequently, Indigenous teacher aides experience disempowerment in the classroom, despite holding positions of authority and esteem within their own local communities. Too often, the most respected black woman in the community is relegated to carrying out menial tasks such as photocopying inside the school (Irizarry, 2009). In this way, her respected status in the community is considered insignificant and disrespected by the school. In contrast, research (Hill, 2008; Matthews et al., 2003) concludes that when teachers accept Indigenous aides as co-teachers, Indigenous students improve academically because of the respectful cooperative learning climate.

3.4.3 Learning theories.

Learning theories are conceptual frameworks describing how information is absorbed, processed, and retained. Learning theories discussed in this study that may assist Indigenous students include cultural deficit theory, bilingual education, bicultural education and critical theory. Historically, educators relied on cultural deficit theory to explain the failure of Indigenous students to achieve academic outcomes (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966; Hess & Shipman, 1965). Bilingual education and bicultural education, in particular, focus on the challenges educators face in adjusting to classrooms where cultural and linguistic diversity is

the norm (Cummins, 1996) as is the case at St Mary's. Critical theory in education suggests a way forward in these classrooms by promoting "a democratic reconstruction of education" (Kellner, 2003).

3.4.3.1 Cultural deficit theory.

This theory emphasised how the students' social and emotional deficiencies affected student performance within the academic system (Bereiter & Engelmann, 1966). Although later discredited by educational researchers (Trueba, 1988; Valencia, 2012), deficit theory attempts to attribute poor educational achievement to characteristics supposedly embedded in students' own cultures and communities (Irizarry, 2009; Muller, 2012). It uses negative stereotypes of Indigenous people to blame the victims of institutional oppression for their own victimisation (Irizarry, 2009).

Similarly, research aimed at solving Indigenous problems in remote Aboriginal communities has focussed on the so-called deficiencies of the people who reside there (McCarthy, 2013). Blame is attributed to cultural differences in Aboriginal people, rather than to the process of how communities have been segregated and mismanaged by successive Australian governments. Not surprisingly, this has generated resentment among Indigenous leaders who claim that this deficit perspective fails to recognise the value of Indigenous knowledges and underestimates the social and cultural capital present in Aboriginal communities (McCarthy, 2013; Porsanger, 2004).

In Australia, this type of research has been termed "terra nullius research" (Martin, 2003, p. 208). Similar to how traditional land became known as *terra nullius*, so are Indigenous people treated as non-persons, becoming objects of curiosity and subjects of research, being denied basic respect and courtesies extended to others in the Australian population (Martin, 2003). Meanwhile, social, economic and health disparities continue for most Indigenous populations. It is therefore not surprising that Indigenous people question not only the value of further Western academic research, but also the policies that continue to perpetuate the disadvantage of Indigenous people (Prior, 2006).

Notwithstanding its pervasive influence, the validity of deficit theory has been discredited by contemporary research (Gay, 2010; Irizarry, 2009; Muller, 2012). Schools are urged to both acknowledge the cultural richness present in Indigenous communities and implement culturally responsive approaches aimed at improving educational experiences and outcomes (Barr & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2009; B. Williams, Williams, & Ullman, 2002). Indeed, Indigenous students achieve at school when academic tasks include experiences that are representative of their own culture (Irizarry, 2009; Yunkaporta, 2009). Moreover, teachers

who incorporate diverse viewpoints into the classroom while refraining from promoting universal beliefs, encourage students from all cultural backgrounds to achieve (Gay, 2010). Teachers and school administrators play a crucial role in implementing an approach to schooling that does not regard non-achievement of Indigenous students as problematic because it is something innate. Instead, schools are encouraged to address the education of Indigenous students by offering culturally appropriate responses (Shipp, 2013).

3.4.3.2 Bilingual education.

Bilingual education describes an approach to curriculum development that uses two languages as the means of instruction in a formally authorised program (Devlin, 2011). The advantages of bilingual education for Indigenous people are language maintenance and enhanced facilitation of learning. Although widely supported by educators for students in Aboriginal communities, the effectiveness of bilingual education to achieve improved educational outcomes has been criticised, particularly with regard to literacy in standard English. Moreover, critics maintain that bilingual education emphasises the maintenance and expression of Indigenous languages and culture but neglects the promotion of academic achievement (Unz, 2016; Willig, 1985). Despite the acknowledged advantages of multilingualism (Manyak, 2006; Marian, Shook, & Schroeder, 2013; May, 2000), this criticism has led Australian governments to limit or terminate bilingual education programs.

3.4.3.3 Biculturalism.

Biculturalism in education maintains that Indigenous peoples' cultural values may conflict with inherent values in Western education systems (Berger, Epp & Moller, 2006). Acknowledgment of this conflict has led to the establishment of theories such as *both-ways* or *two-way* schooling as foundational to educational equity (Purdie, Milgate & Bell, 2011). Such programs advocate a combination of Western and Indigenous knowledge (Yunkaporta, 2009) in the classroom and the incorporation of Indigenous learning values into Western education. These programs are important because they enable simultaneous cultural maintenance and academic success for Indigenous students.

Biculturalism contrasts with earlier education policies that emphasised cultural difference. Such policies conclude that if the Indigenous student is to learn using Western methods, then they have to relinquish their own ways of learning (Christie, 1984; Lowell & Devlin, 1998). Accordingly, Indigenous students are expected to relinquish traditional learning strategies and adopt exclusively a Western learning culture orchestrated by non-Indigenous teachers. This is because educators have suggested that the style of learning through which Aboriginal students are enculturated at home differs markedly from the

teaching of the classroom (Battiste, 2000). Consequently, the simultaneous conservation of Indigenous culture in a Western school system supposedly impedes learning (Gibson, 1984). Ironically, such conclusions fail to explain how marginalised students succeed academically despite being in culturally diverse classrooms (Bolima, 2007). More encouraging research concludes that teachers' commitment to establishing classroom relationships with students, regardless of cultural background, are the catalytic positive influences that enhance learning outcomes of culturally diverse students (Hattie & Yates, 2013; Rahman, 2010).

3.4.3.4 Critical theory in education.

One theory that may assist Indigenous education is critical theory. This theory aims to critique the social structure of schools and proposes that education should be a liberating and empowering process. Since colonisation, Australian government education policies have attempted to control and discipline Indigenous people (Harrison, 2007). Western knowledge and values in Australian school curricula do not entertain the presence of Indigenous knowledge and culture (Mooney & Craven, 2005; Rahman, 2013). In contrast, critical education theory encourages students to evaluate knowledge and consider their own power relations and assumptions and, as a result, become responsible for their own learning (Harrison, 2004). By adopting critical theory in the education process, Indigenous students may learn alternative perspectives of Western knowledge, as well as the skills of analysing, evaluating and deconstructing information (Nakata, 1997).

Critical race theorists have employed this theory to interrogate the pedagogical inequalities that are practised in Western education systems (McDonald, 2003). This theory challenges unreflective assimilationist ideas that do not consider the knowledge and experience of students to inform pedagogical practices (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Indeed, research concludes that opening curricula to new knowledges and exploring new teaching perspectives for culturally diverse students improves their academic achievement (Hodgkinson, 2003; Mehan, 2007). Indigenous students' performance is enhanced when the wealth of personal knowledge that they bring to the classroom is valued and connected to the curriculum and pedagogical practices (Maher, 2010).

However, the rich diversity of Indigenous knowledges is ignored in Australian classrooms (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). Instead, "black Australians are expected to jump through white hoops" (Cooper, Baturo, Warren, & Doig, 2004, p. 240) in order to achieve academic outcomes. Critical race theory encourages teachers to be aware of their privileged position in a multicultural classroom (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). It encourages teachers to establish pedagogical practices that enhance quality relationships and

influence Indigenous students to engage in and take responsibility for their own learning by honouring and incorporating cultural values and practices in learning.

3.4.4 Teachers' expectations and experience.

Research (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Kiger, 2003) concludes that teacher expectations may have positive and negative influences on students' engagement in learning. Indeed, expectation theory maintains that teachers' high expectations of students engender the achievement of learning outcomes. Conversely, this theory also claims that when teachers expect students to underperform, their low expectations are realised. As a consequence, students underperform because their teachers expect underperformance (Gray & Beresford, 2001).

However, research (Babad, 1993; Kiger, 2003) concludes that teachers' expectations of student achievement may differ according to the perceived racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds of students. Generalisations or negative social stereotypes of minority group members may influence teacher expectations of students (Bodkin-Andrews & Craven, 2014). Moreover, when students adopt negative beliefs concerning their culture, they subsequently behave in accordance with the stereotypical view, thus restricting their ability to reach their full potential. Therefore, challenging stereotypical perspectives assists students to have the opportunities to perform to their potential (Partington, 2003).

For this to occur, teachers identify and make use of the rich diversity of knowledges that culturally different students bring to their classrooms (Cooper, et al., 2004; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). Teachers who acknowledge the validity of dissimilar cultural values lessen disadvantage for Indigenous students. These teachers employ culturally responsive learning strategies, having high expectations of all students. They are also aware of their privileged position (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003) as a teacher of Indigenous students.

3.4.3.1 Differing values.

Teaching is values-laden. Curriculum content might be prescribed by education systems; however, the teacher's choice of strategies to engage learning communicates their values to students (Brady, 2011). Teachers who value cultural differences in the classroom are effective in engaging Indigenous students in learning (Cooper et al., 2004). Furthermore, Indigenous students who experience cultural respect are motivated to meet the expectations of educational achievement that teachers have of them (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). It is therefore important that teachers not only display cultural respect, but also demonstrate a belief in the

academic potential of their Indigenous students. This is realised by teachers communicating their high learning expectations to Indigenous students and encouraging them to achieve (Gay, 2002).

Indigenous students often refer to culturally respectful relationships in the classroom as “how the teacher talks” (Harrison, 2004, p. 8). Indigenous students avoid relationships with “loud, aggressive teachers” (Harrison, 2004, p. 8). Instead, they value a teacher with a “quiet, calm demeanour” that has been identified as a pre-requisite for Indigenous students’ engagement in learning (Harrison, 2004, p. 8). Research concludes that meaningful dialogue in the classroom influences student achievement positively (Hattie, 2008; Matthews et al., 2003; Yunkaporta, 2009). Moreover, the teacher’s speaking manner demonstrates their respect of Indigenous students. How the teacher communicates in the classroom identifies them as being a person to either avoid or to respect. It is this respectful relationship, experienced in respectful speech, that influences Indigenous students’ motivation to learn (Harrison, 2004; Matthews et al., 2003).

Another important dynamic that influences Indigenous students’ engagement in learning is the teacher’s appreciation of the different cultural relationships that exist within their families. Indigenous students’ family and community dynamics influence their identities and attitudes to classroom learning (Macfarlane, Glynn, Cavanagh, & Bateman, 2007). Research (Bishop, Higgins, Casella, & Contos, 2002; Gray & Beresford, 2008) concludes that teachers who acknowledge the influence of family in thinking, behaving and relating to others, have substantial influence on student learning. Nevertheless, Bishop et al., (2002) argue that a detailed cultural knowledge of Indigenous society is not necessarily a pre-requisite to the valuing of such knowledge. Indigenous students respect teachers who appreciate their cultural understanding of how family relationships and cultural differences may influence their learning (Bevan-Brown, 2005).

Not surprisingly, teachers’ values and beliefs systems may hinder their teaching of Indigenous students. These teachers acknowledge that how they perceive their students influences how teaching and learning is experienced (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Klenowski, 2009). Research (Partington, 1999; Woolman, 2002) suggests that the inability to perceive Indigenous students as having legitimate, different values influences why some teachers are unable to translate noble intentions into satisfactory outcomes (Partington, 1999). Subsequently, these teachers may interpret non-achievement as an indicator of their inability to educate Indigenous students. As a consequence, they develop negative attitudes about teaching Indigenous students (Woolman, 2002).

Changing teachers' perceptions about the teaching and learning of Indigenous students is a pre-requisite to achieving equitable outcomes in the classroom (Woolman, 2002; Yunkaporta, 2009). For this to occur, teachers need to acknowledge the legitimacy of other values that are different from, compete with or are in conflict with their own. Subsequently, they need to incorporate new understandings of Indigenous cultural values in their developing of appropriate pedagogies for Indigenous students (Gay, 2002).

Pedagogies that provide appropriate learning opportunities are necessary for Indigenous learners to achieve (Whitinui, 2008). However, culturally responsive pedagogies have been criticised by non-Indigenous educators as being difficult to implement, impractical, divisive or antagonistic (Yunkaporta, 2009). Nevertheless, pedagogies that are accessible, practical and reconciling assist teachers to provide culturally responsive learning strategies to Indigenous students (Matthews et al., Yunkaporta, 2009).

3.4.3.2 Teachers as learners.

Effective teachers of culturally diverse students understand that they need to be committed to learning from other cultures. A survey of early career teachers in Australian schools concluded that 40% considered their pre-service education failed to prepare them to teach students from Indigenous backgrounds. A contributing explanation for this is the existence of multiple Indigenous knowledge systems (Castellano, 2000; Semali & Kincheloe, 2002). Nevertheless, non-Indigenous teachers engage with Indigenous cultures by developing responsible and caring relationships with their Indigenous students. This enables them to be effective teachers of Indigenous students.

In this context, the literature identifies two terms: *educating Indigenous students* and *Indigenous education*. While these terms are often used synonymously, Nakata (2002) explains that they have different meanings: Educating Indigenous students is teaching from essentially Western perspectives; Indigenous education incorporates a cultural knowledge base, adopting Indigenous perspectives when teaching a Western curriculum (Nakata, 2002). Research (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Yunkaporta, 2009) emphasises the unfairness of requiring non-Indigenous teachers to engage in Indigenous education without having an appreciation of Indigenous cultures. Indigenous and Western knowledge systems have previously appeared incompatible (Hammersmith, 2009; Michie, 1999). However, these two different knowledge systems have common features that teachers may access to develop pedagogies for teaching Indigenous students (Hammersmith, 2009; Yunkaporta, 2009). This requires teachers to enter into meaningful relationships with

Indigenous students that are fundamental to their educational achievement (Matthews et al., 2003; Yunkaporta, 2009).

In order to become authentic teachers of Indigenous students, teachers acquire a respectful appreciation of Indigenous culture. Purdie et al., (2011) refer to this as non-Indigenous teachers adopting an Indigenous cultural lens that assists them to understand Indigenous students from the perspective of the Indigenous community. Such a sensitivity ensures that Western cultural bias does not impede the acquisition of authentic education (Purdie et al., 2011). This goal requires an attitudinal change by non-Indigenous teachers. This change becomes the catalyst for their adopting culturally sensitive pedagogies when teaching Indigenous students (Santoro, Reid, Crawford & Simpson, 2011).

3.4.3.3 Community relationships.

The relationship that the school has with the local Indigenous community is an important influence on the learning outcomes of Indigenous students (Fordham & Schwab, 2007; Whatman & Duncan, 2005). Students engage in learning when they experience their community leaders being valued by the school and contributing to their education (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003; Murphy-Haste, 2009). Therefore, it is important that school administrators and teachers demonstrate positive working relationships with the Indigenous community.

One way of valuing and engaging the local Indigenous community is to invite Indigenous elders into classrooms as experts and co-educators in Indigenous knowledges. Seeking knowledge from these culture bearers is honouring the unique position Indigenous elders hold in the maintenance of Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices (Murphy-Haste, 2009; Yunkaporta, 2009). It allows the non-Indigenous teacher to adopt the role of learning facilitator, rather than knowledge expert (Murphy-Haste, 2009). This generates a respect for cultural protocols around ownership and dissemination of Indigenous knowledge.

This approach to building relationships benefits both students and teachers. It is particularly important for urban Indigenous students who may not have otherwise experienced their cultural background being valued by non-Indigenous people (Murphy-Haste, 2009). Inviting Indigenous elders into classrooms allows non-Indigenous teachers to learn from living practitioners of Indigenous culture (Yunkaporta, 2009). Simultaneously, they gain insight into the differing cultural perspectives and backgrounds of their Indigenous students. Non-Indigenous teachers display respect for the cultural identity of Indigenous students by esteeming their elders as important knowledge sources for learning. This assists Indigenous

students to confidently engage in and become responsible for their learning in regular classrooms (Murphy-Haste, 2009).

Teachers who experience working in remote area schools gain an understanding of Indigenous cultural perspectives, that in turn generates respectful relationships with local communities. Such teachers who acquire an appreciation of Indigenous culture employ pedagogies that improve educational outcomes for Indigenous students. However, research (Hall, 2012; Hill, 2008) concludes that the high turnover of teachers in remote area schools contributes to the low academic outcomes of Indigenous students in these settings. Teachers exit remote area schools for a variety of reasons including safety concerns, inability to adapt to isolation or experiencing the cultural interface to be over-confronting (Hill, 2008). Hall (2012) refers to the constant exodus of committed teachers from remote communities as the “come and go syndrome” (Hall, 2012, p. 187). It disrupts the learning process of Indigenous students and is responsible for the insecurity experienced by students in these communities (Hall, 2012; Hill, 2008). On the positive side, teachers transfer their Indigenous cultural understanding of relationship building, gained from remote teaching experience, to other schools. While this may benefit Indigenous students in these schools, remote area students continue to be disadvantaged.

Project learning is another strategy aimed at building and maintaining community relationships. This pedagogical approach ensures that learning responds to local community events or celebrations. Proponents of project learning claim that it is meaningful as students engage in contemporary, authentic projects that contribute to community events (Larmer & Mergendoller, 2010; Pascoe, 2007). In turn, Indigenous parents recognise the school as a participant in the local community, engaging their children through relevant learning activities. However, accessing human and project resources is challenging for educators who do not work in close proximity to Indigenous cultural communities. Thus, this valuable strategy for building community relationships is unavailable to urban Indigenous students.

Another learning strategy that emphasises the importance of Indigenous communities being in relationship with the school is two-way learning. This strategy empowers Aboriginal people through Western education while allowing them to retain their Aboriginal identity (Harris, 1990; Yunkaporta, 2009). It involves non-Indigenous teachers sharing their knowledge with Indigenous students. Simultaneously, non-Indigenous teachers respect Indigenous students’ knowledge, cultural perspectives and different ways of learning (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003; Purdie et al., 2011). In so doing, non-Indigenous teachers recognise that they are learners of other cultures and knowledge systems. For

Indigenous students, two-way learning means acknowledging the cultures of home and school as equally valid and important to their achievement of learning outcomes. The result is a positive relationship between their school and home communities.

When schools fail to appreciate the importance of building relationships with their local Indigenous communities, they ignore important learning resources (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). Understandably, Indigenous elders are reluctant to enter classrooms where the dynamic between student, school and community is not valued by teachers. Establishing a relationship where the Indigenous community is appreciated contributes to positive Indigenous student engagement in learning (Fordham & Schwab, 2007; Murphy-Haste, 2009; Rahman, 2010).

3.4.5 Increasing the engagement of Indigenous students.

Increasing the engagement of Indigenous students is dependent on educators' respecting their cultural backgrounds, their ways of learning and their place in Australian society (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). In the past, Indigenous students experienced classrooms that were influenced by assimilationist ideology. This belief asserts the supposed superiority of European culture, while ignoring relevant contributions of Indigenous languages, knowledges and life experiences (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). However, assimilationist approaches in education have been replaced by more inclusive ideologies. Teachers in contemporary classrooms are encouraged to question the relevance of curriculum content for Indigenous students, while exploring pedagogical approaches that may enhance their learning. Establishing respectful relationships with Indigenous students increases their engagement in education while encouraging them to be responsible for their own learning (Murphy-Haste, 2009).

3.4.4.1 Curriculum content.

Research (Battiste, 2002; Evans, 2011; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003) has identified important questions about the content of school curricula. These include: Who defines the content of curricula, and whose interest does this content serve? These questions are important for Indigenous people who have experienced schooling with irrelevant curricula that have served interests that are not theirs, but those of a Westernised, dominant culture.

Currently, there are multicultural education programs that acknowledge the cultures of diverse people. However, programs alone are not always the solution. Teachers are called upon to teach Indigenous students, who themselves come from multiple cultural backgrounds. The reality for these teachers is that cultural diversity in the classroom has become more

varied (Watkins & Noble, 2008). Indeed, diversity has been influenced by intergenerational change, intermarriage and the multiple ways ethnic groups have assimilated Western culture. The challenge for educators is to provide relevant curricula for students who claim many cultural heritages.

Indigenous students are a minority group in Australia. Their culture and language are inadequately recognised in school curricula (M. Evans, Hole, Berg, Hutchinson, & Sukraj, 2009; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). In a predominantly white population, what is accepted as formal knowledge in school curricula is shaped by that population (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003; Rahman, 2013). Researchers (Evans, 2011; Villegas & Lucas, 2002; Willinsky, 1998) have criticised curriculum that considers Indigenous knowledges as secondary to European knowledge. Examples of this include how curriculum offerings draw from solely white interpretations of history. These interpretations continue to impose languages and literatures on colonised peoples (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). Accordingly, education for Indigenous students means revising the names of familiar places and engaging in a knowledge system that is different from Indigenous knowledge (Willinsky, 1998). It also means experiencing learning in a language different from that spoken in their homes.

Teachers recognise the cultural irrelevance of providing only a narrow, middle-class and Eurocentric content to a curriculum offered to Indigenous students (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). However, they also understand that Indigenous students live in Australia, a country that is characterised by a dominant Western culture. In so doing, teachers acknowledge that their Indigenous students must necessarily compete with and therefore access the same curriculum as their non-Indigenous counterparts (Harris, 1990; Wheaton, 2000). Likewise, research on Indigenous families (Malin & Maidment, 2003; Nakata, 2002) concludes that they want an education for their children that incorporates Western cultural knowledge. At the same time, Indigenous parents also prefer an education for their children that honours their Indigenous culture, language and identity (Malin & Maidment, 2003; Nakata, 2002).

Indeed, educators fail Indigenous students if they do not ensure students acquire the necessary competencies that will confirm success in non-Indigenous contexts (Nakata, 2002; Pearson, 2009). Therefore, it is important for Indigenous students that authentic Indigenous perspectives are incorporated into the curriculum to support mainstream academic success. The challenge for educators is to offer relevant curricula to all students. This is achieved by

teachers incorporating alternative knowledges and multicultural pedagogies into their teaching (Battiste, 2002; Evans, 2011; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003;).

Since 2011, Indigenous histories and cultures have been incorporated into the Australian Curriculum as a priority (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). Curriculum planners believe that an appreciation of Indigenous history, culture and epistemologies is beneficial to all Australians. Including Indigenous perspectives into the curriculum encourages students to critically interrogate curricula. It allows them to address inaccuracies, omissions and distortions in texts (Villegas & Lucas, 2002). Consequently, curriculum becomes an intercultural learning space rather than a “way of pacifying the natives or redressing the sins of colonisers” (Nakata, 2011, p. 5).

3.4.4.2 Cultural influence in learning.

Research (Beaulieu, 2006; Evans, 2011; Steinhauer, 2002) concludes that the creation and interpretation of meaning is generated within a cultural framework. Therefore, students with different cultural backgrounds think and learn in different ways (Boykin, Tyler, & Miller, 2005; Evans, 2011). Research comparing Western and Indigenous knowledge systems (Battiste, 2002; Beaulieu, 2006; Yunkaporta, 2009) suggests student learning may be enhanced by adopting pedagogical practices that are culturally appropriate, but also target their specific student learning needs. For this to occur, cultural educational bridges between Western and Indigenous knowledges need to be adopted (Battiste, 2002; Evans, 2011).

Two models of educating Indigenous students have dominated Indigenous education in Australian schools. These are the assimilative model and the culturally responsive model. Research (Beaulieu, 2006; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Demmert et al., 2006) concludes that the assimilative model fails in generating improved academic outcomes. In contrast, research (Beaulieu, 2006; Boykin et al., 2005) confirms that culture-based education enhances student outcomes. This model of schooling increases the learning engagement of Indigenous students which subsequently improves their academic outcomes. In addition, culturally responsive education is advocated by many Indigenous educational leaders and tribal communities (Beaulieu, 2006; Demmert et al., 2006).

Culturally responsive education has been described as schooling that “builds a bridge” (Boykin et al., 2005, p. 523) between a student’s home culture and school culture in order to improve learning. In traditional, Western classrooms, the learning rules or guidelines reflect the white dominant culture, values and practices. Consequently, those students, such as Indigenous and minority students who do not have the cultural match-ups that schooling requires for success, face the most educational disadvantage (Rahman, 2010). They are often

confronted by their inability to understand school expectations and navigate learning outcomes (Norton, 2000). However, Indigenous students who are exposed to culturally compatible teaching methods are able to build on their cultural knowledge to become active, independent learners (Yunkaporta, 2009). Moreover, they develop skills that enable them to think critically (Rahman, 2010).

Current Australian government education policies attempt to address education achievement differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students (Klenowski, 2009). They propose culturally responsive schooling as a means of closing the gap (Purdie et al., 2011). Accordingly, in 2008, the National Indigenous Reform Agreement included six target areas that were agreed to by COAG (Sullivan, 2011). However, only half of those targets are expected to be met by 2018. There have been mixed results in other educational objectives. Gains have been made in the proportion of Indigenous students achieving their Year 12 certificate. However, a deterioration in achievement results for Indigenous students between 2008 and 2014 was noted in reading in Year 7 ACT students and also in Year 9 students in Tasmania. Simultaneously, in Year 3 students from New South Wales and Victoria, a deterioration in achievement of numeracy has been reported. National trajectories to achieve the Closing the Gap targets were only in line for Year 7 reading and Year 9 numeracy in 2014 (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2015). Further research is needed to address educational underachievement of Indigenous students.

In the past, research (Cole & Means, 1981; Hofstede, 1986) focussed on learning styles theory to explain relationships between culture and how people think. This theory maintained that not only were there differences in the way Indigenous people thought, but also that there were distinct styles of learning unique to particular Indigenous people. Later research (Hughes & More, 1997) suggested that there were recurrent learning patterns unique to Indigenous students. There has been considerable deliberation on the What Works website over what actually constitutes a learning behaviour among Indigenous students (<http://www.whatworks.edu.au>). Indeed, the existence of one particular learning approach that is peculiar to Indigenous students has been questioned. Stewart (2002) acknowledges that recurrent learning behaviours occur often enough among Indigenous learners to warrant careful attention by teachers, provided they also attend to individual differences between students. However, Hughes, More and Williams (2004) conclude that there is no particular approach to learning that is peculiar to all Indigenous students. Instead, Indigenous students adopt a variety of learning behaviours.

Committed non-Indigenous teachers recognise the need to adopt culturally appropriate pedagogies. However, they are challenged by how to achieve this (Hughes & More, 1997; Hughes et al., 2004). Research offers two explanations for this. First, the likelihood of teaching students from Indigenous cultural backgrounds is a possibility that their pre-service education failed to address. Cultural awareness training in pre-service courses is concerned with aspects of legislation regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander matters, the history of dispossession, community dysfunction and anthropological studies. However, such content fails to address non-Indigenous teachers' lack of cultural knowledge, which is a pre-requisite in their generation of appropriate pedagogies (Yunkaporta, 2009). Second, non-Indigenous teachers' processes of creating and interpreting meaning are derived from their own cultural contexts (Santorio, 2007). They teach from their own cultural learning contexts inherently (Yunkaporta, 2009) and are challenged to teach in ways that respond to a culture of which they have little knowledge or understanding.

To address this challenge, Indigenous researchers advocate focusing on learning strategies rather than lesson content, that is, “not looking at *what* we learn, but *how* we learn it” (Yunkaporta, 2009, p. 4). The learning orientation of Indigenous students is different from that of non-Indigenous students (Riley & Howard-Wagner, 2014; Wheaton, 2000; Yunkaporta, 2009). The choice of appropriate learning experiences is the rationale underpinning the *Eight Ways* pedagogical framework, developed to assist non-Indigenous teachers to understand Indigenous knowledge and to use it in the classroom (Yunkaporta, 2009). The major concepts in this framework include pedagogies that are familiar to non-Indigenous teachers and learning strategies that are familiar to Aboriginal students. Therefore, these concepts may be approached by teacher and learner together as “familiar territory from their own cultural standpoints” (Yunkaporta, 2009, p. 46).

Further, the learning of Indigenous students is hindered by the sequential nature of verbal thought, typical of Western pedagogies. Indeed, Indigenous people who have achieved in Western education, have reported experiencing a sense of being severed from their Indigenous culture in the learning process (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). It is at this intersection between linear and non-linear pedagogies that Indigenous and Western pedagogies have, in the past, been considered irreconcilable (Nakata, 2010; Yunkaporta, 2009).

However, Battiste (2002) suggests that a focus on similarities between systems of knowledge instead of differences is more conducive to educational reform. Yunkaporta (2009) argues Indigenous and Western knowledge systems as complementary rather than

oppositional. He is critical of the limiting view of categorising all Western knowledge as linear, citing De Bono's (1992) use of *thinking hats* as an example of lateral thinking used in Western classrooms. Incorporating an Indigenous pedagogical framework into Western classrooms avoids false dichotomies by finding common ground (Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009). As such, this framework is centred on the reconciling principle of the cultural interface (Nakata, 2002) rather than focusing on differences between cultures.

In preparing teachers to implement authentic pedagogies, teacher educators need to acquire cultural knowledge to appreciate how learning occurs. Such a challenge invites them to engage in a process of deculturalisation. This means that they become aware of their Western beliefs and values which are incongruent with those used by Indigenous students (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003).

3.4.4.3 Authority.

Research (Harrison, 2004; Partington, 2003) concludes that the traditional role of the teacher as authority figure impedes their forming quality relationships with Indigenous students. Nevertheless, these relationships are important influences on improving student learning outcomes (Hattie, 2008; Murphy-Haste, 2009; Preimesberger, 2000). For many Indigenous students, their relationship with the teacher is based on mutual personal respect, rather than respect for the teacher's perceived position of authority (Harrison, 2004). Thus, teachers are often evaluated by Indigenous students as persons with whom to relate, rather than as educators to be obeyed (Groome, 1995; Harrison, 2004). Classrooms that are socially constructed on the teacher's authority may contribute to Indigenous students' cultural problems with school as well as their capacity to conform to school values (Partington, 2003).

In addition to the formal curriculum, schools have a hidden curriculum that consists of implicit cultural messages that are communicated to students (Abbott, 2014). These include values such as conformity, competitiveness, individual worth, and deference to authority (Abbott, 2014). Indigenous students may be challenged to conform to such cultural values that may conflict with their own. However, in a culturally safe environment, quality student/teacher relationships contribute to a reconciling dynamic that may assist Indigenous students to address this challenge (Rahman, 2010). Such an environment allows Indigenous students to "feel safe and secure in our identity, culture and community" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011, Ch. 4) .

Indigenous students' resistance to conformity has been linked not only to conflicting value systems, but also to a perceived lack of future opportunities (Partington & Gray, 2003). The contrasting culture explanation for racial disparities in education was first introduced by

Ogbu (1992). It suggests that students from oppressed cultural minority groups demonstrate their antagonism toward the dominant majority by resisting educational goals that prepare them for future achievement (Ogbu, 1992). Students' resistance to school and societal norms might therefore be viewed as a response to the dominant group values assumed in the classroom (Horvat & Lewis, 2003; Perso, 2012). Moreover, students in minority groups who respond differently by striving to achieve academically may be accused by their peers of "acting white" (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986, p. 176).

Teachers who respect students' diverse cultural values adopt pedagogies and encourage learning experiences that respect Indigenous culture (Nakata, 2002; Yunkaporta, 2009). Indeed, Nakata (2012) suggests that the appreciation of culturally diverse students not only encourages those students to engage in learning, but also influences the achievement of all students positively.

Many Indigenous students share family stories of being judged and mistreated by educational bureaucracies (Battiste, 2002; Sarra, 2008). These stories ensure that Indigenous students have learned from their families to be concerned about authority in the classroom (Evans, 2011; Harrison, 2004). Many teachers adopt authoritarian behaviours in the classroom unintentionally by positioning themselves as the person who manages and controls knowledge. In doing so, they may not only perpetuate the students' culturally ingrained historical fear of authority, but also position the teacher as a judgmental person (Harrison, 2004). It is not uncommon for Indigenous students to feel that they are "constantly being judged by the teacher and other students" (Harrison, 2004, p. 8) while at school. It is therefore important that teachers position themselves in the classroom, not as authority figures, but as educators who relate to Indigenous students and collaborate with them to achieve.

Teachers need to recognise their privileged position in teaching Indigenous students. They are encouraged to mute expressions of the institutionalised position of power by building socially just relationships (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). A willingness to acknowledge conflicting values and social norms in the classroom influences teacher/student relationships positively and assists in engaging and not alienating Indigenous students.

3.4.4.4 Language.

The language of instruction in Australian schools is Standard Australian English (SAE). However, SAE is not the first language of many Indigenous students. Consequently, they may be challenged to converse and identify with classroom discourses where SAE is used exclusively.

Aboriginal English (AE) is a naturally preferred style of speaking for Aboriginal students. This is a language used by all Aboriginal people in Australia to express Aboriginal meanings (Sharifian & Malcolm, 2003). A campaign to train pre-service teachers to appreciate the centrality and status of AE as a positive influence to Aboriginal student learning began in the early 1990s (Harrison, 2004). However, its non-academic status and the belief that it is a corruption of the English language has minimised its adoption by educators (Harrison, 2004). Teachers' perceptions that AE is "not proper English" (Harrison, 2004, p.12) is often the reason offered for their reluctance to recognise it in the classroom (Konigsberg & Collard, 2002). However, AE has its own composition and its own distinctive ways of thinking and communicating (Eades, 1995, p. 3). It is therefore not a language to be denigrated, but may instead affirm the identity of Indigenous students (Harrison, 2004).

Research (Beardsmore, 2008; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003) has acknowledged the cognitive advantages of multilingualism. Indeed, culturally responsive schools that employ local languages in classrooms have experienced an improvement in Indigenous student learning outcomes (Brayboy & Castagno, 2009). Conversely, in classrooms where only SAE is spoken, Aboriginal students may be alienated from learning, themselves and their peers.

Our own unique ways of knowing, teaching and learning are firmly grounded in the context of our ways of being and speaking. And yet we are thrust into the clothes of another system designed for different bodies. (Dodson, 1994, p. 5)

In addition to AE, other traditional dialects and non-traditional languages are spoken by Indigenous students throughout remote, regional and urban settings of Queensland (Queensland. Department of Education & Training, 2016). The use of these languages in the classroom encourages interaction between Indigenous students and with non-Indigenous students. It also assists Indigenous students to negotiate a relationship with teachers that is not based solely on authority (Harrison, 2004). The advantage of teachers' acceptance of Indigenous students using their home language in learning situations is that it enables them to experience a cultural acceptance that subsequently increases their learning engagement.

Nevertheless, teachers also understand that Indigenous students need to develop proficiency in SAE to attain equal access to classroom learning (Riddle, 2014). This necessity reduces the likelihood of the survival of Indigenous language. Moreover, it challenges Indigenous people to maintain their cultures authentically when schools are invalidating their languages (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003).

In other English speaking countries, laws mandate English as the language of tuition (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). This is contrary to the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* that asserts in Article 14.3 that Indigenous children have the right to learn in their own language (United Nations General Assembly, 2007). Teachers who are perceived by Indigenous students as advocates of their minority languages may decrease the educational disadvantage experienced by Indigenous students (Sharifian & Malcolm, 2003). Conversely, the non-recognition of their home languages in schools may contribute to historical relations of powerlessness and disadvantage.

3.4.6 Conclusion and first specific research question.

The review of the literature pertaining to the teaching and learning of Indigenous students identifies many complex historical and contemporary issues that influence their engagement in schooling. The history of education in Australia documents examples of disadvantage for Indigenous students that occurred in the times of colonial suppression of Australia's Indigenous people. Strategies to redress these disadvantages include the forming by teachers of quality relationships with Indigenous students, learning from Indigenous educators and valuing Indigenous cultures and languages.

Leadership and staff at St Mary's have attempted to employ teaching and learning strategies to increase the engagement of Indigenous students. Determining how effective St Mary's initiatives are in providing appropriate Indigenous education is the rationale underpinning the first specific research question:

How do Indigenous students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?

The engagement of students in learning is influenced by the meaningful relationships they have with their teachers (Matthews et al., 2003; Yunkaporta, 2009). However, meaningful relationships that occur outside of school are also influential in student engagement and achievement. In the next section I consider the influence of the Indigenous family and their experience of teaching and learning at St Mary's.

3.5 Influence of Family

Engaging Indigenous students in learning involves understanding the expectations and influence of their family. Indeed, their decision to engage or disengage with learning is often a reflection of the value placed on Western education by their family. The history of education for Indigenous people is one of discrimination and mistreatment by educational authorities. Enduring consequences for successive generations of Indigenous people include perceptions of racial inferiority that have become embedded into Indigenous people's psyche

(Gray & Beresford, 2008; Pearson, 2009). Theories of cultural difference informing educational policies reinforced this negative self-belief among Indigenous people and the consequent expectation of failure at school (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Harrison, 2004).

3.5.1 Consequences of history.

Contemporary educational experiences of Indigenous students have their appreciation in an historical context (Reid, 2004). In 1967, the Australian people voted to end constitutional discrimination against Aboriginal people (Bennett, 1985). By 1969, all Australian states had repealed the legislation allowing for the removal of Aboriginal children under the policy of protection. Nevertheless, enduring memories of the Stolen Generation² continue in the psyche of Indigenous people (Nakata, 2011; Pearson, 2009). The primary aim of removal was to absorb Indigenous children, predominantly those of mixed descent, into white Australian culture (Kennedy, 2004). Family stories of this time are the cultural heritage of many Indigenous students. The stories contribute to their identity and therefore influence their perceptions of their world, including their education.

3.5.1.1 Perceptions of racial inferiority.

One historical legacy is Indigenous people's perception that their own race is inferior compared to the European races (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Pearson, 2009). This perception is a destructive cultural and ideological force that has been internalised by Indigenous people and passed from one generation to another (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Pearson, 2009). Thus, Indigenous students' disengagement from learning may be a consequence of their culture's negative self-perceptions (Gray & Beresford, 2001; Klump & McNeir, 2005; Pearson, 2009).

The supposed inferiority of Indigenous race and culture is not a belief confined to Indigenous people. Non-Indigenous researchers have also portrayed Indigenous culture as a relic of the past, without contemporary value (Porsanger, 2004). Additionally, Indigenous knowledges are cultural dynamics of their society that invite preservation (Prior, 2006; Wilson, 2004). Indeed, many Indigenous people describe the experience of Western research as an oppressive exercise of power that intrudes on their communities (Prior, 2006; L. T. Smith, 1999). Not surprisingly, this research fails to recognise Indigenous culture as valuable. Consequently, Indigenous people often distrust Western research on them (McCarthy, 2013;

² The forcible removal of Aboriginal people from their families from the 1900's to the 1960's to be fostered by white families or institutions.

Porsanger, 2004). For them it represents another element in the colonising process of Indigenous peoples that contributes to negative perceptions about their race and culture.

3.5.1.2 Responses to negative perceptions.

Successive Australian governments implemented programs designed to respond to negative perceptions about Indigenous cultures. These are necessary to address disadvantage of Indigenous people. However, these approaches, particularly those that include monetary reparations, are criticised as appeasing Indigenous people and viewed as a way of silencing Aboriginal voices (Cooper et al., 2004). Indeed, many Indigenous leaders claim that government programs disadvantage Indigenous society (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Pearson, 2009; Sarra, 2014). This occurs when Indigenous people consider government assistance, not as an avenue to end disadvantage, but as a solution and end in itself (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Pearson, 2009). This, in turn, leads them to become a conditioned underclass:

In effect, they see their race as their destiny. This represents a challenge to Indigenous leaders who strive to break down passive welfare dependency among their people who, they contend, have adopted ways of thinking about their condition that contribute to their ongoing perpetual dysfunction and disadvantage. (Pearson, 2007a)

In a similar manner, Indigenous students may accept this negative categorisation of race as destiny, legitimised over generations by a legacy of colonialism. Consequently, they may understand victimisation as victimhood and engage in the self-fulfilling prophecy of educational failure (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Pearson, 2007a). Schools are challenged to work with Indigenous families to counter this debilitating attitude that educational achievement is not possible for Indigenous students (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Pearson, 2007b). As such, schools have the responsibility to redress social injustice. This may enable Indigenous students to succeed in education despite the negative cultural identification and ideological barriers that alienate them from learning success (Partington, 2003).

3.5.1.3 Building positivity and acceptance.

Although there is increasing acceptance of Indigenous cultures by non-Indigenous Australians, racist attitudes and educational disadvantage remain (Harrison, 2004; Reid, 2004). The lived experiences of some Indigenous people not only emphasise the continuing effect of negative historical relations, but also the tenacity of Indigenous people to overcome these. Martin Nakata, an Indigenous leader of Torres Strait Islander (TSI) heritage, is an example of a person challenging stereotyping. He recalls being taught by white teachers who denigrated his local language, TSI Creole. His teachers considered it not to be a real language

(Nakata, 1997). Similarly, Indigenous students who spoke Aboriginal English were thought to be speaking some form of poor English (Eades, 1995) and not something that mirrors and confirms their identity as Aboriginal people (Harrison, 2004). Similarly, Aboriginal spokesperson, Chris Sarra, refers to being limited by societal expectations during his own schooling. He also recalls being stereotyped and discredited in his professional teaching career (Sarra, 2014). Such adverse treatment may lead Indigenous people to acquire a negative identity. Indeed, stress experienced by Indigenous adolescents is attributed to a confusion with their cultural identity (Gray & Beresford, 2008). Indigenous adolescents' relatively high engagement with the juvenile justice system is a consequence of their acquiring negative identities during adolescence (Sarra, 2014). Sarra and Nakata are isolated examples of Indigenous people's achieving in both worlds, despite experiencing the debilitating effects of personal and institutional racism (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). The challenge for education is to turn these isolated examples of lived experiences into general outcomes for Indigenous people.

However, some Indigenous people are criticised by others in their own community because they achieve in the Western world. Their cultural identity is questioned as they are accused of deserting their Indigenous heritage or acting white because they choose to pursue personal goals (Harrison, 2004; Hughes et al., 2004). Indeed, those who aspire to high achievement are judged by their community as surrendering their identity (Carlson, 2016). Further, some Indigenous people have adopted the attitude where the terms "*successful*, *hardworking*, and *Aboriginal* are mutually exclusive terms" (Sarra, 2014, p. 11). In response, Nakata (2011) argues for a more complex understanding of Australian society. Indigenous people must avoid contrasting Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. Instead, Indigenous people need to recognise the complexity of the space where they live in order to nurture better futures for their children (Nakata, 2011).

In the classroom, it is important that educators avoid polarising Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledges and pedagogies. Instead they are encouraged to "privilege both in the appropriate context for appropriate purposes" (Nakata, 2010, p.56). As a consequence, classrooms may become places where knowledges from different cultures converge (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015; Nakata, 2012). This, in turn, generates new opportunities for learning and teaching.

3.5.2 Family expectations.

Indigenous families expect schools to address two issues that are essential to their survival. These are an education that empowers Indigenous children with Western cultural

knowledge, while also situating them firmly in their Indigenous culture, language and identity (Nakata, 2002). Indigenous families recognise the maintenance of cultural connections as important to the formation of positive identity and wellbeing. They also recognise as equally important the development of necessary skills for achieving in non-Indigenous contexts (Nakata, 2002; Pearson, 2009). Indigenous families want their children to “walk tall in both societies, while retaining and consolidating their Aboriginal identities” (Malin & Maidment, 2003, p. 90). For this to occur, Indigenous families need to be involved in their children’s education and contribute to the planning of school policies and procedures. At the same time, schools need to provide the environment for Indigenous students to achieve in Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds (Nakata, 2003).

3.5.2.1 Parental engagement.

All students benefit from their parents’ being involved in their education. However, this has added importance for Indigenous students. In order to retain their cultural identity at school, their cultural values need to be incorporated into the social mores of the school (Duff, 2002). This occurs when they experience their parents’ involvement in their education.

Current education policies welcome parental engagement in schools and family involvement has been endorsed as a valuable strategy to promote student achievement (Epstein, 2013; Weiss, Lopez, & Rosenberg, 2010). However, some Indigenous parents are uncomfortable about approaching their children’s school. This is a consequence of adverse historical relations that have arisen between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (A. J. Martin, 2003). Indigenous parents may have negative memories of childhood associations with schooling and non-Indigenous teachers. As a result, these parents are intimidated by school structures and teachers.

The perception of the school as an overwhelming and confrontational place to be avoided has influenced intergenerational educational disadvantage for Indigenous people (Gray & Beresford, 2008). Indigenous parents’ negative experiences and subsequent disassociation with schooling is the reason for their inability to assist their children in academic learning, a reality that generates shame, frustration and friction between parents and children (Matthews et al., 2003). As a result, some Indigenous parents are confirmed in their belief that school is an intrusive institution that generates family conflict and division.

However, not all Indigenous students are disadvantaged by their parents’ lack of formal education or negative school experiences. Indeed, some Indigenous parents’ own positive and meaningful experiences of schooling motivate them to influence their children’s education. Moreover, other parents encourage their children to embrace the advantages of education, in

order to avoid the disadvantages that a lack of education has caused them (Gray & Beresford, 2001).

The dilemma for Indigenous people is the belief among them that pursuing mainstream education is a choice that also dismisses the value of traditional culture. For this reason, parents may be criticised by extended family members for supposedly prioritising their children's Western education to the neglect of cultural education. However, to pursue traditional culture to the neglect of mainstream education is to risk not making sense of that education (Nakata, 2002). Consequently, schools are challenged to provide quality education for Indigenous students while simultaneously valuing their Indigenous cultures. This requires the involvement of Indigenous parents as educators and community leaders.

3.5.2.2 Family literacy.

Families also contribute to children's early literacy development. Children become familiar with the knowledge and skills associated with the practices of literacy teaching through experiencing their parents' involvement in literacy. These children transition readily into formal schooling (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Kazak, 2004). However, there is often a dissonance between the literacy experiences of children from minority backgrounds and those they encounter on entry into formal schooling (Maher & Bellen, 2015). Children who experience this dissonance are unfamiliar with the dominant practices of literacy teaching in schools and are subsequently disadvantaged (Maher & Bellen, 2015; Rose, 2004).

Prior to formal schooling, an informal literacy curriculum exists in the home that includes valuing and learning from written texts (Rose, 2004). Children learn to read by engaging in sequential stages of reading development. The first of these begins in homes that value the deriving of meaning from written texts. This is important for student achievement as it underpins the formal curriculum that children encounter on entry to school. Thus, children from highly literate families access dominant learning practices tacitly while children from less literate communities are effectively excluded.

Indigenous families have an historical oral tradition of imparting knowledge. As such, they may be less familiar with written texts as a teaching and learning resource (Rose, 2006; Yunkaporta, 2009). Subsequently, Indigenous students may arrive at school without the orientations to written texts that children from literate families acquire (Rose, 2004). As a consequence, teachers may identify Indigenous students as non-achievers in the early stages of their schooling. More importantly, Indigenous students themselves accept this to be reality (Rose, 2004). Indigenous families that have an understanding of Western pedagogies through

their engagement in the school community may be more able to redress this belief of teachers and students.

3.5.2.3 Family obligations.

Indigenous students may have cultural obligations to family that are not recognised or understood by their non-Indigenous teachers (Harrison, 2004). Indigenous family obligations originate from cultural values involving complex kinship responsibilities. For Indigenous students, these responsibilities may be prioritised before their commitment to school learning.

Relationships in the family, peer group and school of all adolescents influence the construction of their identities. These important influences are rarely congruent or harmonious. However, students from minority cultures may experience additional conflict between the cultural expectations of family and the educational expectations of the school (Groome, 1995; Matthews et al., 2003). Indigenous students negotiate tensions between family, peer group and school constantly. Family responsibilities may be reasons for Indigenous students' extensive periods of absence from school. They are often challenged to fulfil their obligations to family and, at the same time, honour their commitment to school. Reflecting on family values may also require them to confront contradictory expectations about the purpose and importance of education in their lives.

Because teachers understand the value of learning, they often mistakenly assume that students likewise prioritise education (Harrison, 2004). However, not all students and families privilege education. In some Indigenous families, learning for oneself is a counter-cultural concept. In these families, gaining an education is not a priority in their lives, and commitment to cultural values is prioritised before the individual's wish to fulfil their own personal learning goals (Harrison, 2004).

Thus, Indigenous students may experience conflict between the expectations of others and their own expectations (Hughes et al., 2004). Moreover, in a society based on community rather than individual advancement, some Indigenous students do not want to be perceived as pursuing personal goals as this may be interpreted by their family and friends as acting white (Hughes et al., 2004). This is exemplified when industrious Indigenous students are labelled as coconuts by their peers and relatives. This is an attempt to insult them by suggesting that, "like a coconut, they are black on the outside but white on the inside" (C. Sarra, 2014). Unfortunately, some Indigenous students submit to this pressure from peers and family and consequently underachieve at school.

3.5.3 Conclusion and second specific research question.

The review of the literature concerning Indigenous families identifies many historical and contemporary issues that influence Indigenous students' engagement in school and achievement of learning outcomes. Parents are the most influential educators of their children. Indigenous parents encourage their children to respect and preserve Indigenous knowledge and culture. They also recognise the necessity of their children receiving a Western education if they are to achieve and be leaders in Western society.

Parental engagement in schools is a positive influence on their children's attainment of learning outcomes. Leadership and staff at St Mary's have attempted to engage families in the education of Indigenous children and include Indigenous perspectives in classroom practices. The effectiveness of these attempts is the rationale for the second research question:

How do Indigenous parents experience the education of their children at St Mary's?

Engaging with Indigenous elders and parents assists non-Indigenous teachers to become sensitised to Indigenous cultural differences and traditions. An understanding of the complex issues of cultural diversity and cultural identity of Indigenous people underpins practices and policies that aim to ensure inclusive education. I consider how educational institutions might ensure inclusiveness of Indigenous students without loss of their cultural identity in the next section.

3.6 Inclusive Education

Inclusive education aims to build school communities that value, celebrate and respond to diversity. Inclusivity is underpinned by respectful relationships between learners, teachers and parents, and supported by collaborative relationships with communities and governments (Slee, 2011). An inclusive education respects cultural diversity by incorporating Indigenous perspectives into classroom learning. Such a dynamic increases the likelihood of Indigenous students' achieving educational outcomes. Moreover, teachers are enriched if they are aware of the influences of past and present Australian government policies on the education of Indigenous people. For educators in Catholic schools, inclusive education may be aligned with the principles of Catholic Social Justice Teaching (CSJT).

An exploration of this theme explores issues of Indigenous identity and critiques relevant government policies that aim to redress the educational disadvantage of Indigenous students. This section also considers how Catholic social justice values are experienced in Catholic schools.

3.6.1 Cultural identity.

Cultural identity is an awareness of belonging to a particular cultural group (Hampton & Toombs, 2013). It may be described as having an understanding of a culture and adopting inherent traits within that culture. These traits predispose people to share similar values and modes of thinking that influence their responses to circumstances. Personal identity within the group develops as entities grow in learning about their culture. This process becomes the catalyst for them to adopt appropriate social roles (Groome, 1995; Hampton & Toombs, 2013). Hampton & Toombs (2013) maintain that a “personal cultural lens influences how we interpret others and how we behave in society” (p. 5). For Indigenous students, this lens effects how they relate to other students and their teachers.

Indigenous students appreciate non-Indigenous teachers who are interested in learning about Indigenous culture and incorporate Indigenous perspectives into their teaching. Conversely, the teacher’s failure to appreciate the importance of Indigenous students’ cultural perspectives and identities may be an impediment to effective teaching and learning.

Being Aboriginal has nothing to do with the colour of your skin or the shape of your nose. It is a spiritual feeling, an identity you know in your heart. It is a unique feeling that may be difficult for non-Aboriginal people to understand.
(Burney, 1994, p. 6)

Shared histories and traditions, as well as shared experiences of colonisation contribute to explaining contemporary Indigenous cultural identity. The influences of urban living and current experiences also contribute to the identity formation of Indigenous people. These influences explain how they identify with Indigenous culture (Carlson, 2016). Indeed, many Indigenous people have reorientated their perspectives from discourses of disadvantage associated with colonial history to those identifying future challenges (Nakata, 2011). They are now engaged in processes of land rights reform, policy development and cultural heritage protection. These issues are intrinsically integrated with reconciliation agendas and social justice processes for Indigenous people that may redefine their cultural identity (Carlson, 2016).

Similarly, contemporary Indigenous students recognise their shared common traditions and histories. However, they have diverse experiences as families, individuals and localities that influence the construction of their identities (Nakata, 2011). Thus, Indigenous students do not embrace homogenous beliefs, values and histories, but participate in a variety of cultural and social dynamics that reflect diverse educational needs. Although they are often portrayed

as underachievers, increasing numbers of Indigenous students are succeeding in education (DiGregorio, Farrington & Page, 2000; Smyth & Fasoli, 2007).

This inconsistency in Indigenous students' achievement of educational outcomes has generated extensive research. One response suggests that younger generations of Indigenous people are more likely to walk in two worlds and enjoy the best of both (Pearson, 2009). However, another perspective suggests Western education has been responsible for the development of the existence of two distinct Indigenous societies. One is dependent upon the Western world and the other has adapted to the Western world (Lane, 2007). These two societies have been characterised as follows:

- (A) Dependents: a “welfare embedded population” that is risk and work averse, and benefits, welfare and security-oriented;
- (B) Adaptors: an “open society population” that is opportunity, effort and outcome-oriented (Lane, 2007, p. 33).

The first society, A, reflects Indigenous people who have remained in community settlements that were purpose-built to accommodate them in the 1930s. These people have accepted the dominant society's categorisation of themselves as impoverished victims of Australian society. Indigenous people living in this type of society externalise the problems they experience as the responsibility of non-Indigenous bureaucrats or as a product of their own biology (Lane, 2007).

Conversely, the second society, B, describes Indigenous people who, in the 1940s and 50s, left these settlements to secure work and become part of Australia's economic upturn at that time. These people intermarried and have children who have completed secondary school successfully and have enrolled in universities (Lane, 2007). As a result, there are Indigenous professionals employed in government and academia. This elite has been criticised for portraying themselves as spokespersons and champions of the “welfare embedded population,” Society A. Moreover, this group, Society B, has been criticised by Society A for building their careers in the infrastructure networks that supposedly address the problems associated with Society A. These infrastructure networks have been derogatorily labelled “the Aboriginal industry” (Dillon, 2014).

The identification of two distinct groups of Indigenous people travelling on different pathways raises important questions for the Indigenous society (Lane, 2007; Pearson, 2007b; C. Sarra, 2014).

- (C) Is assimilation the only positive future choice for Indigenous people? and

(D) What happens to discrete Indigenous communities whose members desire to maintain their language and culture (Lane, 2007; Nakata, 1997)?

Further, these communities are often located in places where a mixture of traditional culture and welfare has led to dysfunctional behaviours (Phillpot, 2006). It is therefore not surprising that Indigenous students from these communities are not challenged to achieve academically, remain educationally disadvantaged, and perpetuate that society.

Contemporary Australian media generates similar negative accounts of Indigenous culture. Moreover, the topic of Indigenous identity is often related to the topic of resource allocation. This association generates false notions among non-Indigenous Australians of Indigenous people's misuse of government resources through false claims to Indigenous identity (Carlson, 2016). This is harmful to Indigenous people for whom cultural identification is a serious and sensitive issue. Indeed, among Indigenous people, "who is and what counts as being Aboriginal today" (Nakata, 2011, p. 5) is a focus of serious debate. This tension leads Indigenous people to critique one another over what constitutes an authentic Indigenous identity. In doing so, they are behaving as governments once did by defining and dividing Indigenous people, causing further harm to themselves (Nakata, 2011).

Attitudinal change on the part of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people is invited in order to achieve the goals of socio-economic equality and bi-culturalism. Such a process is assisted by committed, energetic and capable teachers and teacher educators (Hunter, 2007). The alternative is a future of assimilation, where Indigenous people become socially and economically equal, but are no longer culturally distinct (Pearson, 2009). There is richness in Indigenous cultures that contributes to the learning of non-Indigenous Australians. The dynamic of schools in promoting and maintaining this learning is important. Proponents of inclusive education claim that the lives of disadvantaged Indigenous students may be transformed by education without the destruction of Indigenous culture.

3.6.2 Government policies.

The inability of education systems to generate improved outcomes for Indigenous students has resulted in governments formulating policies to address educational disadvantage. These include increasing the number of Indigenous teachers, specifying curriculum content and implementing welfare programs to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous achievement. However, the experience of educational reform for Indigenous students has been largely disappointing (Gray & Beresford, 2008).

Both sides of Australian politics have formulated policies that have failed to address equity for Indigenous students (Pearson, 2007b). Conservative protectionist approaches implemented prior to the 1967 Australian Referendum generated a legacy of mistrust of educational authorities by Indigenous people (Partington & Gray, 2003). Government policies of this time were not inclusive; they excluded Indigenous children from education. Similarly, Labor party initiatives have not lessened the educational disadvantage of Indigenous students (Pearson, 2009). While political reforms may have increased the number of schools in remote areas and provided support for Indigenous students to study in boarding schools, they have not generated an education that is inclusive of Indigenous cultures and traditions.

While the current Australian curriculum urges intercultural understandings for all students as well as the incorporation of Indigenous histories and cultures, these implementations have been disappointing (Nakata, 2011). The challenge is to translate the Australian curriculum into strategies that produce meaningful change for all students (Nakata, 2011).

The educational disadvantage of Indigenous students is generated by issues emanating from social and cultural contexts wider than the school. It reflects inequalities in Australian society and an education system that has evolved to advantage an inherently unequal socio-economic order (Rose, 2004). Nevertheless, teachers and school administrators within individual schools accept the responsibility for addressing this educational disadvantage. However, government policies continue to offer general solutions to the educational disadvantage experienced by Indigenous students (Santoro et al., 2011).

Indigenous students cannot be understood as having consistently homogenous characteristics. Indeed, research identifies diversity in their cultural backgrounds (Nakata, 2011). Their families reside in various settings that include major urban locations, rural towns and remote areas of Australia. Consequently, programs that target all Indigenous students are unlikely to succeed (Gray & Beresford, 2008). In contrast, specifically designed programs that honour responsible relationships with Indigenous students and their cultures have positive results (Harrison, 2004; Hattie, 2008).

3.6.2.1 Increase in Indigenous teachers.

Indigenous people remain underrepresented at approximately 1.2% of the teaching workforce in Australian schools (MATSITI, 2014). Consequently, policies have been initiated to increase the number of Indigenous classroom teachers with the aim of lessening the educational disadvantage of Indigenous students (MCEECDYA, 2010). This is considered a culturally responsive approach to enhance the educational experiences and achievements of

Indigenous students (Barr & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2009; Leeman & Reid, 2006). Teachers who have substantial influence on Indigenous students are those who are sensitive to the plurality of how Indigenous students think, talk, behave and learn (Tanaka, 2009). This is the rationale for government policies aimed at encouraging the recruitment of more Indigenous teachers (MCEECDYA, 2010).

Nevertheless, Indigenous knowledges and multicultural pedagogies have been argued to be not only relevant to Indigenous students, but also beneficial to non-Indigenous teachers and students. Research (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015) therefore suggests an alternative approach that places less emphasis on increasing the number of Indigenous teachers. Instead it argues for further recognition and implementation of Indigenous pedagogies and knowledges as valuable for all teachers and students.

3.6.2.2 Cultural inappropriateness.

Australian education systems have been challenged to engage Indigenous students through an appropriate curriculum. Moreover, research (Shipp, 2013; Wheaton, 2000) argues that curriculum be culturally appropriate for all Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian students. An inclusive approach is needed that integrates Western academic education with a privileging of Indigenous knowledges and culture. Moreover, what is needed is an understanding of how to value and position Indigenous content in the curriculum as something that enriches the education of all students (Nakata, 2011).

Research (Ball, 2004; Durie, 2005) refutes the concept that classical learning is inappropriate in multicultural classrooms. Instead, researchers suggest that universal concepts are embedded in all knowledge systems. Moreover, cultural interface theory emphasises managing the classroom as an intercultural learning space (Nakata, 2011) and provides a framework for reconciling knowledge systems (Yunkaporta, 2009). This theory argues for critical reasoning and problem-solving abilities that are appropriate for students of any culture (Nakata, 2002). Knowledge is generated and traditions are honoured in a system that allows all students to learn from both Western and Indigenous cultures (Gray & Beresford, 2001; Malin & Maidment, 2003; Yunkaporta, 2009).

3.6.2.3 Welfare programs.

Another ideological debate that has informed government policies and affects the education of Indigenous students is the creation of welfare assistance programs for Indigenous people. The objective of such programs is to decrease the social disadvantage of Indigenous people. However, without an accompanying understanding of the social problems of the

contemporary Indigenous society, such programs are ineffective (Pearson, 2000). Moreover, the social and educational disadvantage of Indigenous people continues (Pearson, 2000).

Monetary initiatives alone generate a system of passive welfare (Pearson, 2000). This system contributes to the problems affecting contemporary Indigenous communities, including the disengagement from learning and subsequent low educational outcomes of Indigenous students. Passive welfare is an illogical, financial relationship, where transactions are not based on reciprocity, but on charity (Ring & Brown, 2002). This government policy undermines traditional values and relationships by depriving Indigenous parents of their dignity (Pearson, 2000; Queensland. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Task Force on Violence & Queensland. Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Development, 2000).

3.6.2.4 Educational standards.

Government policies that prioritise the achievement of targeted outcomes measure schools by their capacity to deliver improved test scores as proof of their educational legitimacy (Graham, 2010). However, in schools where educators have high expectations and adopt purposeful assessment, it is likely that educational outcomes and authentic learning are achieved. Such practices differ from the application of tests that are used to grade schools, allegedly providing greater transparency and accountability so parents might make better school choices based on academic achievement (Graham, 2010; Klenowski, 2009).

Yunkaporta (2009) claims that authentic learning and purposeful assessment may be further explained by distinguishing between educational outcomes (improved scores) and educational outputs (knowledge, products, relationships). Educational outcomes are defined as quantifiable results. For Indigenous students, these may be measurable improvements that demonstrate progress in closing the gap between them and non-Indigenous students (Yunkaporta, 2009). Such data are sought by government agencies that regard schools as consumer items in an education supermarket (Graham, 2010). In contrast, educational outputs refer to connectedness, engagement, higher order thinking and deep knowledge (Yunkaporta, 2009). These values contribute to the generation of quality learning, but lack the precision governments require.

Educators experience concern when the demand to produce student outcomes is a prerequisite to sourcing government funding. Moreover, when producing higher test scores as evidence of student learning is a school's first priority, teachers focus on results rather than learning (Klenowski, 2009; Seidel, 2010). In such an environment of accountability for improved test scores, authentic teaching programs aimed at addressing equity issues in the

classroom are overlooked (Klenowski, 2009). The challenge for teachers is to remain assessment literate and see beyond the statistical outcomes.

3.6.3 Catholic schools.

In this section I explore the founding purpose of Australian Catholic schools and explores changes that have occurred. Further, it questions whether the contemporary Catholic school is achieving its stated purpose, particularly in regard to the provision of opportunity for those who are marginalised in Australian society. Following that is a critique of wealthy Catholic schools labelled as unauthentic because of their selective enrolment policies. Finally, this section explores the commitment of Catholic schools to lessen the educational disadvantage of Indigenous students. It explores common themes that emerge among diverse practices for redressing this disadvantage.

3.6.3.1 Purpose of Catholic schools.

Catholic schools were established in pre-federation Australia in the 1850s. At this time, the Catholic population was marginalised, because the colony, founded upon the Protestant ethic, disapproved of Catholic religious beliefs (McLaughlin, 2005). Thus, Catholic schools were initiated to provide an education to the predominantly poor Catholic people in order to support their religious beliefs. Vatican documents over several decades have defined the rationale of the Catholic school and the responsibilities of those involved in Catholic education. Laghi and Martins (1997, para. 9) state that the Catholic school is to “be a school for the human person and of the human person”. Further, they maintain that this purpose is achieved when the school engages in processes to develop an authentic, inclusive community (Laghi & Martins, 1997, para. 9). Therefore, authentic Catholic schools endeavour to implement policies and practices that are inclusive.

This may be achieved by applying the principles of Catholic social teaching (CST) (Eick & Ryan, 2014). CST refers to social principles and moral teachings of the Church. These teachings honour the protection of human life and dignity by the promotion of social justice (Eick & Ryan, 2014). CST embraces the values of human dignity, the common good and a preferential option for the impoverished and marginalised (Scanlan, 2009). These principles have been applied to critique the justice of educational policies and the overall ethos governing Catholic schools. Research (Storz & Nestor, 2007) suggests that too many Catholic schools fail to practise these principles, as the needs of students marginalised by society are unaddressed. In Australia, this includes Indigenous families who define social justice as:

... the ability to nourish your children and send them to school where their education will not only equip them for employment, but reinforce their knowledge and appreciation of their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health: a life of choices and opportunity, free from discrimination. (Dodson, 1993, p. 119)

Australian Catholic schools espouse three goals that are shared and valued by Indigenous families. These are quality teaching, the fostering of human community and a freedom from oppression (D. McLaughlin, 2005). Indigenous parents choose to enrol their children into a Catholic education after having studied a school's literature promoting these goals (Bagley, Woods, & Glatter, 2001; Parsons, Chalkley & Jones, 2000). Thus, it is quality education and human values, not Catholicity, that leads Indigenous parents to choose Catholic schools (Friedman, Bobrowski, & Geraci, 2006). They are in search of education standards (Arthur, 2005) and the human values purported to be experienced at a Catholic school (Sultmann, Thurgood, & Rasmussen, 2003). These values honour a dignity shared by all humans and ensure that school policies reflect a preferential option for society's marginalised (Scanlan, 2009). Catholic school enrolment policies assert that they are open to all who share these values (Laghi and Martins, 1997, para. 7). However, studies (Fitzgerald, 2009; McGreevy, 2004; Sayed, 2009) have examined whether these espoused values align with those observed in Catholic schools. Research concludes that a commitment to the poor is often not realised in the enrolment policies of schools that focus on educating elite or middle-class students (Sayed, 2009). Consequently, a discrepancy concerning this commitment exists between Catholic discourse and Catholic practice (Grace, 2003). Catholic schools where social justice values remain espoused but unrealised, have been labelled at best inconsistent, and at worst, arguably duplicitous or hypocritical (Scanlan, 2009).

Overall, the Australian schooling system has become increasingly stratified according to socioeconomic status (Savage, 2013). Catholic schools have become more elite, serving fewer disadvantaged students, including Indigenous students (Fitzgerald, 2009; McGreevy, 2004). Selective admission practices in contemporary Catholic schools marginalise the students whom Catholic schools were originally founded to assist (Scanlan, 2008). Catholic schools that enrol only the wealthy have been criticised as ignoring the Catholic Church's social justices teachings (Scanlan, 2009).

In response to this criticism, proponents of an elite Catholic school system argue that they are fulfilling the Church's mission to the poor by "helping the spiritually poor when they educate the children of the rich" (Dorr, 1992, pp. 296–297). This is, supposedly, as important

for the Church's mission as service of those who are materially poor (Dorr, 1992). However, when education is withheld for financial reasons, the Catholic school may be accused of failing to challenge or condoning social injustice (Dorr, 1992; Grace, 2003). Therefore, Catholic schools that cater exclusively to the relatively wealthy, have been labelled as inauthentic (Treston, 1997).

3.6.3.2 Commitment to Indigenous students.

The QCEC website provides a policy statement on Indigenous education that outlines a commitment to ensuring equity and quality education for Indigenous students (<http://www.qcec.catholic.edu.au>). This policy is informed by a belief in the transformative power of education to form the basis for intergenerational change for Indigenous people. Accordingly, diocesan and school mission statements confirm that Catholic schools are culturally safe places of learning, growing and belonging for Indigenous students, families and community members.

Indeed, successful initiatives have been implemented in Australian Catholic schools that have led to closing the gap in education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. These include programs for engaging with their cultural heritage, increasing numeracy and literacy skills and developing quality leaders and teachers of Indigenous students (QCEC, 2013). Catholic educational leaders have welcomed the inclusion of Indigenous histories, cultures and content in the Australian curriculum. Additionally, where Indigenous students represent a high proportion of school enrolments, Catholic dioceses have committed to Indigenous language and culture programs as requested by the school community (Catholic Education Diocese of Darwin, 2014).

3.6.3.3 Providing education to Indigenous communities.

Education providers are challenged to provide quality secondary education to Indigenous students in remote Aboriginal communities (Mander, 2012; Pearson, 2004). Indigenous leaders understand the impracticality of resourcing the required secondary teaching specialisations to such small numbers in such locations (Pearson, 2004; Sarra, 2008). As a consequence, students from remote areas are encouraged to access secondary education in locations outside their home communities. I discuss two strategies in this section that enable this to occur.

The first strategy involves Indigenous students from remote communities accessing scholarships to enrol in private and Catholic boarding schools in metropolitan areas. Attendance at these boarding schools is perceived by many Indigenous parents and leaders as

a positive initiative to address the educational disadvantage of Indigenous students (Langton & Ma Rhea, 2009).

However, critics of this strategy suggest that removing students from their communities for the purpose of education is a version of a new Stolen Generation (Hagan, 2004). As these students are in out-of-home care, they are considered to be disconnected from their community and culture. Critics assert that residential boarding schools for Indigenous children are a means of combining education with physical separation from family, culture and language. As such, attendance at distant boarding schools may be perceived as harmful to Indigenous students. It results in a loss of language and cultural identity that influences the health and wellbeing of young Indigenous people negatively.

Indigenous leaders refute this criticism. They perceive boarding school scholarships for Indigenous students as part of a broad strategy for educating the next generation of Indigenous people. Further, they argue that many boarding schools offer a Western education and honour the cultural values of their Indigenous students by incorporating these into their curricula. Therefore, it is unfair to associate boarding school attendance with an era of forced removal and assimilation (Langton & Ma Rhea, 2009; Pearson, 2004). Moreover, they emphasise that students are not forcibly removed, because Indigenous parents willingly send their children to boarding schools in order for them to receive an education that is impossible to provide in their communities (Pearson, 2004). Moreover, the improved conditions for learning in boarding schools ensure that Indigenous students are given opportunities for educational achievement (Langton & Ma Rhea, 2009).

The second strategy for educating Indigenous students calls for education providers to establish regional boarding colleges that are closer to Indigenous communities (Marika, Yunupingu, Marika-Mununggiritj, & Muller, 2009; Sarra, 2008). Attendance at these schools in regional areas, rather than metropolitan boarding schools, provides an option for remote Indigenous students that does not separate them from their community or culture. Proponents of this strategy emphasise the marked contrast between boarding school culture and home cultures and the negative influence this may have on Indigenous students: "... if they don't succeed there [at boarding schools], there's often no going back to where they've come from either, so they're left in no man's land" (Sarra, 2008). Thus, for those Indigenous students overwhelmed by the mono-culture of boarding schools or not prepared to leave their community, this strategy safeguards their perceptions of self-identity

Indigenous students need access to quality secondary education. This may occur at metropolitan boarding schools or residential schools in regional centres that honour

Indigenous cultural values and establish relevant educational programs for Indigenous students. This assists Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to gain a deeper understanding and appreciation of Indigenous histories and cultures.

3.6.4 Third specific research question.

This review of the literature concerning inclusive education in Australian schools identifies historical and contemporary issues that influence the experience of school Indigenous students. It necessarily explores both how students identify with their culture and the influence this identification has for teaching and learning. It also critiques the implementation of government policies aimed at redressing the educational disadvantage of Indigenous students and offers explanations for their limited realisation. The literature concerning Catholic schools explores the commitment of Catholic education to redressing the educational disadvantage of Indigenous people. This commitment is disseminated and evidenced in the initiatives of individual school leaders and teachers who build and sustain relationships with Indigenous students and their families. The literature also examines the position of Catholic boarding schools and how enrolment at these may influence Indigenous students.

St Mary's has attempted to develop and implement policies and practices that ensure Indigenous students experience an education that reflects the needs of Indigenous people. The effectiveness of these attempts is the rationale for the third research question:

How do Indigenous students experience the implementation of inclusivity policies at St Mary's?

3.7 Conclusion

This chapter has reviewed literature concerning the education of Indigenous students. It provides an exploration of the historical experience of Indigenous people in Australian society as a necessary framework for understanding contemporary issues confronting Indigenous people. The literature was conceptualised under three themes:

1. Teaching and learning;
2. Influence of family; and
3. Inclusivity.

The issues identified in this literature review generated three specific research questions that structure the management of the research process. These three specific research questions are:

- How do Indigenous students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?
- How do Indigenous parents experience the education of their children at St Mary's?
- How do Indigenous students and parents experience the implementation of inclusivity policies at St Mary's?

Chapter 4: Design of the Research

4.1 Introduction

In this chapter I justify the implementation of the research design adopted in this study to explore how Indigenous students and their parents experience education. There are three specific research questions that concentrate the implementation of the research design:

- How do Indigenous students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?
- How do Indigenous parents experience the education of their children at St Mary's?
- How do Indigenous students and parents experience the implementation of inclusivity policies at St Mary's?

4.2 Theoretical framework

A theoretical framework explains and justifies the philosophical beliefs that underpin the research design (Creswell, 1998). The hierarchical nature of this framework ensures that the assumptions embedded in the epistemology informs each subsequent element (Crotty, 1998).

Epistemology is the theory of knowledge that defines what knowledge is possible and legitimate. It is a “way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know” (Crotty, 1998, p. 3). This research is supported by the constructionist epistemology.

From within the constructionist epistemology, the research paradigm of interpretivism is adopted. A research paradigm reflects a particular world view for illuminating the complexity of understood realities (Patton, 1990). The interpretivist paradigm is premised on social interaction between humans and context as the foundation for knowledge generation (O'Donohue, 2007). Within the interpretivist paradigm several theoretical perspectives coexist. Theoretical perspectives are lenses for conceptualising interpretive data. Two theoretical perspectives are considered necessary for this research: symbolic interactionism and Indigenous perspectives.

Case study is the methodology adopted in this research and data gathering strategies are the techniques or procedures used to gather data (Crotty, 1998). The research methodology is a justification for the choice of data gathering strategies and how they orchestrate the conduct of the research design (Lee, 2014; Merriam, 1988;). This research uses document analysis, structured group interviews and individual in-depth interviews to gather information. Table

4.1 illustrates the components of the theoretical framework. Constant Comparative Analysis is the primary process of analysing data in this study. A detailed description of the data analysis used may be found in Section 4.10 of this chapter.

Figure 4.1 presents a diagrammatic representation of the research design.

Table 4.1

Theoretical Framework of the Research Design

Epistemology	Constructionism
Research paradigm	Interpretivism
Theoretical Perspectives	Symbolic interactionism
Methodology	Case study
Data Gathering Strategies	Document analysis
	Focus group interviews
	Individual interviews

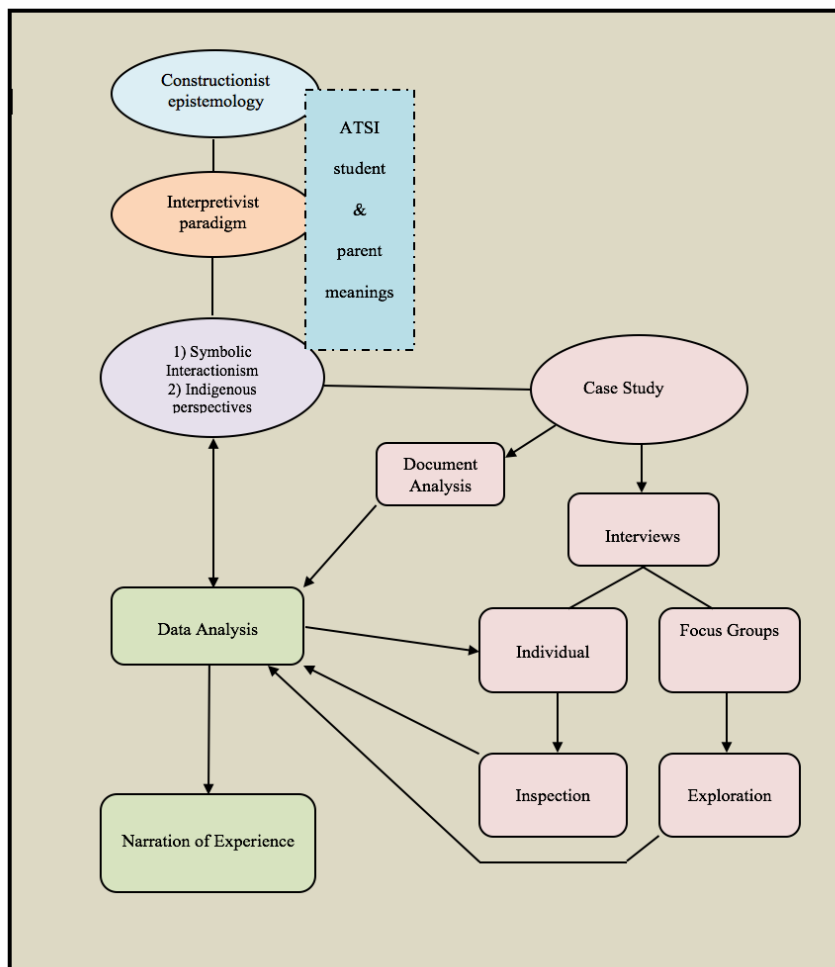


Figure 4.1. Diagrammatic overview of the research design.

4.3 Epistemology: Constructionism

Epistemology provides a philosophical foundation for understanding perspective of knowledge and how knowledge is generated. It is a way of perceiving and explaining how we, as humans, know what we know (Crotty, 1998). As such, it not only addresses how knowledge is derived, but also how it should be tested and validated (Feast, 2010; O'Donohue, 2007). Understanding how knowledge is acquired and how concepts are developed assists in clarifying the knowledge generated by research (Dickerson, 2010).

The epistemology that perceives knowledge as being construed by people is constructionism. It is this epistemology that underpins this study. A constructionist epistemology implies that truth and meaning are not objective, but construed through engagement of minds with the world (Crotty, 1998). However, for constructionists, objectivity in relation to humans presents a problem because each human interprets the world through their own system of meaning (Candy, 1989). Further, a constructionist epistemology affirms that groups of humans may form meaning differently, even concerning the same phenomenon (Feast, 2010). Thus, constructionism is an expression of how people negotiate their own reality and make sense of that reality. Moreover, constructionists claim that prior to there being a consciousness on earth capable of interpreting the world, the world held no meaning at all. This meaning of the world was then constructed by human beings as they interacted with their environment (Crotty, 1998). Thus, constructionists argue that there are many ways to interpret the world and its meaning and that reality is socially constructed by these interpretations.

This study focuses on how Indigenous students experience education at Mary's. As these experiences do not occur in isolation, the research explores Indigenous students' interactions with others and critiques how these experiences are interpreted. Constructionism acknowledges how human beings use individual, subjective experiences to interpret and comprehend their existences (Creswell, 2013; Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 1994). Therefore, constructionism is considered appropriate for this study.

Constructionism is an expression of how people accept their own reality and make sense of that reality. These interpretations of reality are influenced by cultural, historical, political and social norms (Crotty, 1998; Schwandt, 1994). Accordingly, people from different cultures may interpret the same phenomenon very differently (Feast, 2010). There is no personal essence that affects the reality people perceive (Neuman, 2002), but each perspective "tells us something very important about what is really true" (Charon, 2007, p. 2). How Indigenous people interpret the world has been informed by their culture in Australian

society. This study is about exploring the experience of Indigenous students. Therefore, it is important that this study reflect an understanding of how Indigenous culture and society influence the construction of reality for Indigenous students.

Constructionist research emphasises the importance of the participants' beliefs. Further, it emphasises how the context in which participants express their beliefs may influence personal meaning for individual people (Creswell, 2008). A culturally safe school environment within the context of a supportive community is an important setting in which to explore participants' beliefs in an authentic manner. Further, within this culturally safe environment there are other influences that affect the educational experiences of Indigenous students. These include the relationships students have with teachers and other students and also the expectations of their families. Accordingly, there are many different meanings that are constructed as individuals interact and subsequently develop understandings from their experiences (Creswell, 2013).

This study engages with and negotiates multiple perspectives concerning Indigenous students' experience of education at St Mary's. In so doing, it is not expected to generate truths. Rather, it seeks to inform readers about how meaning is constructed from the experience of Indigenous students and their parents within a particular educational context. This approach reflects the epistemology of constructionism that is embedded in this study.

4.4 Research Paradigm: Interpretivism

Research paradigms are associations of rational ideas about the world that are used as a basis for understanding and explaining human society (Basse, 1999). Research paradigms are composed of various theories in relation to how knowledge is produced and accepted as valid (O'Donohue, 2007). A research paradigm has to be congruent with the purpose of the research. It also needs to justify the selection of a particular methodology to accomplish that purpose and to answer the research questions (Crotty, 1998; Feast, 2010). The particular research paradigm that provides a context for this study is interpretivism.

Interpretivism is built on the assumption that social interaction is the foundation for knowledge (O'Donohue, 2007). Furthermore, interpretivism contends that the world is comprehended from the perspective of individual actors within that world (Candy, 1989). Thus, it rejects the notion of unbiased observation and the idea of universal rules. Its aim is not to report a supposed objective reality, but to understand the values, attitudes and beliefs that affect individuals to act in a particular way (Candy, 1989; Punch, 1998). Interpretive research does not endeavor to retranslate the experiences of others. Instead, it seeks to

generate a more profound, extensive and systematic representation of those experiences from the viewpoint of those who experience it (Candy, 1989). Consequently, interpretivism purports that multiple realities of phenomena exist, not single realities, and that these realities may differ in relation to time and place.

Interpretivist research is appropriate for this study that explores how Indigenous students experience education at St Mary's. Interpretivism seeks to provide a comprehension of the intricate area of lived experience from the viewpoint of those who live it (Merriam, 1988). Through an interpretivist lens, this research explores various perspectives of the realities of St Mary's students (Schnelker, 2006). It aims to understand Indigenous students' education experiences, thereby generating a more in-depth appreciation of this specific phenomenon.

4.5 Theoretical Perspective: Symbolic Interactionism

Symbolic interactionism is a theoretical perspective in the interpretivist research paradigm that provides a further lens for conceptualising research design. The principle underpinning symbolic interactionism is comprehending the viewpoints of others (Crotty, 1998). As such, symbolic interactionism has been defined as a process through which humans "become aware of perceptions, feelings and attitudes of others and interpret their meanings and content" (Crotty, 1998, pp. 75-76). Research in this study is consistent with this definition of symbolic interactionism. This perspective focuses on the actions of individuals and the meanings ascribed to these actions. It assumes that humans are actors in society who generate and modify meanings about phenomena on the basis of their interactions with others and context. Symbolic interactionism is premised on the following understandings:

- the individual is constructed through interaction with others and these interactions contribute to the construction of their society;
- ongoing social interaction contributes to a human definition as a person in a community;
- humans are active, thinking beings who define their situations through meaning making by interacting with others because humans are not individual agents;
- human action is understood by focusing on social interaction, human thinking, the definition of the situation and the nature of the human being; and
- meaning is communicated through symbols which are learned from others and influenced by context (Charon, 2007).

Thus, symbolic interactionism interprets meaning and knowledge as being generated by human construction and negotiation. In symbolic interactionism, people are viewed as actors who modify their performances when interacting with others or in different contexts. They are not conforming objects of socialisation, but creative participants who fashion their social world. Interaction occurs when people assume societal roles and interrelate. Interactions are symbolic when they include symbols through which communication occurs. Language is therefore a symbolic interaction through which people become aware of the perceptions of others and subsequently interpret their meanings (Crotty, 1998).

Symbolic interactionism is the theoretical perspective used in this research since meaning is negotiated through relational, interactive experiences. Indigenous students' experiences of education at St Mary's have been generated through socially interactive processes whereby students make meaning from the interactive social interface they encounter in the school context. Through the lens of symbolic interactionism, this study seeks to explore the interpretations of Indigenous students and their experiences of education.

4.6 Research Methodology: Case Study

A research methodology is a theoretical justification for the choice and orchestration of data-gathering strategies (Sarantakos, 1998). The research methodology implemented in this thesis is case study.

Case study is comprehensive, investigative research into a current phenomenon within its realistic setting (Yin, 2003). It may be explained as a unit of human interaction—the phenomenon—embedded in the natural domain (Scholz & Tietje, 2002). In case study, this phenomenon is a bounded entity (Yin, 2003). This means that the case is situated within a specific setting or context and may be bounded by time and/or geography (Gillham, 2000; Scholz & Tietje, 2002).

The holistic focus of case study enables the researcher to appreciate the complexity of the phenomenon within the case (Punch, 1998). Therefore, a case study design is adopted because it offers an in-depth understanding of the situation and meanings being explored. It focuses attention on the participants' perspectives within the intricacies of each setting. It also engages with local knowledge to generate new understandings (Yin, 2003). Case study's emphasis on context ensures that it is a discrete research methodology (Merriam, 1988). Insights generated from case studies may influence policy, practice, and further research (Merriam, 1988).

Case study methodology corresponds with interpretive research and the theoretical perspective of symbolic interactionism. Case study contends that the world may be interpreted from the viewpoint of individuals (Candy, 1989). It incorporates and presents the opinions of these individuals in the case under study (Tellis, 1997). It is a multi-perspectival analysis of the voices and social orientation of the actors and the ways that groups of actors interact (Tellis, 1997).

Case study is an appropriate methodology for school-based research (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). The identifying features of case study confirm it as an appropriate methodology for researching the experience of Indigenous students for the following reasons.

First, a case study investigates a specific, contemporary phenomenon and seeks to construct a comprehensive understanding of the interpretations and meanings generated from exploring the phenomenon (Merriam, 1988). The context for this research is St Mary's community. Meaning is interpreted from the perspective of individual students, parents and teachers concerning this experience.

Second, case study relies on inductive reasoning to generate the concepts as they emerge from data analysis (Patton, 1990; Thorne, 2000). In exploring the experience of education for Indigenous students, themes emerge from the analysis of collected data.

Third, case study methodology leads to concepts that are heuristic. This researcher's intent in analysing data are to appreciate the experiences of St Mary's education for Indigenous students. However, these data may also generate further understandings concerning education generally or prompt questions for further research about the experience of Indigenous people in other contexts.

Last, case study methodology promotes the reflective process. In this study, the researcher reflects on the data gathered from documents and discussions with Indigenous students, their parents and teachers. An analysis of these data assists the researcher to clarify meaning and thereby enhance understanding of identified issues. This occurs through more in-depth discussions and individual interviews with relevant stakeholders.

Case study is the chosen methodology to answer *how* or *why* queries, when the researcher does not direct events and the focus is a current phenomenon in a natural context (Yin, 2003). As such, case study enables the researcher an opportunity to function in the actual, rather than the theoretical world (Walker, 1985).

Case study methodology has also been critiqued regarding its perceived lack of control over extraneous variables, making it descriptive and valid only for one phenomenon. Because

the understandings of a particular case study are relevant to an individual site, generalisations are not applicable (Gomm, Hammersley, & Foster, 2000; Yin, 2003). However, this criticism demonstrates a misunderstanding of the purpose of case study which is to particularise rather than generalise new understandings (Stake, 1995). A single case is specifically chosen because the researcher aims to understand the particular in depth, not to learn what is generally true of all (Merriam, 1988). Proponents of case study methodology dispute the notion of a generalisable theory being the only worthwhile goal of research. It is not the intention of case study to generalise, but to understand the case in its complexity and entirety (Punch, 1998). Further, case study allows the opinions of participants to be heard, explained, described and understood (Tellis, 1997).

A further criticism of case study methodology refers to human subjectivity. This implies that the researcher may be selective in interpreting results and in making observations and interpretations that may not be easily verified. The researcher is often the major means of generating data collection and analysis. Thus, detractors of case study methodology claim that this may allow equivocal evidence or personal opinions to influence the new understandings and conclusions (Punch, 1998). However, the researcher employs a number of strategies that ensure the integrity and credibility of interpretations. These include a prolonged engagement with the case study site and the use of multiple data gathering strategies and sources of data in order to defend interpretations. Supporters of case study methodology recognise that there are many perceptions of specific actualities. Triangulation assists in clarifying different interpretations. This is a process whereby a number of perceptions are used to generate meaning, confirming the validity of the process (Stake, 1995).

Critics are also concerned that the quantity of the data arising from the case study may overwhelm the researcher, so that the product may be too lengthy or detailed for readers to appreciate. As it is anchored in real life situations, the case study generates a profound and complete account of a phenomenon (Merriam, 1988). However, the volume of the data may be managed by adhering strictly to the study's research questions. This ensures that the study's conclusions are accessible to the reader.

For this study, the strengths of case study dismiss its limitations. Case study is an apt methodology to explore the complex experience of Indigenous students at St Mary's. Finally, it is the methodology used in this research because it satisfies the four conditions in which it should be used. These are when:

- the focus of the study is to answer how and why questions;
- the behaviour of those involved in the study cannot be manipulated;

- the study encompasses contextual conditions relevant to the phenomenon studied; and,
- the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (Yin, 2003).

The three research questions for this study begin with how. The research focuses on the authentic experience of Indigenous students and their parents. The study site is the specific context of a secondary school. The study could not be considered outside the context that influences the experience. As such, case study is the research methodology implemented in this study.

4.7 An Indigenous Perspective

An Indigenous perspective is employed to integrate the research design because it informs an understanding of the experiences of Indigenous people. Indigenous people perceive meaning and construct knowledge about their world in diverse and complex ways. Understanding the world views of research participants is an indication of a scholar's authenticity in conducting research if they are going to do more good than harm (Bishop, et al., 2002). Thus, an understanding of Indigenous epistemologies is foundational in appreciating how Indigenous participants perceive their reality. Moreover, because this research honours the values of Indigenous people, the guiding principles of Indigenous research methodology is included in this study.

Educational theorists have advocated for an Indigenist, rights-based approach to the leadership and management of education of Indigenous children (Ma Rhea, 2014; Martin & Miraboopa, 2003). This approach includes recognition of the human rights of Indigenous peoples, specifically their distinctive economic, linguistic and cultural rights within complex postcolonial education systems. It also involves policy makers reconsidering their previous colonial approaches to the leadership and management of Indigenous education (Ma Rhea, 2014). However, postcolonial scholars (Ashcroft, Griffin & Tiffin, 1998) point to the enduring and complex nature of the task of decolonising society, arguing that it is therefore “not surprising that school leaders face a difficult task in rethinking their approach to Indigenous people” (Ma Rhea, 2014, p. 92).

Indigenous students enrolled at St Mary's have diverse cultural backgrounds. Many students identify as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. In addition, many also have non-Indigenous heritage. Family groups are located in areas from the regional city of Cairns, in which this research is located, to the remote Aboriginal community areas of Cape York and the Torres Strait. As such, how St Mary's Indigenous families understand their lives is related

to their complex cultural identities as well as the cultural and geographical origin of their families.

4.7.1 Indigenous epistemology.

An Indigenous epistemology is a lens to understand how knowledge is acquired and used by Indigenous peoples. There are many definitions that are useful in generating an understanding of Indigenous epistemologies and how these compare to other epistemologies. One definition describes Indigenous epistemology as a reputable knowledge of Indigenous peoples, their worldviews, and the practices and traditions that guide them (De La Torre, 2004). However, it may also be explained as “the peoples’ cognitive and wise legacy as a result of their interaction with nature in a common territory” (Maurial, 1999, p. 62). Nevertheless, understanding Indigenous knowledge is more important than advocating any one definition (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2000). Hart (2010) explains that this is because “understanding requires the inquirer to be open to accepting different realities, regardless of how one uses this term” (p. 4).

Indigenous people have demonstrated epistemologies that differ from and challenge previous Western, Euro-centric understandings of knowledge. An Indigenous epistemology is described as individual, oral, pragmatic, comprehensive, and communicated in metaphorical language (Castellano, 2000). As such, Indigenous epistemology may be understood as a fluid means of knowing attained from lessons communicated by narrative, where the narrator or storyteller adds personal nuances to each story (Vijayah, 2011).

Indigenous epistemology contains an intuitively based process for knowledge enhancement (Ermine, 1995; Vijayah, 2011). The diverse nature of this knowledge ensures that there is no singular Indigenous epistemology. Nevertheless, Dei, Hall and Rosenberg (2000) offer the following explanation that offers an insight into concepts underpinning Indigenous knowledges:

We conceptualize an Indigenous knowledge as a body of knowledge associated with the long-term occupancy of a certain place. This knowledge refers to traditional norms and social values as was the mental constructs that guide, organize and regulate the people’s ways of living and making sense of their world. It is the sum of their experience and knowledge of a given social group through both historical and current experience. This body of knowledge is diverse and complex, given the histories, cultures and lived realities of people (p. 6).

Knowledge that is expressed through artistic performance and ritual expresses how Indigenous people display their knowing and being through their ways of doing (A. J. Martin, 2003). It is through such performances that Indigenous people maintain their identity, place and peculiar cosmology (Wilson, 2004).

Indigenous knowledge is understood through the various complementary methods of knowing that have been conveyed through an oral tradition (Battiste, 1998). This knowledge reflects dynamic, relational processes (Steinhauer, 2002) that emphasise the importance of contexts, values, time and relationships, in learning about Indigenous knowledges (A. J. Martin, 2003).

Unlike other epistemologies that may perceive reality as objective or constructed, an Indigenous epistemology is concerned with relationships between people and their natural environment. As such, Indigenous epistemologies convey an ecological assumption:

Knowledge is not a description of reality but an understanding of the processes of ecological change and ever-changing insights about diverse patterns or styles. Concepts about ‘what is’ define human awareness, but add little to the actual process of change. To see things as permanent is to be confused about everything: an alternative to that understanding is the need to create temporary harmonies of interdependence through alliances and relationships among all forms and forces (Kenny, Faries, Fiske, & Voyageur, 2004, p. 15).

The recovery of Indigenous ways of knowing is fundamental to Indigenous people’s aspiration for recognition of their cultural identity (Battiste & Youngblood Henderson, 2009). Adopting an Indigenous epistemology in research design initiates a decolonising process. This is because the design invites both researcher and participants to critique how the historical process of colonisation may have devalued Indigenous knowledges systematically (Wilson, 2004).

4.7.2 Indigenous research methodology.

Indigenous research methodology advocates an ethical and cultural approach to research processes with Indigenous people. Indigenous methodologies are concerned with empowerment and relationships. Research involving Indigenous people aims to promote their self-determination through encouraging Indigenous participation, resisting dominating discourses, creating political integrity and strengthening community values (S. Wilson, 2008).

The guiding principles of Indigenous research methodologies are:

- recognising Indigenous world views, knowledges and realities as distinctive and catalytic to existence and survival;
- honouring Indigenous social mores as essential processes through which Indigenous people live, learn and situate themselves as Aboriginal people in their own lands and in the lands of other Aboriginal people;
- honouring social, historical and political contexts that influence Indigenous experiences, lives, positions and futures;
- privileging the opinions, experiences and lives of Aboriginal people; and
- addressing issues of importance for Aboriginal people (Martin, 2003).

Methodologies that honour these principles contrast with other research methodologies that have exploited Indigenous culture in order to advance the supremacy of a Western research structure (Blanchard et al., 2000; Fredericks, 2008). In the past, researchers often employed methodologies that intruded on Indigenous communities and were colonising and oppressive in their hegemonic exercise of power (Prior, 2006; L. T. Smith, 1999). These perspectives perceive Indigenous communities as deficient (Porsanger, 2004).

The term, relational accountability, adopted in Indigenous research methodology, describes how a human is in relationship with different forms of knowledge (Wilson, 2004). Indigenous research methodology ensures that new understandings generated from research with Indigenous communities respect cultural protocols and benefit the community through the sharing of those understandings (Wilson, 2004).

Indigenous research methodologies reject assumptions that Indigenous people are objects of investigation (Porsanger, 2004). In Australia, social, economic and health disparities exist in many Indigenous populations. Research that does not address this disadvantage is labelled *terra nullius research* (Martin, 2003). This term implies that this type of research does not benefit Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous research methodologies might also be envisaged within a wider framework of decolonising methodologies (L. T. Smith, 1999). Decolonisation research is concerned with the valuing, reclaiming, and foregrounding of Indigenous voices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). The benefit of Indigenous knowledge generated through research is limited unless practitioners are empowered and supported to “not only survive, but also thrive” (Wilson, 2004, p. 359). As a result, Indigenous research methodologies enable Indigenous communities to theorise about their own lives and to integrate their former histories with their future prospects (L. T. Smith, 2000). A decolonising approach does not dismiss the contribution of Western research. Instead, a decolonising methodology integrates this research respectfully

with Indigenous knowledges. It critiques and interrogates Western approaches by challenging colonising and oppressive dynamics (L. T. Smith, 1999).

4.7.3 The non-Indigenous researcher.

Indigenous research principles promoting self-determination, ownership and control of Indigenous knowledges guide the non-Indigenous researcher. However, these principles also emphasise the complexities of Indigenous research undertaken by a non-Indigenous researcher. Three identified areas of contention are discussed.

First, Indigenous research methodology requires the researcher to understand the complex cultural mores, beliefs and relationships within an Indigenous community. A non-Indigenous researcher requires a cultural understanding necessary for them to respectfully enter the different worlds of Indigenous people (Sue & Sue, 2012). This is problematic for the non-Indigenous researcher who is not part of the community and therefore may not understand the complexity of Indigenous community relationships. The non-Indigenous researcher needs to understand the responsibility of being in relationship with the community. This differs from the Western perspective of relationships and community. The non-Indigenous researcher committed to Indigenous research is required to understand this difference and accept the responsibility of relationship with Indigenous people.

Second, implicit in Indigenous research methodology is the premise that it should confront the colonial assumptions of Western approaches to research. Indigenous knowledge recovery is an anti-colonial undertaking that gains momentum from “the anguish of loss of what was and the determined hope for what will be” (Wilson, 2004, p. 359). Without experiencing colonialism’s eradication of Indigenous approaches to seeing, being and relating to the world (Wilson, 2004), the non-Indigenous researcher may not appreciate the realities of colonialism, described as the brutal racist oppression that is part of Indigenous reality (Rigney, 1999).

Third, Indigenous research methodology aims to honour Indigenous peoples’ journey toward self-determination. Thus, Indigenous methodologies contribute to the generation of knowledge for the benefit of Indigenous people (Porsanger, 2004). The difficulty for non-Indigenous researchers using Indigenous methodology is that they have a Western approach to research embedded unavoidably in their psyche (Prior, 2006). Thus, the non-Indigenous researcher is constantly challenged to disengage with the Euro-master narrative (Doxtater, 2004), which has an inherent colonising dynamic.

For these reasons, some Indigenous researchers claim that only Indigenous people may conduct research on, with and about Indigenous peoples (A. J. Martin, 2003; Rigney, 1999). Further, Indigenous communities are sceptical about the benefits of research conducted by a non-Indigenous researcher (Doxtater, 2004; Westby, Moore & Roman, 2002). They remain cautious about the colonial mindset or positional superiority that is embedded in the mentality of Western researchers (Prior, 2006; S. Wilson, 2003).

However, non-Indigenous researchers may adopt Indigenous research methodology by being aware of the limitations of their own ingrained cultural perspectives. They also need to accept cultural differences, value cultural integrity and acknowledge the appropriate use of cultural sources (Universities Australia, 2011). In so doing, they develop a cultural competence perspective necessary for completing research within Indigenous contexts (Gower, 2012; A. J. Martin, 2003; Rigney, 1999). This viewpoint emphasises the importance of fostering relationships, as well as demonstrating respect and cultural sensitivity (Fredericks, 2008). It involves an understanding and appreciation of another human's culture and values and actively applying this in practical circumstances (Liamputtong, 2008). Cultural competence in research is described as:

The awareness, knowledge, understanding and sensitivity to other cultures combined with a proficiency to interact appropriately with people from those cultures in a way that is congruent with the behaviour and expectations that members of a distinctive culture recognise as appropriate among themselves (Australian Government, Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2016).

Moreover, as a non-Indigenous researcher, I identify as Indigenist. The term 'Indigenist' refers to a supporter of Indigenist rights and perspectives without implying that the supporter is Indigenous. Further, as Ma Rhea (2014) indicates, "not all Indigenous people are Indigenist in their worldview" in the same way that "not all women are feminist" (Ma Rhea, 2014, p. 95). As an Indigenist researcher, I understand that non-Indigenous school leaders and decision makers about Indigenous education must take responsibility for ensuring that Indigenous and non-Indigenous students have equal access to educational outcomes.

I repudiate an authoritative standpoint and the view that an understanding of Indigenous perspectives is inferior to Western perspectives. I am aware that ingrained Western cultural assumptions may challenge the use of Indigenous, decolonising methodology. Nevertheless, this research honours the discourse evoked in the research process that is important to the decolonising agenda of Indigenous methodology:

The aim [of the decolonising research movement] is to evoke discourse ... a process of developing meaning or 'truth' through a relationship of trust, reciprocity and co-operatively evolved methods of research that remain true to the context of the story being presented (Prior, 2006, p. 165).

This study incorporates the guiding principles of Indigenous research methodology. These require the researcher to adopt appropriate data gathering strategies carefully and to share the benefits from the research with Indigenous participants (Prior, 2006). Ways of addressing the areas of contention outlined above are discussed with participants in Chapter 5 of this thesis and also with members of an Indigenous consultative committee. This ensures the authenticity of the research. This research seeks to complement knowledge concerning Indigenous peoples. It is about, for, and hopefully, of benefit to Indigenous peoples.

4.8 Participants.

In accordance with case study methodology, participants were identified according to the boundaries of the phenomenon to be studied. Purposive selection was used to identify participants from the College community (Creswell, 2008; Merriam, 1988). Participants were purposively selected according to criteria that indicate their particularly informed knowledge and understanding of Indigenous students' experience of education at St Mary's.

4.8.1 Selection of participants.

Selection was based on membership of four stakeholder groups at the case study site: Indigenous students, Indigenous parents, Indigenous support staff, and teachers. While all members of the College community may have potentially contributed to this research, only those who met the inclusion criteria were invited to participate. Prospective participants were invited to attend an informal information sharing meeting concerning the purpose of the research and the conditions of participation. The criteria below determined the choice of participants for each of the designated groups.

4.8.1.1 Indigenous students.

All Indigenous students were invited to be participants. These are male and female students aged from thirteen to eighteen years. Apart from their identification as Australian Indigenous people, these students are a diverse group. They have differing family situations, cultural backgrounds, cultural immersions and academic achievement levels. Table 4.2 below indicates the numbers of Indigenous students who participated in the research.

4.8.1.2 Indigenous parents.

As the second specific research question explores how Indigenous parents experience the education of their children, all St Mary's Indigenous parents/guardians were invited to participate in the research. St Mary's Indigenous parents are not a homogeneous group. They represent varying cultural backgrounds, and have a diversity of employment categories and educational achievement levels. Table 4.2 below indicates the numbers of Indigenous parents who participated in the research.

4.8.1.3 Indigenous support staff.

There are three Indigenous support staff members employed at St Mary's who were invited to participate in this study. Their role at the College is to assist the teaching and learning of Indigenous students through the appropriate integration of Indigenous culture and education. Indigenous support staff form influential relationships between Indigenous students, their parents and teachers. As such, they are sensitive to the views of stakeholders.

4.8.1.4 Teachers.

Ten teachers were purposively invited to participate in this research. The selection criteria are:

- identification as Indigenous people;
- experience in teaching Indigenous students in remote areas;
- experience in professional counselling roles;
- experience in school pastoral care roles;
- demonstrated interest in promoting social justice.

These selection criteria are justified on the basis that these teachers have a rich experience and understanding of teaching Indigenous students. Their specific roles within schools also suggest that they understand the importance of students' social and emotional wellbeing.

4.8.2 Conditions for participation.

The wellbeing of research participants is the priority in the study. Involvement in the research was voluntary and participants were able to withdraw during the study. The researcher maintains participants' privacy, anonymity and confidentiality. Written consent to participate was acquired from all participants. For students, parental consent was also obtained. Consideration was given to the scheduling of student interviews to ensure that disruption to classroom learning was minimal. All interviews were conducted in a relaxed, friendly environment.

The researcher's role as the College Principal is acknowledged because of the influence this may have had on the truthfulness of participants' responses. This is especially important for Indigenous parents who may be sensitive to or intimidated by school staff and protocols. This situation was addressed by the presence of a respected Indigenous elder who participated in the interview process. Prior to the interviews, the rationale underpinning research questions was discussed with this elder. His presence at interviews alleviated participants' safety concerns and encouraged their authentic participation. A summary of participant groups and interview strategies is detailed in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Participant Groups and Interview Strategies

Data Gathering Strategy	Stakeholder Group	Participant Numbers	
		Invited	Accepted
Focus Group Interviews	Indigenous students	65	29
	Indigenous parents	86	22
	Indigenous support staff	3	3
	Teachers	10	7
Individual Interviews	Indigenous students	11	11
	Indigenous parent	9	9
	Indigenous support staff	3	3
	Teachers	2	2
Total participants	Indigenous students		29
	Indigenous parents		22
	Indigenous support staff		3
	Teachers		7
	Total		61

Students and parents were first allocated to focus groups on the basis of the length of their experience at St Mary's. Homogenous groups not only encouraged discussion, but also

facilitated comparison between groups (Jarrell, 2000). Issues identified in these focus groups were then further explored in individual interviews. The specific participant groupings are listed in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3

Participant Groupings

CATEGORY	NATURE OF EXPERIENCE
1	Indigenous students who have been enrolled for less than 2 years.
2	Indigenous students who have been enrolled for more than 2 years.
3	Indigenous students who are members of the Student Representative Council.
4	Indigenous parents/guardians of students who have been enrolled for less than 2 years.
5	Indigenous parents/guardians of students who have been enrolled for more than 2 years.
6	Indigenous support staff.
7	Teaching staff.

4.8.3 Process for informed participation.

A letter of invitation to participate was sent to prospective participants from each of the groups identified in Table 4.3. Following this, all candidates were invited to meetings where the purpose of the research, roles of the participants and responsibilities of the researcher were explained. These included the safeguarding of participant anonymity, respect, privacy, and their entitlement to correct transcripts or withdraw from the study. Documents pertaining to Indigenous Education and Inclusion were available to prospective participants on the College and Catholic Education Services (Cairns) websites. I discuss these ethical issues further in section 4.12.

4.9 Data Gathering Strategies

This research employs the following data gathering strategies which are represented diagrammatically in Figure 4.2:

- Document analysis;
- Focus group interviews ($n = 61$ participants in 13 groups); and

- Individual, in-depth, interviews ($n = 25$ participants).

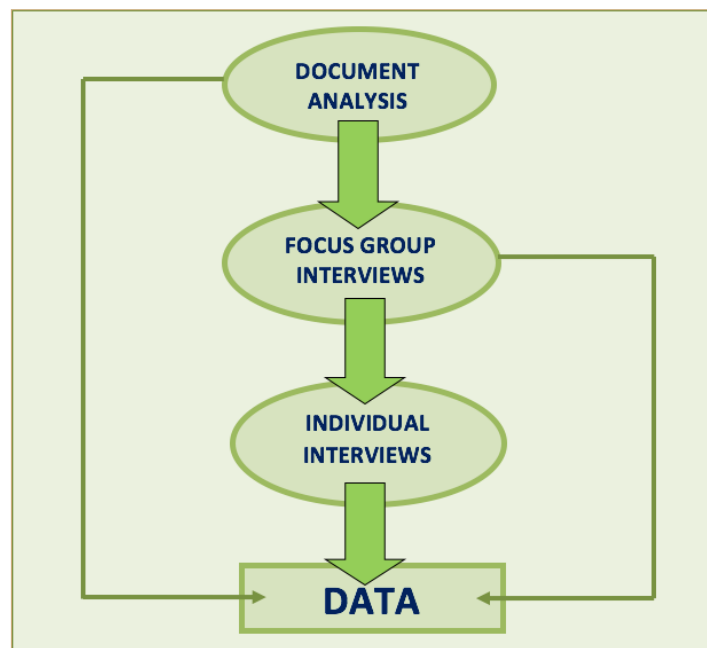


Figure 4.2. Data gathering strategies and process. Focus groups are comprised of 61 participants in 13 groups. There are 25 individual interviews.

Case study methodology accommodated the implementation of various data gathering strategies that may have been conducted concurrently. This enabled an in-depth study of a contemporary phenomenon and reinforced the case study evidence (Yin, 2003). Further, the use of multiple strategies to gather data permitted a methodological triangulation of information, ensuring the trustworthiness of the data (Hitchcock & Hughes, 1995). Data gathering strategies employed in this study were categorised into two phases – exploration and inspection. These are represented diagrammatically in Figure 4.3.

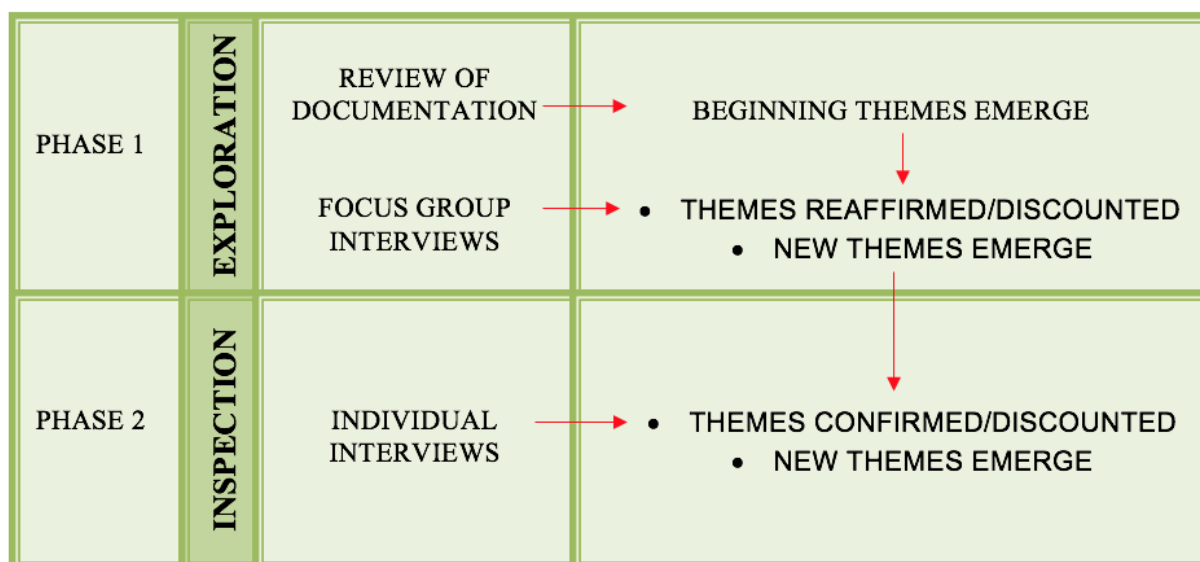


Figure 4.3. Phases of data gathering.

4.9.1 Exploration phase.

The exploration phase in this study used two data gathering strategies. They are document analysis and focus group interviews. During the exploration phase, emerging themes were explored, before being confirmed or discounted as shown in Figure 4.3.

4.9.1.1 Document analysis.

Documents offer the official view about how policies and procedures relating to the education of Indigenous students are purportedly implemented. Further, they provide detail of how Indigenous students may experience Catholic education. An analysis of these documents assisted the researcher in understanding the principles of Catholic education and also the expectations of staff in Catholic schools with regard to the implementation of inclusive education. These documents gave insight into the values of the document writer/s (O'Donohue, 2007). Data from the document analysis were useful in informing questions for focus groups. These data also presented a common language for discussion of the experience of education by Indigenous students and assisted in the emergence of beginning themes. The documents studied in this analysis were:

Diocesan policies

- Enrolment of students in Catholic Schools
- Inclusive Practices
- Social and Emotional Learning (SEL)

Diocesan publications

- The Catholic School Difference

- Strategic Directions
- Diverse Learners
- Indigenous Education
- Parental Involvement

College publications

- Our Vision and Mission

College Policy

- Student Wellbeing

4.9.1.2 Focus group interviews.

A focus group interview is a means of gathering data from a group of participants who interact with a researcher with the purpose of sharing understandings about a particular area of interest (Creswell, 2008). The researcher designs questions and uses the subsequent conversational dynamic to gain insight into participants' perceptions. New topics or themes may emerge from focus group discussions and the researcher remains flexible as to how and when these themes are addressed (Hannan, 2007).

Focus groups generate insight into participant's shared understandings and how meaning is produced through interaction (Morgan, 1988). Ways of thinking are not formed in a vacuum, but through interaction with others (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). The focus group recognises multiple understandings of the same phenomena. It may also emphasise and enable differences to be discerned between participants' statements and their actions (Morgan, 1988). This more readily occurs when the participants are placed in homogeneous focus groups (Jarrell, 2000). Participants in homogeneous groups tend to speak more openly in the presence of considered, like-minded people who are intellectual and social equals (Jarrell, 2000).

For this reason, student focus groups were selected according to the age and year level of the student. This grouping was chosen as an appropriate way of identifying students. In addition, the length of enrolment at St Mary's influenced students' immersion into school culture and overall understanding of the College norms and expectations. Also, students' age and year level were likely to be an indicator of their maturity. Groups of students at similar stages of maturity volunteered information more readily in group discussion and the interviewer was better able to extrapolate information based on similar experiences.

In the same manner, the process used to identify parents for participating in focus groups considered their family relatedness, relationships and involvement in community partnerships. The researcher was advised in this selection process by a trusted elder who is

respected by the Indigenous community and has knowledge of St Mary's Indigenous families. This elder is of Aboriginal descent from the Torres Strait. He is employed as a community liaison officer at the College. He was consulted by the researcher regarding the appropriate format and nature of parent focus group interviews. This assisted in generating honest conversation and ensured that information for discussion was culturally appropriate and respectful to all.

While the focus group strategy has many advantages, it is not without its disadvantages. Critics have identified the researcher's lack of control over the group and the subsequent lack of control over the collection of quality data. Moreover, the reliability of responses by focus group participants may be influenced by the presence of more dominant focus group members. Consequently, it is challenging to analyse shared understandings that are a result of interaction between all participants (Jarrell, 2000). However, these disadvantages may be alleviated through the careful preparation of interview questions and consideration of individual participants and group dynamics. Further, the strategy of focus group interviews is not used in isolation, but in combination with other data gathering strategies. Focus group interviews are a useful means of generating information through the interaction of participants. Moreover, they form the basis on which further in-depth, individual interviews are decided.

The exploratory stage of the research involved the collective use of document analysis and focus group interviews. Further, data gathered by using these two strategies provided a precise focus to the research direction. Subsequent to the exploratory phase, meaningful questions were developed to direct the inspection phase of this study.

4.9.2 Inspection phase.

The inspection phase of this research involved the identification of individuals to participate in in-depth interviews. These participants had previously been interviewed in focus group interviews. During the inspection phase, emerging themes were confirmed or discounted and it was possible that new themes may emerge as shown in Figure 4.3.

4.9.2.1 In-depth, individual interviews.

Following their participation in focus groups, a smaller number of participants accepted the invitation to be interviewed individually. Participation in individual interviews was offered to all focus group participants. The decision to further participate in individual interviews was made by the participants themselves, with some participants self-selecting to withdraw from further interviews. These in-depth interviews revisited issues raised in focus

groups that may have required further in-depth discussion to extend the understanding of the researcher.

Individual interviews are a strategy for exploring participants' understandings and perspectives that encourages an unfolding of how these understandings and perspectives are constructed. Relevant themes that emerge from data gathered in focus group interviews provide the framework for inquiry in individual interviews (Yin, 2003).

In-depth, individual interviews involved the researcher's engaging in two interviewing techniques. First, an interactive approach was employed by implementing open-ended questions. Second, the researcher probed to seek an extensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. The researcher sought data concerning Indigenous students' experience of education at St Mary's and how this has been influenced by others. Important insights into the phenomenon are then interpreted (O'Donohue, 2007; Yin, 2003) from the perspective of students, parents, support staff and teachers.

The interpretive interview is not an impartial exchange of information, but an empathetic process (Fontana & Frey, 2005). They are perceived as interactional encounters. Thus, unlike interviews used in positive research, there is not the necessity for personal detachment in interpretive interviews. It is understood that the social dynamic of the interpretive interview "shapes the nature of the knowledge generated" (Fontana & Frey, 2005, p. 699).

To maintain standardisation of information, all interviewees were exposed to similar questions. However, the interviewer explored, probes and asks questions flexibly that resulted in in-depth information about the phenomenon seen from multiple perspectives (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Merriam, 1988). The interviewees were given the freedom to recall and expand on events, providing opportunity for rich data collection (O'Donohue, 2007). Questions were adapted progressively in subsequent interviews in order for a complete and authentic understanding of information to be generated from multiple perspectives.

A critique of the interpretive interview is that these data gathering strategies may lead to a tainting of the data. However, proponents of interpretivism argue that the interpretivist interview reflects how people construct knowledge, not in a vacuum, but through interacting with other people (Lincoln, Lynham & Guba, 2011). Moreover, the acknowledgement of multiple perspectives and realities in this approach to gathering data corresponded with the constructionist epistemological assumptions of this study.

4.10 Data Analysis

Data analysis is the means by which the volume of collected data are processed systematically and logically. It involves “making sense out of, and providing structure and order to data” (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002, p. 31). This is accomplished by reducing data into categories and themes, then offering tentative interpretations concerning the meaning of synthesised data (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; O'Donohue, 2007). In this process, data were collected and analysed simultaneously and recurrently. Specifically, the analysis of data informed the collection of new data that, in turn, informed new analysis (Thorne, 2000). Thus, a repetitive process occurred whereby a pattern of multiple cycles of revisiting the data transpired (Berkowitz, 1997).

The process of managing and analysing data are illustrated diagrammatically in Figure 4.4.

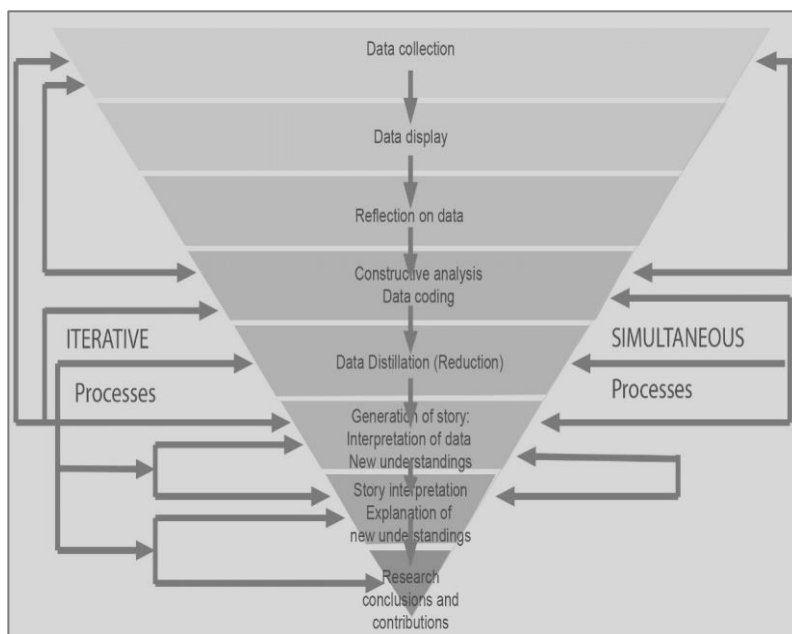


Figure 4.4. Process of managing and analysing data.

4.10.1 Data analysis phases.

The analysis of data occurred in two distinct phases as shown in Figure 4.3. The exploration phase involved document analysis and focus group interviews and the inspection phase consisted of in-depth, individual interviews. These two phases led to a third phase of *story writing* where the researcher produced a narrative about the Indigenous student experience of education.

In the exploration phase, the document analysis and focus group interviews occurred. Focus groups interviews were recorded digitally. Additionally, notes were taken in order to

capture relevant information that was unable to be recorded verbally, for example, behaviours, expressions and gestures. The recorded focus groups were transcribed verbatim. Participants were invited to make any amendments they considered necessary in order to enhance their representation (O'Donohue, 2007). Progressively, transcripts were read, scrutinised and analysed.

In the inspection phase of data analysis, participants were interviewed individually. Issues generated from the analysis of focus group data formed the foci of the interviews (see Appendix F). In-depth interviews were recorded digitally and transcribed verbatim (Merriam, 1988). Themes from focus group analyses were confirmed, rejected or modified and new themes that may emerge were clarified. Thus, data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously. Table 4.4 illustrates the phases, strategies and data analysis process used in this study.

Table 4.4

Data Analysis Process

Phases & Strategies		Data Analysis Steps
EXPLORATION: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Document analysis • Focus group interviews 	Step 1	Study relevant Diocesan and College policies and publications for commonalities of language and substance.
	Step 2	Categorise, code and analyse data from Step 1 and re-organise into relevant data sets.
	Step 3	Compose questions for focus group interviews, prompted by data gathered in Step 2 and considering the research questions.
	Step 4	Organise participants into purposeful, homogeneous groups and conduct and record focus group interview.
	Step 5	Transcribe recorded focus group interview verbatim to provide a rich data base of information.
	Step 6	Participants read transcripts from Step 5 and are given the opportunity to make amendments.
	Step 7	Assign codes to focus group data and identify themes and further discussion questions for further focus groups.
INSPECTION: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individual interviews 	Step 8	Invite selected participants from focus groups to participate in individual, in-depth interview.
	Step 9	Compose questions for focus group interviews, prompted by data gathered in Step 5 and considering the research questions.

Phases & Strategies	Data Analysis Steps
	Step 10 Conduct individual, in-depth interviews and confirm, discard, modify themes and identify emerging themes.
	Step 11 Continue simultaneous data collection and analysis in individual interviews until new information is saturated.

4.10.2 Constant comparative analysis.

Constant comparative analysis (CCA) was the analysis process employed in this research. This process involves the data being constantly taken apart to form data bits and analysed for patterns, before being coded and categorised. Categorised concepts are then critiqued with preceding categorisations (Dye, Schatz, Rosenberg, & Coleman, 2000). The researcher used an iterative process of constantly comparing and refining concepts generated from the data which, in turn, generated alternative themes or confirmed the appropriateness of previously identified concepts (O'Donohue, 2007). The subsequent comparing of specific themes allowed the researcher to explore and establish their relationship (Duriau, Reger, & Pfarrer, 2007). These concepts formed the foundation for defensible coherent explanations, interpretations or theorising about the specific research questions that are the focus of this study (Boeije, 2002).

4.10.3 Coding.

Coding refers to the analytical process that invites data to be grouped and examined, then integrated into conceptual themes (Creswell, 2008). Coding shows relationships between and makes sense of the data (Moghaddam, 2006). Three forms of coding were implemented: open, axial and selective.

First, open coding established initial categories by deconstructing the data and examining individual bits to identify similarities and differences (O'Donohue, 2007). In the exploration phase, open coding was applied to data gathered from documents and focus group interviews. Relevant texts and transcripts of interviews were segmented and labelled as having similar or dissimilar concepts and clustered into categories. This analytical process interpreted and reduced data into contestable concepts.

Second, axial coding offered tentative interpretations concerning possible relationships with open coded categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). It allowed data to be “put back together in new ways” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96) after being deconstructed in open coding. In the inspection phase, axial coding reduced the number of initial codes by grouping these together into categories identified by their connectedness (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

Third, selective coding integrated the categories concerned with generating explanations or theory developed through axial coding. It is the process of integrating and refining the theory through the development of a story line that defensibly interpreted codes and categories (Creswell, 2008). Selective coding identifies “core categories that are of critical importance to the study” (Moghaddam, 2006, p. 7). It systematically reviewed relationships between categories for validation and further explored those categories inviting additional refinement (Dey, 1993; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). In this way, defensible explanations of the analysed data were generated.

4.11 Verification

The verification of this study as genuine research was ascertained by the validity of the processes of data generation, its interpretation and the integrity of the researcher (Anfara et al., 2002; Polit & Beck, 2004). Trustworthiness in interpretative research ensures its authenticity. Four criteria established the trustworthiness of this research: credibility, confirmability, dependability and transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 2000). Collectively, the honouring of these criteria ensured that the data and their interpretation are trustworthy and authentic (Trochim, 2006).

4.11.1 Credibility.

Credibility denotes the reader’s assuredness of the defensibility of the researcher’s interpretations of the data. This study employed a number of strategies that safeguarded the credibility of data and the trustworthiness of the researcher’s interpretations. These include the appropriateness of the interviewer, her/his prolonged engagement in the field, the triangulation of sources and data gathering strategies and peer review (Polit & Beck, 2004).

4.11.1.1 Appropriateness of the interviewer.

The interviewer in this research is the Principal at St Mary’s. Thus, the researcher is an insider whose familiarity with research participants influenced the conduct of the research. Consideration was given to the influence of the researcher’s prior relationships with interviewees and also to how the interviewer’s “authority figure status may influence interviewees’ responses.

The researcher with insider status has been criticised for lacking the appropriate detachment from participants (Mercer, 2007). This familiarity may minimise the objectivity of the interview (Unluer, 2012) as researcher and participants have prior knowledge of the other’s perspective. In interpretivist research, the interviewer necessarily seeks to empathise with participants in order to establish engaging relationships (Partington, 2001). However,

when the interviewer is an insider, previously established relationships with interviewees may influence interactions positively or negatively during interviews. This is because the researcher has to “contend with her/his own pre-conceptions, and those their informants have formed about them as a result of their shared history” (Mercer, 2007, p. 25).

Insider-researchers may also be challenged by the duality of their roles within an organisation. In particular, insider research has been criticised because participants identify a hierarchical imbalance of power between themselves and the insider-researcher. This may result in interviewee responses being less than honest or complete.

Relationships of mutual trust had been established with participants prior to the commencement of interviews. Regular attendance at Student Representative Council (SRC), as well as participation in Parents & Friends’ (P&F) meetings and staff and community meetings had generated relationships that demonstrated the researcher’s honesty and trustworthiness. These regular and diverse consultative initiatives offer evidence of the Principal’s willingness to invite communication and advice regularly from the various St Mary’s constituencies.

In particular, Indigenous community members acknowledged that the researcher invites honest contributions from Indigenous people. This is a result of the activities of an Indigenous Consultative Committee as well as the promotion of initiatives that recognise Indigenous people. Consequently, there is substantial evidence that the researcher had established authentic relationships with Indigenous participants necessary for truthful communication.

The advantage of using the insider researcher dynamic is that the researcher was able to access private knowledge reflecting relevant patterns of social interaction (Shah, 2004). Additionally, this researcher had access to inside knowledge that an outsider would take far longer to acquire (Unluer, 2012).

There are three particular advantages of being an insider researcher in this study. These include the researcher’s: (a) having a sensitive appreciation of Indigenous cultures; (b) enhancing the usual forms of social communication; and (c) establishing intimacy which promotes truthful communication (Bonner & Tolhurst, 2002).

Clearly then, credibility is not dependent on whether the researchers are insiders or outsiders to the study, but on their commitment to and demonstration of authenticity.

4.11.1.2 Prolonged engagement in the field.

Credibility of the research process was also ensured through the researcher’s prolonged engagement at the study site. A prolonged engagement ensured comprehensiveness in

appreciating the research context and also provided time for research participants to communicate with the researcher. The research was conducted over a period of approximately twelve months (see Table 4.6). During this time, the researcher developed a profound understanding of the experiences of the four stakeholder groups. Rapport and mutual trust with participants were established through the researcher's being immersed in the culture of the case study site.

4.11.1.3 Triangulation of sources.

A process of triangulation also contributes to enhancing the credibility of data interpretations (Creswell, 1998; Olsen, 2004). Triangulation involves the use of many participants from a variety of stakeholder groups as well as the use of multiple data gathering strategies (Olsen, 2004). The study involved four stakeholder groups: Indigenous students, Indigenous parents, Indigenous support staff, and non-Indigenous teachers. Data gathering strategies included document analyses, focus group interviews and in-depth, individual interviews. Collectively, the variety of stakeholder groups and data gathering strategies ensured the trustworthiness of the research.

4.11.1.4 Peer review.

Peer review is a strategy aimed at enhancing the credibility of the research by addressing criticisms concerning interpretative research and the influence on the data collection, and interpretation by the researcher. Peer review occurs when the researcher consults with respected colleagues who act as critics for the research (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007). Critical peers do not participate in the research. However, they are familiar with the phenomenon being researched and the relevant issues being explored. For this study, they included two doctoral supervisors, two members of the College leadership team and an ex-Principal. Critical peers engaged with the researcher to discern possible bias (Cohen et al., 2007). They assisted by challenging the researcher's assumptions, playing *devil's advocate* and questioning the researcher's methodology, interpretations and conclusions. The peer review strategy not only provided and confirmed direction for the research (Polit & Beck, 2004), but also enhanced its truthfulness (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

4.11.2 Confirmability.

Confirmability refers to how data interpretation may be corroborated. Participant reviews of shared understandings are an important strategy for establishing the trustworthiness of data interpretation as they allow the researcher to confirm the interpretations and explanations generated from data analysis.

All participants were provided the opportunity to review their interview transcripts and the 26 participants in individual interviews were provided with the opportunity to read and respond to the interviewer's annotations and interpreted meaning of their comments. Moreover, eight key participants were provided with an outline of the applied open and axial codes used by the researcher and also a draft of the researcher's new understandings. These key participants, who were representative of the four stakeholder groups, were chosen because of their commitment to being involved in this study.

This process enabled participants to appreciate how their perspectives were understood by the researcher and, as well, presented a means to offer them evaluative opportunities to critique researcher interpretations. Participant reviews also provided an opportunity for interviewees to add additional material that may assist in clarifying their perspectives or that may have been overlooked by the interviewer (Shenton, 2004).

4.11.3 Dependability.

Dependability is how the research may be defended as trustworthy by the implementation of a defensible audit trail that records each aspect of the research process. An audit trail enabled the researcher's new understandings to demonstrate defensible interpretations of data analysis (Cohen et al., 2007). The researcher established dependability by explaining the sequence and strategies used in the research process and ensuring these are logical and defensible (Cohen et al., 2007). In this way, the researcher accounted for changes in the research context and how data were collected and analysed (Lincoln et al., 2011). Additionally, the documentation of coding strategies that record iterations of de-contextualising and then re-contextualising data contributed to the trustworthiness of the research (Anfara et al., 2002).

4.11.4 Transferability.

Transferability relates to how new understandings from the research may be transferred to other contexts (Polit & Beck, 2004; Yin, 2003). The use of the interpretive research design limits new understandings to a context and time that is particular to the research phenomenon (Creswell, 1998). However, transferability may be increased by providing sufficient descriptive data to allow interpretations to be evaluated by the reader who critiques their situation in relation to the research situation (Stake, 1995). It is the responsibility of the reader to determine if new understandings may be applicable from the research context to other situations.

It was not the intent of this study to advance generalisations about Indigenous students' experience of education. Instead, it sought to explore an in-depth human experience within one context and describe that experience from participants' perspectives (Charon, 2007).

4.12 Ethical Foundation of the Research Design

The ethical foundation of research is explained in terms of autonomy, beneficence and justice (Marczyk, DeMatteo, & Festinger, 2005).

The autonomy of participants was ensured by obtaining their informed consent to be involved in the study, without any coercion or compulsion. Ethical issues relating to anonymity, confidentiality and wellbeing were explained at participant meetings convened before data gathering commenced and also in the written invitations to participants (Appendices C, D, E & F).

Additionally, the study sought to ensure that all participants benefitted from the research. Beneficence is an important ethical research component involving Indigenous people. Scholars (Doxtater, 2004; Prior, 2006) suggest that ethical research standards are based on Western values of individualism and individualised property that is contrary to community values inherent in Indigenous societies. Further, Indigenous community protocols have, in the past, not been respected by researchers (L. T. Smith, 2000). The data gathering in this study addressed Indigenous community protocols as advised by an Indigenous consultative committee comprised of Indigenous parents and elders. The interpretation of new understandings may respectfully contribute to the Indigenous people's knowledge of themselves. Additionally, the new understandings may positively influence the experience of education for Indigenous students at St Mary's.

The concept of justice in research ethics refers to how participants are selected (Marczyk et al., 2005). Student, parent and teacher aide participants were identified by their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage and membership of St Mary's community. Teacher participants are also part of the school community. A letter of invitation explained the rationale and plan of the research as well as how the data gathering strategies were to be used (Appendices D, E & F). Tentative timelines of research process were outlined and the use of respondent codes and pseudonyms to protect confidentiality and anonymity were explained. Participants were given the opportunity to review their responses to interview questions (see Chapter 5) and the researcher's interpretation of them (see Chapter 6). Table 4.5 outlines the ethical considerations for the data gathering strategies.

The *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (AIATSIS, 2011) underpin the ethical foundations of this research. The Guidelines comprise fourteen principles grouped under the following six categories:

- Rights, respect and recognition;
- Negotiation, consultation, agreement and mutual understanding;
- Participation, collaboration and partnership;
- Benefits, outcomes and giving back;
- Managing research: use, storage and access; and
- Reporting and compliance.

These principles are founded on respect for the rights of Indigenous Australians. As such, the *Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies* (GERAIS) is an important reference for researchers of Indigenous people and culture. However, at the heart of good ethical research are behaviours and practices in an engaged participatory process, rather than an over-dependence on an institutionally based, prescriptive document (Davis, 2010). This research is compliant with the GERAIS and also engages with Indigenous people in respectful ways.

Table 4.5

Data Gathering Strategies and Ethical Considerations

Data Gathering Strategy	Ethical Consideration
Document analysis	College documents and published records open to public scrutiny
Focus group interviews	Invitational letter sent to each participant outlining how focus groups are to be conducted. Signed letter of consent obtained from each participant. In-person reiteration of the expectations of focus group interviews re confidentiality and respect. Participant codes: each participant allocated a code and pseudonym in order to anonymise their responses e.g. <i>Kelly sfg1</i> denotes the respondent's participation in a student focus group.
Individual interviews	Invitational letter outlining how in-depth interviews are to be conducted.

Data Gathering	Ethical Consideration
Strategy	<p>Signed letter of consent obtained from interviewee.</p> <p>In-person reiteration of the expectations of in-depth interviews re confidentiality and respect.</p> <p>Participant codes: each participant allocated a code and pseudonym in order to anonymise their responses e.g. <i>Tony ii/elder</i> denotes the respondent's participation in an in-depth interview and their status as an Indigenous elder.</p>

Ethical approval for the research has been granted from the Australian Catholic University (ACU) and the Catholic Diocese of Cairns.

4.13 Summary of the Research Design

An interpretivist approach to research design was used. Interpretivism is consistent with the research purpose of exploring how Indigenous students as stakeholders experience education—the phenomenon—at the College, which is a bounded system. This study is based on the understanding that knowledge is not objective, but construed by individuals through meaningful interaction with others. Such understanding supported the constructionist epistemology and theoretical perspective of symbolic interaction. Because the research involved Indigenous people, Indigenous research protocols were adopted respectfully. Case study methodology justifies the choice and orchestration of the data-gathering strategies that enabled the researcher to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research phenomenon. Table 4.6 offers a summary of the research design that outlines the data sources and strategies used to address the research questions and provides a timeline for the gathering of data.

Table 4.6

Summary of the Research Design

Research Questions	Participants	Phase	Data gathering strategy	Data Analysis	Time Frame
Q1 How do Indigenous students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?	Nil	Exploration	Document analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content analysis 	Semester 2, 2013
	Indigenous students	Inspection	Focus group interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant comparative analysis • Coding 	Semester 2, 2013 & semester 1, 2014
	Indigenous students	Inspection	Individual interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant comparative analysis • Coding 	Semester 2, 2014
Q2 How do Indigenous parents experience the education of their children at St Mary's?	Nil	Exploration	Document analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content analysis 	Semester 2, 2013
	Indigenous parents	Inspection	Focus group interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant comparative analysis • Coding 	Semester 1, 2014
	Indigenous parents	Inspection	Individual interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant comparative analysis • Coding 	Semester 2, 2014
Q3	Nil	Exploration	Document analysis	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content analysis 	Semester 2,

Research Questions	Participants	Phase	Data gathering strategy	Data Analysis	Time Frame
How do Indigenous students and parents experience the implementation of inclusivity policies at St Mary's?	Indigenous students Indigenous parents Indigenous support staff	Inspection	Focus group interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant comparative analysis • Coding 	2013 Semester 2, 2013 & Semester 1, 2014
	Teachers Indigenous students Indigenous parents Indigenous support staff Teachers	Inspection	Individual interviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant comparative analysis • Coding 	Semester 2, 2014

Chapter 5: Research Understandings

5.1 Introduction

My intention in this chapter is to offer the research understandings that are generated from exploring how Indigenous students and parents experience education at St Mary's. The term, research understandings, is adopted as a more appropriate description than the customary one, research findings. This is because the chapter presents the researcher's understandings of the participants' understandings expressed in their responses to focus group and individual interview questions. This process is described as a *double hermeneutic* (Norreklit, 2006). Hence, the product of this research is not found, but is generated during communication with multiple participants and while gaining an appreciation of their various perspectives. This chapter presents the researcher's synthesised interpretation of the perceived multiple realities documented in the data. Such a process is consistent with the interpretive paradigm.

5.1.1 Participants, pseudonyms and codes.

Participant representation and numbers engaged in focus group and individual interviews are summarised in Table 5.1:

Table 5.1

Participants

Participant Groups	Focus Groups	Focus Group Participants	Individual Interviews
Students	5	29	11
Parents	6	23	10
Support Staff	1	3	3
Teachers	1	6	2
TOTAL	13	61	26

All participants were initially interviewed in focus groups. From this cohort, some participants were invited to be interviewed individually.

Table 5.2

Participant Codes

Participant Group	Letter	Example of pseudonym
Students	S	Shaun, Sebastian, Sam
Parents	P	Pim, Payton, Percy
Aides (Support Staff)	A	Adam, Alan, Anthony
Teachers	T	Theodore, Trevor, Tim

Note. To ensure anonymity, participants' identities are coded according to the initial letter of the stakeholder group of which the individual is a member. Participants are also assigned a pseudonym beginning with the initial letter of that group.

An *FG* or an *I* is attached to participant codes to specify that the data originated from either a Focus Group interview or an Individual interview. Also, a numeral is allocated to participants in the same data gathering strategy. For example:

SI4 03.02.15 indicates that the data are derived from a Student Individual interview and that the student is number 4 of students engaged in this activity, as per Table 5.1. The insertion of a date specifies that the interview was conducted on 3 February, 2015.

Tim, TFG1, personal communication, October 08, 2014 indicates the date of Tim's interview as 8 October, 2014 and that he participated in Teacher Focus Group 1.

All participants, irrespective of gender, have been allocated male identities to increase anonymity.

5.1.2 Research analysis: Codes to concepts.

Data were analysed in section 4.10.2 using the constant comparative processes. The codes, themes and concepts which were generated from an analysis of the data are illustrated in Tables 5.4, 5.5 and 5.6. These codes, themes and concepts are organised under the appropriate specific research questions.

1. How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?
2. How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander parents experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?
3. How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students experience the implementation of inclusivity and equity policies at St Mary's?

Table 5.3 presents the concepts and themes that were engendered from an analysis of the data.

Table 5.3

Concepts and Themes Generated from Data Analysis

Research Question 1	Research Question 2	Research Question 3
How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?	How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander parents experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?	How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students experience the implementation of inclusivity and equity policies at St Mary's?
5.2.1 Learning experiences	5.3.1 Community spirit	5.4.1 A value system
5.2.1.1 As a minority group	5.3.1.1 A sense of belonging	5.4.1.1 Espoused values
5.2.1.2 Overcoming differences	5.3.1.2 A partnership	5.4.1.2 The Catholic ethos
5.2.2 Influences on student learning	5.3.2 Securing the future	5.4.1.3 Classroom attitudes
5.2.2.1 Family expectations/politics	5.3.2.1 Safety	5.4.2 Interpretation of values
5.2.2.2 Indigenous support staff role	5.3.2.2 Influence of family	5.4.2.1 Available assistance
5.2.2.3 Teacher knowledge and respect	5.3.2.3 Establishing boundaries	5.4.2.2 Relationships with aides
	5.3.3 Conflicting priorities	5.4.2.3 Relationships with teachers
	5.3.3.1 Pride in cultural heritage	5.4.2.4 Importance of parent support
	5.3.3.2 Recognition or segregation	5.4.3 A personal journey
	5.3.3.3 Inclusive education	5.4.3.1 Identification
	5.3.3.4 Racism	5.4.3.2 Acceptance
	5.3.3.5 No one culture	5.4.3.3 Discomfort
	5.3.4 Multiple histories	
	5.4.1 Learning about culture	
	5.3.4.2 Conflicting accounts	
	5.3.5 Human resources	
	5.3.5.1 Appreciation of Indigenous support staff	
	5.3.5.2 Appreciation of teachers	
	5.3.6 Ideals in action	
	5.3.6.1 The Christian ethos	

Note. Concepts and themes are arranged in accordance with the relevant specific research question from which this data emerged. Themes and concepts are numbered and relate to the sections within this chapter.

The understandings are presented by addressing each of the three specific research questions that focus the research design.

5.2 Research Question 1

The first specific research question is: How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?

Table 5.4 is a synthesis of responses for the first research question. It demonstrates how the presentation of understandings regarding this specific research questions were generated.

Table 5.4

Synthesis of Responses for the First Research question

Research Question: How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?		
Codes	Themes	Concepts
not alone; similar people; family connections; small numbers; worry about teasing; worry about difference; hoping for more Indigenous enrolments; think the same; focus in class; learning goals; same in class; no difference; cultural feelings; accepted; welcomed; included; acknowledged; valuing of culture; assembly greetings; no difference in classroom; determined to succeed; being stronger, smarter;	As a minority group	Learning experiences
differences: obvious, skin colour, facial features, race, background; cultural practices; many cultures; stereotypes; wanting to be the same; one family; different, but same; good relationships; friendly; teachers want to help; trying too hard; everyone is equal; comparison with non-Indigenous students; competing; doing your best; feeling shame; labelling; fitting in; proving yourself; respect; cooperation; Indigenous support staff roles; breaking stereotypical thinking; proving yourself; acting White; expectations; school culture;	Overcoming differences	
parents expect a lot; to do better; just to finish high school; pressure;	Family	Influences on

<p>as long as we're happy; doing your best;</p> <p>study at home; help from parents; support; encouragement; not understanding;</p> <p>wanting the best;</p> <p>family resentment; think they're better; "white" school; racism within Indigenous community; past influencing present; need to move on;</p>	<p>expectations and politics</p>	<p>student learning</p>
<p>Indigenous support staff: easy to talk to, culture problems, language, help, understanding, no shame, friendly, other mother, willing to help, "homework help" after school, comfortable;</p>	<p>Indigenous support staff role</p>	
<p>teachers: expectations, values, assumptions, attitudes, skills, knowledge;</p> <p>equality in classroom; cultural obligations; stereotyping; racism; value of education; need to be learning; teachers' knowledge of Indigenous history; understanding of cultural things; sometimes too helpful; wanting to help; trying; unhelpful; ignorant; insensitive; hurt; identified by skin colour; acceptance; forgiveness; realistic; big picture is important; culture training for teachers; personal responsibility; sharing of knowledge; pride;</p>	<p>Teacher knowledge and attitudes</p>	

5.2.1 Learning experiences.

Two themes emerge that explore how Indigenous students experience teaching and learning. These are:

1. As a minority group
2. Overcoming differences

5.2.1.1 As a minority group.

Students who identify themselves as having Indigenous heritage represent approximately 10% of enrolments at the College. As such, they are a minority group. There are two dynamics that influence the learning of these students positively: the sense of community gained from a network of support; and how the College creates supportive cultural learning experiences.

Participants identified the support they experienced from other Indigenous students as creating a sense of community within the College. Community for Indigenous students is a catalyst in developing safe places where students experience a sense of belonging. This is particularly important for Indigenous students who need to feel that schools belong to them as much as to any other children (Watson & Beswick, 2007). This is especially important in shared experiences outside the classroom.

Santo explains the importance of this group dynamic for Indigenous students:

I was worried because I went to Woree primary school and there were lots of Aboriginal & Torres Strait people there and I ... grew into that, because ... I have family who are Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander obviously and I went to school with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people and, coming here and knowing that there would be less [sic] Indigenous people at this school, I thought that it would be different because, you know, I can get maybe teased by people in the grounds because of my colour. (Santo, SFG4, personal communication, November 20, 2014)

While there is recognition of their minority group status at the College, Indigenous students experience a community network of cultural understanding within that group. Indeed, the presence of this community offers a valued supportive cultural safeguard that is needed in times of challenge. Santo explains the unique cultural experience that a school based Indigenous network supports:

Because they [Indigenous students and staff] understand more ... if we were to come to school, like pretty upset, saying that we've had a funeral, it's what they [Indigenous students and staff] know. It may seem different ... the Indigenous ways to the other ways, but they'd understand better [than non-Indigenous students and staff]. (Santo, SI1, personal communication, February 11, 2015)

Another dynamic that influences how Indigenous students may have positive educational experiences concerns how the College promotes cultural learning. In particular, the College has introduced structures that demonstrate respect for those students who are the first people of Australia and ensure that established connections with local Indigenous communities are maintained through collaboration with elders and traditional owners. The quality of relationships formed within school communities influences the learning of Aboriginal students positively (Matthews et al., 2003). This is the rationale for the use of public greetings spoken in the local Aboriginal dialect such as *Bilun Gudjin*. In addition,

references to the spirit of *wabu minjin*³ are common at formal and informal gatherings of the school community. In this way, the College encourages Indigenous students to be proud of their heritage. Soren expresses a sense of pride generated from such initiatives: “We all get recognised. I tell my aunts and uncles about how we welcome each other at Assembly ... with Bilun Gudjin and they are proud” (Soren, SI2, personal communication, February 06, 2015).

Indigenous students are invited to share knowledge of their culture with non-Indigenous students and teachers in the classroom. Sam explains how teachers who demonstrate an interest in his cultural heritage assist in making him feel accepted and less concerned about being part of a minority group.

There’s [sic] a lot of teachers who aren’t Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander [people] who are always asking questions, or, when the NAIDOC is on, they’re like ‘Oh, what does this mean?’ or ‘What do you usually do for this?’ and they want to know more. I feel like I’m accepted at St Mary’s ... I’m not put at a disadvantage or I’m not pushed to the side and left alone. Everyone is really welcoming and I feel like I’m a part of the St Mary’s family, the community, *wabu minjin*. (Sam, SI3, personal communication, February 02, 2015)

Such cultural respect creates an environment where Indigenous students feel safe and supported in their learning. Not surprisingly then, Indigenous students favour increasing their number at the College, as seen in comments like: “I’d like to see more here, my own kind here, so that they could experience just the same thing that we’re going through” (Shay, SFG4, November 20, 2014) and “muck around with at lunch and play footy” (Steven, SI4, personal communication, February 11, 2015).

Thus, students who experience that their culture is valued at school want to share those experiences with others. For Indigenous students, the respect of their culture enhances a sense of identity and engenders an idea of belonging to both their school and their own cultural minority group.

Belonging to a cultural minority group within a school is a complex concept that invites clarification. For St Mary’s Indigenous students, the importance of belonging to a minority group varies in different settings. While the presence of a substantial number of Indigenous

³ Local Aboriginal term used meaning “togetherness” or “community”.

students is important in generating a sense of belonging outside the classroom, their presence within classrooms is considered to be irrelevant to the learning experience of Indigenous students. This may be explained as Indigenous students being focussed on understanding the lesson being taught in the classroom. They view the classroom environment mostly as a place of academic learning. As a result, there is little concern with being part of a minority group in the classroom where the support of other Indigenous students is unimportant. Solomon succinctly expresses this perspective in the statement: “I just go in to learn ... it doesn’t really matter to me who’s there” (Solomon, SI10, personal communication, February 03, 2015).

Sebastian confirms Solomon’s explanation:

[The classroom] is the place where you don’t really have friends as such. You just zone in on the lesson. After all, that’s the main reason you come to school in the first place; to learn. (Sebastian, SI1, personal communication, February 05, 2015)

Indigenous students believe the presence in the classroom of students from their own culture is not necessary for them to achieve academically. Some purposefully distance themselves from other Indigenous students while in the classroom environment in order to focus on academic learning. This is aptly explained by Soren who advises others about how to achieve success in school: “Don’t have too many friends in the classroom ... just keep your head down and like [*sic*] work hard and you’ll get where you want to go” (Soren, SFG5, personal communication, November 27, 2014).

In summary, Indigenous students recognise that they are in a minority at St Mary’s. While this is a concern for them, they are appreciative of the school-based network of Indigenous support that operates within the College and also initiatives that promote cultural learning. In the classroom setting, however, Indigenous students prioritise the achievement of academic learning outcomes. Their identification as Indigenous students and belonging to a cultural minority are less important in this setting than the focussed goal to achieve academically.

5.2.1.2 Overcoming differences.

The second theme generated in response to the first research question concerns how Indigenous students understand some teachers’ classroom approaches to be discriminatory. This understanding is based on Indigenous students’ classroom experiences. While participants do not believe themselves to be different from non-Indigenous students, they

believe their teachers do. Participants identified two teacher behaviours that have negative influences on their learning. These behaviours relate to skin colour and social background.

Participants believe that some teachers hold lower academic expectations for Indigenous students than they have for their non-Indigenous peers. Furthermore, teacher interactions in the classroom suggest that these lower expectations are related to Indigenous students' physical appearance. Santo explains this phenomenon: "The lighter-skinned Indigenous kids are in the 'higher expectations' group, because you've got the teachers expecting ... the white kids to know more ... and the black kids not to know much" (Santo, S11, personal communication, February 11, 2015).

The belief that teachers have academic expectations that are influenced by skin colour is explained by Stanley:

It's a skin colour thing ... I've gotten [*sic*] a lot of help from teachers because they push me 'cause they know that I can do better ... not many people know that I'm Indigenous ... and so I haven't been singled out as being not bright or anything. (Stanley, SFG5, personal communication, November 27, 2014)

These perceived teacher attitudes not only have a negative influence on student learning, but may also be personally confronting for Indigenous students. Santo, a high achiever, explains this: "Sometimes in English or Maths, I get told, straight up, to move to the front and I'm asked if I understand the work ... because I'm Black" (Santo, SFG4, personal communication,) Santo is insulted by the teachers' assumption that his skin colour influences his ability to understand.

In contrast, Spencer has lighter coloured skin. He experiences difficulty with academic learning and has sought learning support. He explains how the questioning by some teachers of this support, an Indigenous classroom aide, has had a negative influence on learning:

My skin is pretty fair ... when I've told teachers before that I am Aboriginal ... because Dad was Aboriginal ... he was really dark, but I just turned out whiter for some reason. When I say that I'm Aboriginal, they're [teachers] like 'No, you're not!' So I just give up ... why would I lie about it though? I used to have a picture of Dad in my wallet to prove it and I used to feel like, well, you know, it's not my fault, I just turned out this way ... I am what is called half-caste. I just don't look it. It makes it hard to learn sometimes. (Spencer, SFG1, personal communication, November 04, 2015)

Another teacher behaviour identified as having an adverse influence on learning concerns the perception that teachers do not regard all Indigenous students in the same way. Some Indigenous students at the College have homes in the remote Aboriginal communities of Cape York. The traditional communities are places where a mixture of traditional culture and welfare has led to dysfunctional behaviours, often criticised in the media (Phillpot, 2006). It is not surprising that students from these communities find mainstream education a challenge. Sam reflects on this:

With the kids from the Cape communities, the teachers would think a bit less of them because of where they have come from and I guess that does not really help the students. Because they know that the teacher doesn't think that they are equal to the others. And, I know that if I was in that position, I would find it difficult to learn and stuff. (Sam, SI3, personal communication, February 02, 2015)

Indigenous students employ a variety of coping strategies to address these perceptions of inequality and discrimination. One such strategy is to adopt school mannerisms which are inconsistent with values underpinning their cultural upbringing. Sancho explains this: "Indigenous students act differently ... to fit in here ... they want to keep their culture out" (Sancho, SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015).

However, this acting strategy often results in accusations by their peers of "acting white". Soren explains that the effect of this "... makes [them] feel uncomfortable ... is that the right thing? Do I have to start blending in with them [non-Indigenous students] to fit in?" (Soren, SI2, personal communication, February 06, 2015).

For other Indigenous students, acting white is not so much about changing behaviour to assimilate appropriately into the school, but making a deliberate choice to live respectfully, honouring school values. Sam offers a nuanced explanation of a perceived racial response.

I know that people say that you can act black or act white, and a lot of people say to me 'Oh, you always act white', but that's just what is expected of a St Mary's student. It's not acting white, it's being polite and following the rules ... it's how you should behave all the time, not just at school. (Sam, SI3, personal communication, February 02, 2015)

Consequently, the behaviour is not so much about abandoning traditional values to become white, but adapting and expressing respect for others, irrespective of race. This becomes an issue of identifying values by which to live.

It is only a very few teachers who exhibited discriminatory behaviour. Indeed, most classrooms were places where equality was experienced. As Sancho explains, “In the teacher’s eyes, once you step in the classroom, everyone is equal ... it doesn’t matter what culture you are or where you come from” (Sancho, SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015).

Despite the fact that Indigenous students are a minority and experience some discriminatory attitudes, a culture of belonging is being cultivated and experienced. Sam illustrates this when saying that

There’s no such thing as ‘odd one out’ ... because there’s [*sic*] so many different cultures ... it’s really diverse and everyone is welcome ... I’m just the same as everyone else ... I’m no less than the people around me”. (Sam, SI3, February 02, 2015)

5.2.2 Influences on student learning.

A further understanding that emanated from the exploration of the first research question concerns the influence of particular groups of people in the lives of students. Participants identified how certain people particularly motivated them to learn. Three themes emerge from the data. These are:

1. Family expectations and politics;
2. Indigenous support staff roles; and
3. Teacher knowledge and respect.

5.2.2.1 Family expectations and politics.

Participant attitudes towards learning and academic achievement are influenced by parents who may not have experienced the educational opportunities of their children. Stories of injustice and inequality combined with poor teaching resulting in little progress are common in family histories about school. These stories often inspired Indigenous students to achieve academically, as stated by Sancho in: “It certainly makes me want to try harder ... a bit of pressure ... get the best possible outcome you can with the skills and opportunities you’ve been given” (SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015).

Parental hopes and expectations influence some Indigenous students to achieve. Shaun expresses this feeling of personal responsibility to make the most of education: “Well, I have to be the one that’s better ... make up for the others ... like it’s all down to me” (SFG2, personal communication, November 10, 2014). Sonny documents similar parental expectations: “When I was at school, I didn’t have all the things that you have ... if I was at

that school, I'd be taking advantage of the opportunities ... this and that ... she expects me to do well" (SFG3, personal communication, November 11, 2014).

However, not all Indigenous students' experience encouraging parental expectations; some parents display expectations that are far less demanding. As an example, Sidney states: "My parents just want me to be happy. They are really supportive ... when I do well, they are so proud of me" (SI5, personal communication, March 24, 2015).

Many students recognise the worth of their endeavours and personal achievements, however small, to the social standing of their family within the Indigenous community. Children's academic success is proudly shared by their entire family. Seth explains the importance of his individual accomplishments to his family: "My Mum just wants me to finish high school because she didn't. No one in the entire family has ever graduated from high school. It's a big thing for them" (SFG2, personal communication, November 10, 2014).

Indigenous parents acknowledge that the College provides a positive learning experience for their children. However, surprisingly, some extended family members resent Indigenous children attending St Mary's. This resentment is directed at the student and is accepted as family politics. Seth explains:

I get told 'you're a whitey' all the time from my cousins and family going to other schools ... whenever we meet at a feast or something like that. I know that I talk and act different. I don't try to, but they talk in 'language' sometimes and I don't get it and so ... they can't talk or argue very well, so it's easy to show them up... but they're always saying, just in fun, 'Ooooo ... manners!' I just shrug and say "I'd rather be this than you". They say "little black girl, trying to be white", but ... I don't care ... like, where are they going? (SFG2, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

Likewise, Sonny acknowledges that some of his extended family members resent his attending the College. His words demonstrate both his acceptance of family politics and also his resilience to it:

They say 'You go to a white school' and they call me 'pretty boy' because of the uniforms and all that ... the way I talk. They say it to stir me up. Sometimes it works. Most of the time I laugh at them. (Sonny, SFG3, personal communication, November 11, 2014)

Soren identifies negative stereotypes of Indigenous people and speaks of how these are accepted by his family. He uses the criticism generated from family politics to become more determined to achieve:

There's [sic] a lot of stereotypes out there and you get it from family [saying] 'you'll be just going to Centrelink; you're going to be another one in Yarrabah⁴'. I don't want that ... education is the key to everything ... my goal is just to work hard and achieve ... prove them wrong. (Soren, SI2, personal communication, February 06, 2015)

Family expectations and politics influence the learning of Indigenous students. While some family members criticise the success of Indigenous students, such criticism becomes the motivation for their increased determination to further succeed.

5.2.2.2 Indigenous support staff roles.

Participants appreciate the assistance provided by Indigenous teacher aides who work with students in the classroom. Indigenous teacher aides are also accessible to students outside of class to provide individual assistance or at organised student support programs. At the College, they are located in the Kuiyam⁵ room which is often visited by students seeking support with study organisation or the completion of assessment. An Indigenous Community Engagement officer works with parents and the community on educational programs, cultural protocols and other sensitive issues.

While teachers are available to students who seek help, many participants admitted being more comfortable accessing Indigenous teacher aides who are described as more approachable: "I find that they [Indigenous teacher aides] are less intimidating ... if I don't completely understand something, I feel less intimidated by them. I'm not sure why" (Sebastian, SI11, personal communication, February 05, 2015). There is a perception that Indigenous teacher aides "understand more ... they know what's hard ... they can break the work down" (Shay, SI9, personal communication, February 12, 2015). Sebastian explains how problems in his learning were identified:

In class, I'd be OK, I'd kind of understand. Sir would say 'OK, do these for homework' and I'd come home and I'd sit there and I'd just be like 'What can I

⁴ Yarrabah is a Aboriginal community close to Cairns.

⁵ Kuiyam is a legendary warrior from the local area. A meeting place at the College has been named after him.

do?’ I went to Maths tutorials ... then I met up with Mr Anthony to go over what I did know and what I didn’t know. I ended up having to go back and do Year 7 Maths work, because I didn’t go to school for much of Year 7”.

(Sebastian, SI11, personal communication, February 05, 2015)

Older students recognise that assistance from Indigenous teacher aides in lower grades had provided them with a foundation for learning and the confidence to continue learning at complex levels. Shaun explains this:

Mr Anthony is pretty good. He has helped me a lot. He’s like the jack of all trades. [In] grade 8, grade 9, I had no idea what I was doing, to be honest. He helped. The more help I can get now ... the better ... for the last year.” (SI6, personal communication, February 03, 2015)

Being present with students in the classroom offers teacher aides a valuable insight not only into the content of the lesson, but also into the varied pedagogies that are employed by teachers to promote learning. They have direct experience of lesson purpose and how the teacher expects content to be learned. This understanding of the classroom generates relationships based on shared experiences. Spencer offers this explanation: “I can get help from home or the teacher, but I would rather just go and see Mr Anthony ... he explains it in more detail ... he knows what is going on in class because he’s been there” (SFG1, personal communication, November 04, 2014).

Indigenous teacher aides are helpful in assisting students to learn because they not only share the learning and teaching experiences of the classroom, but they also possess shared cultural experiences. Steven identifies the sense of wellbeing that exists between people of the same cultural background:

When I ask questions to the teacher ... it’s kind of like shame and stuff; but when I talk to Uncle, it’s more comfortable, because he knows what we’re like ... I don’t feel shame when I talk to him”. (SI4, personal communication, February 11, 2015)

Participants recognise that Indigenous teacher aides have a lived appreciation of cultural issues that especially influences learning:

There could be some things about our culture ... say there’s a death in the family, we mourn for a couple of days, no matter if it’s a school day or a weekend, so we mourn for that amount of days and if the work that we don’t learn then [is] during those days, we don’t end up catching up on. So that’s the work that we’re not knowing and some of the teachers don’t understand or

accept that we couldn't be here". (Santo, SI1, personal communication, February 11, 2015)

Indigenous teacher aides who have an in-depth understanding of culture, are personally approachable, build confidence and are able to identify deficits in learning. In particular, they have a comprehensive knowledge of lesson content and pedagogies used by different teachers. As such, they are a highly valued resource for student learning at the College.

5.2.2.3 Teacher knowledge and respect.

Participants acknowledge that their learning is influenced by their teachers' knowledge and respect of Indigenous cultures. Moreover, participants are aware that many teachers have little knowledge of Indigenous culture. This is an important observation because participants believe that the more teachers demonstrate a knowledge and respect for Indigenous culture, the more they engage Indigenous students in learning. However, participants drew a distinction between knowledge of Indigenous culture and respect for Indigenous culture. While these concepts are related, Indigenous students believe that teachers may be excused for their lack of knowledge, but not their lack of respect, as Sancho says: "It'd be good for them [teachers] to know your culture, but, if they don't ... so [*sic*] long as they show respect for your culture ... they can learn about it ... maybe later or in another way" (SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015).

Indigenous students concur that most teachers "don't know a lot about our culture" (Saxon, SI8, personal communication, February 17, 2015). This becomes apparent when teachers stereotype Indigenous people. As Sancho amusingly explains, "A lot of my teachers, they say 'Indigenous people are good at singing, they're good at drawing. Are you good at that?' They think that we're all the same" (SFG5, personal communication, November 27, 2014).

Some participants believe that teachers have a responsibility to become culturally literate if they expect Indigenous students to improve their learning: "If they have Aboriginal students, they should know something about Aboriginality ... they should learn it or be taught it or search it up if they don't have the information already" (Shay, SI9, personal communication, February 12, 2015). In contrast, other participants believed that teachers should not be expected to know the complexity of Indigenous culture without a lived experience. This is insightfully expressed by Steven: "They [teachers] don't really need to know ... how could they know if they haven't been growed up [*sic*] that way" (Steven, SI4, personal communication, February 11, 2015).

However, participants are appreciative of teachers who are open to learning from them: “In Religion, we were looking at different types of spirituality ... I had [Teacher] and she was really interested in our Indigenous spirituality. She was good” (Sebastian, SFG2, personal communication, November 10, 2014). Indigenous students share knowledge of their own culture willingly to assist teachers to become more knowledgeable about cultural concepts. Some participants view this as a personal responsibility:

I feel proud when I talk about [my culture] ... especially about Babinda, that’s where my tribe is from. I just feel like I have a responsibility to tell them [teachers] more about it ... of what I know ... what you have to remember is that where they go to become teachers, they’re not taught that. (Sam, SI3, personal communication, February 02, 2015)

Adam also believes that students have a responsibility to teach their teachers:

You have to teach them too ... I’m from the Torres Straits, but I am of Aboriginal descent. But nowhere in the history books does it say that there are any Aboriginal people in the Torres Straits. But there is ... if you go to Horn Island ... and if you said that you were a Torres Strait Islander, you’d get hurt. (Adam, SFG4, personal communication, November 20, 2014)

Clearly then, the issue of teacher sensitivity to Indigenous culture and student learning invites further explanation. Participants agree that the teachers’ lack of knowledge of Indigenous culture does not have a detrimental influence on learning specific academic subjects. “Their lack of knowledge of my culture doesn’t affect their teaching of Maths” (Sam, SI3, personal communication, February 02, 2015) Nevertheless, when teachers indicate a willingness to learn more about Indigenous culture, they develop a positive relationship with Indigenous students. What subsequently occurs approximates to a role reversal in the classroom in that the teacher becomes a learner, with the Indigenous student becoming the teacher. From this perspective, the teacher’s cultural knowledge deficit becomes a bridge to connect with Indigenous cultures. This dynamic is the catalyst for a personal relationship between teachers and students that influences Indigenous students’ learning positively.

The rationale above explains why participants concede that teacher knowledge of Indigenous culture is less important than demonstration of their valuing of that culture in the classroom. Teaching is values-laden. Content might be prescribed; however, a teacher’s choice of strategies and experiences which with to engage learning communicates their values to students (Brady, 2011).

Participants concur that teachers at the College honour principles of equity: “[Teachers] treat everyone the same ... just as the class ... ‘you’re my students and you’re all the same’” (Shaun, SI6, personal communication, February 03, 2015). Shay confirms this opinion: “[Teachers] treat us the same in the classroom; it doesn’t matter what culture you are” (SI9, personal communication, February 12, 2015). Indigenous students have not always experienced such respect from teachers. Steven compares his experiences of two different schools:

In my old school, [Indigenous students] would usually go out of the classroom and get help ... and heaps of whites [*sic*] would say “Oh, we’re dumb too. Let’s go with them” and the teacher would just ignore it and just go along ... but I haven’t really gotten [*sic*] that from people here. (SI4, personal communication, February 11, 2015)

Teachers demonstrate their principles of equity by providing additional support and encouragement to Indigenous students. Sancho explains how this additional support may assist in motivating students:

I’ve noticed in some of my classes ... with some of the Indigenous kids that might not be doing so well, you see the teachers ... in the back of their heads they’re kind of thinking “Come on, try a bit harder” ... like they want you to succeed and prove yourself. So you got to get rid of the preconception that you don’t have much of a chance ... because they do ... they have the potential ... it’s just motivation. (SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015)

However, unless used prudently, well-meaning support may be perceived as patronising and a hindrance to learning. Santo explains this:

He [teacher] wants us to do well, but if you asked how [to do] a question, he would just write it for us in our books ... just gives us the answer ... and for the non-Indigenous kids, he would explain it ... so they learn it. Then when we get a bad mark on our exam, he’ll growl at us. (SFG4, personal communication, November 20, 2014)

While most teachers were considered to be supportive of Indigenous cultures, other teachers resented what they perceived to be special privileges extended to Indigenous students. Seth describes an incident where a younger Indigenous student was criticised for

wearing a distinctive shirt to celebrate NAIDOC:⁶ “[The teacher] said ‘Why should you get to wear it ... other kids can’t wear their nationalities like that’ ... and she just had a big go [*sic*] at her about that”. (SFG2, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

Teachers’ behaviours demonstrate that many different values pertaining to Indigenous culture exist in the classroom. These are easily discerned by Indigenous students and have an important influence on their learning.

5.3 Research Question 2

The second specific research question is: How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents experience education at St Mary’s?

Table 5.5 is a synthesis of responses for the second research question. It demonstrates how the presentation of understandings regarding this specific research questions were generated.

Table 5.5

Synthesis of Responses for the Second Research Question

Research Question:	Codes	Themes	Concepts
How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander parents experience teaching and learning at St Mary’s?	satisfied; positive; fitting in; feeling included; one family; caring;	A sense of belonging	Community spirit
	communication; common values; connection between home and school; invited to participate; good examples; role models; given a voice; anti-discrimination; trust; partnership	A partnership	
	a safe place; physical protection; protection from authorities; no family politics interfering; negative stereotypes; breaking the cycle; fights; one way to solve problems; resilience; confidence in future; misbehaviour not ignored; correction; value of non-Indigenous teachers; safety net; coping; change; preparation for the real world; understanding; care; family: criticism, resentment, jealousy, politics, obligations, “tall poppies”, “white” school, low expectations, low self-esteem, history repeating, ‘shame’, belief, abilities, differing aspirations, not all	Safety	Securing the future

⁶ National Aboriginal and Islander Day of Celebration

Research Question: How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander parents experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?			
Codes	Themes	Concepts	
families are the same, differences, not united;	Influence of family		
human nature; stress; elitism; "crabs in a bucket" syndrome; alienation from community; setting boundaries re family; bullying in Indigenous community; personal responsibility; past defining present and future;	Establishing boundaries		
pride; first peoples; recognition; anxiety; segregation; standing apart; special events and excursions are non-inclusive; unfairness; special 'treatment'; discrimination; funding rules; learning for all students; multiculturalism; learning other cultures; <i>Black Comedy</i> ; stereotyping; condescending;	Pride in cultural heritage Recognition or segregation Inclusive education Racism	Conflicting priorities	
racism: parental influence, from "their own mob", affects all cultures;			
confidence; reporting; speak up; no one culture;	No one culture		
educational programs; learning about culture; curriculum content; social history; the real story; pre-colonial history; whose story; no one way; no one history;	Learning about culture Conflicting accounts	Historical perspectives	
Indigenous aides: positive relationships, liaison between school and home, available, accessible, approachable, understanding of cultural protocols, not essential but valuable; resourceful;	Appreciation of Indigenous support staff	Human educational resources	
teachers: skills, patience, care, awareness, fairness; teacher training; confidence in teachers; teaching culture; knowledge; historical perspective; guest speakers from Indigenous community; complementary knowledge; traditional owners; whose perspective	Appreciation of teachers		
Catholic traditions; Christian influence; religious grounding; values; not theology; a safe place; protection; practice; demonstrated by actions; spirituality; holistic approach; respect; present and future; Missionaries; Catholic symbols; God first;	Value of Christian ethos	Ideals in action	

5.3.1 Community spirit.

Two themes illuminate how Indigenous parents experience community spirit at the College. These are:

1. A sense of belonging
2. As a partnership

5.3.1.1 A sense of belonging.

Just like their children, Indigenous parents need to experience a sense of belonging. Participants stated that this was catalytic for the establishment and maintenance of authentic communication between home and school. Without experiencing this sense of belonging to the school community, parents tended to isolate themselves, becoming non-communicative. Paris explains this characteristic behaviour as an historical alienation of Indigenous people: “If I’m not at ease with what’s happening, I don’t want to react in a manner that’s not appropriate. So I have the silent mode [*sic*]. I just go silent. And that’s the way we’ve [Indigenous people] always coped” (PI1, personal communication, March 02, 2015.)

Generating a sense of belonging for Indigenous parents is dependent on the aligning of values between school and home. Participants appreciate the values of respect and diligence that they constantly encourage from their children: “It’s the same at home. I bring my girls into line all the time about respect and doing the best you can. So I feel that we’re on the same page with that” (Paris, PI1, personal communication, March 02, 2015).

Another way that assists parents to experience a sense of belonging is their having a welcoming access to teachers and administrators at the College. However, some Indigenous parents are uncomfortable speaking with authority figures. Having access to a trusted liaison person is important to “break that barrier there ... that difficulty of speaking to the teachers, even though they want to” (Paris, PI1, personal communication, March 02, 2015). Consequently, an Aboriginal elder is employed at the College in this role:

They need to talk to Uncle Adam first ... because they want to speak to someone but they just can’t. When I worked in Police Liaison it was the same ... you have to go and say ‘this is what the police want to speak to you about’ and they’d go [*sic*] “Oh, OK then’. It’s the same here with the teachers ... until they [Indigenous parents] meet with them and chat with them, they’re not comfortable. (Paris, PI1, personal communication, March 02, 2015)

Thus, establishing a positive relationship with teachers and school leaders builds trust and generates an awareness of belonging to a community among Indigenous parents. This

community is defined by Indigenous parents as trusted and like-minded people at St Mary's with whom they and their children feel safe. Such a supportive culture is prioritised ahead of the College's Catholic or educational identity. Pablo explains this experience:

I'm not very churchy, but I know what's going on in your Masses and Tim's [Assistant Principal] rules about the Friday [Lent] things and why we have to study this curriculum ... everybody talks about what happens at the school outside the school ... so it's easy to know what's going on ... and I think that, if something terrible happened at school, I would hear about it quickly ... so I know he's safe. (PI2, personal communication, November 23, 2015)

5.3.1.2 A partnership.

Indigenous parents believe that by enrolling their children at the College, they enter into a personal partnership with teachers and school leaders. Parents acknowledge the importance of formal education. More importantly, they encourage their children to acquire important personal values that prepare them for the future. These values include resiliency, prioritisation, respect, and tolerance.

Resiliency is prioritised as being a necessary quality that may be learned at a school where teachers have similar expectations for all students, regardless of their cultural background. Indigenous students understand that belonging to a minority culture may be a negative influence on their learning. However, Indigenous parents claim that their children's understanding and subsequent acceptance of this phenomenon may lead them to become more determined to succeed. Pedro explains:

My daughter needs to be challenged by non-Indigenous teachers and other students ... it's no good her going to a blackfella [*sic*] school where she's allowed to think 'I didn't succeed because I was black' ... but learn to ask 'did I put in the study, did I practise' ... 'then, I need to try again' ... that's the resilience we're looking for. (PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

Parents believe education is the foundation for children not only to appreciate the world in which they live, but also to contribute to it. In particular, St Mary's Indigenous parents value their children learning "how to live another way so that the cycle of dependence on welfare is broken" (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015).

For many Indigenous parents, a St Mary's education provides a perspective for their children that leads to employment, in contrast to a reliance on welfare. Nevertheless, parents

spoke of their disappointment at their children's lack of appreciation of parents' sacrifices for this education.

My children say to me ... [Cousins] have a brand new PS3 ... they get twenty bucks [*sic*] for the tuckshop ... we're so poor and they're so rich!" I say "Yeh, but [cousins] don't have a bed! If you open their fridge, you'll see nothing there. That's why we're taking food there". They [the children] don't see that all of the house is a mess ... they won't look at that until they're older ... they start to see how everything works. (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015)

Indigenous parents share an agenda with the school concerning the importance of education. Parents rely on teachers not only to educate their children in the academic curriculum, but also to honour the obligation to live respectfully with others: "You know that if they do anything wrong, they're going to get pulled up straight away, or we'll know about it" (Payton, PI5, personal communication, February 22, 2015).

Participants were appreciative of how the school partners with Indigenous elders in the local community in order to engage Indigenous with non-Indigenous students in learning about local history and customs. This is a way to share their culture through education. It also builds understanding and tolerance. "[Cultural programs] should be open to everyone, not just students from that culture, because, how are they going to learn about another culture?" (Payton, PI5, personal communication, February 22, 2015). Parents agree that these cultural programs create authentic engagement and cooperation between non-Indigenous students and Indigenous students:

All kids aren't just Aboriginal. They're not all just from one island in the Torres Strait ... from way back from colonisation. We're all different shapes and colours now. So you need to have all these different cultural programs and aim it [*sic*] at everyone. (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015)

5.3.2 Securing the future.

The second new understanding generated from analysis of the data concerns how Indigenous parents hope to secure a future for their children through education. This understanding focuses on three themes. These are:

1. Safety;
2. Influence of family; and

3. Setting boundaries.

5.3.2.1 Safety.

A constant theme generated from the data analysis is that parents and students believe that St Mary's is a place of safety. The College offers not only physical safety but also an encouraging and supportive educational environment.

Participants acknowledged that Indigenous culture is often characterised by conflict: "A lot of Indigenous people sort out their fights with their fists" (Percy, PI6, personal communication, March 02, 2015). Indigenous students confirm this: "At [the local primary school], everyone fights. Every black kid is fighting every day" (Selwyn, FG4, personal communication, November 20, 2014). While Indigenous parents do not encourage their children to fight, they do recognise that fighting regularly occurs in schools close to the Aboriginal Communities.

I always tell the boys 'you never fight, it's not good to fight', but there are different schools that are not safe for your children and the further north you go, the worse it is; and it's like they rule the teacher. (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February,20, 2015)

In contrast, parents trust St Mary's leaders and teachers, who offer a caring and safe learning environment for their children:

After the game, things seemed to be a bit fiery ... [teachers] made sure that they got into the bus safely, so that if there was [*sic*] any issues that was [*sic*] going to happen with them fighting, it was defused by the actions that you did ... calmly and expecting them to be calm as well ... I could see what you were doing and I thought that was keeping us all safe. (Page, FG4, November 18, 2014)

Parents also respect how the school nurtures a culture of encouraging and celebrating academic endeavour and achievement:

I wanted them to be in an environment where they felt safe ... just a safe, Christian environment where education comes first and I wanted them to be here to go to school ... to be educated with no outside influences from other kids and cousins ... I was looking for other students who were good role models here. (Page, FG4, personal communication, November 18, 2014)

5.3.2.2 *Influence of family.*

The prioritisation of their children's education is a parental decision that may generate family resentment and alienation from others in the Indigenous community. In order to be considered for school enrolment catchment zones, some Indigenous parents choose to live in different neighbourhoods away from family. This choice may result in the resentment of other Indigenous families. Some Indigenous parents seek schools that offer an Indigenous sensitive environment where their children have improved possibilities to succeed. Often this decision entails considerable family sacrifice. Moreover, those who choose to enrol their children in non-State schools, may experience alienation. Indeed, their community labels them as “not truly black” (Pim, PI4, February 20, 2015). Further explanation is appropriate:

It depends on where they live, what house they live in, what area; if you don't live in [local suburb, local street], then you're not seen as 'black' black ... you don't have the hardships ... you don't have the family dynamics ... you know, we're all hard done by because we live here ... that type of mentality. (Pim, personal communication, PI4, February 20, 2015)

In other words, decisions to provide an appropriate education for their children may generate an alienating tension between these parents and their traditional community. Indigenous parents describe the “mentality” referred to above as the *crabs in a bucket syndrome*. This is an Indigenous understanding of what Anglo-Australians term the *tall poppy syndrome*⁷. “They're all climbing over each other in the bucket to get out, but when one is climbing up to the top, trying to get out, you [*sic*] pull them back down again” (Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014). This understanding is not a novel experience, since it has its genesis in Indigenous family politics and history:

It has happened for generation after generation ... my grandparents were part of that Stolen Generation ... when the Act changed and they were supposed to move back to the community, they said 'no'. They had kids of their own by then and they wanted them to go to school and have an education. So they moved into town ... it's only about two minutes drive from the community ... so, even though they are the traditional owners, they are not seen as black as those who live there. (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015)

⁷ Tall poppy syndrome is a pejorative term to describe a social phenomenon in which people of genuine merit are criticised because their talents or achievements elevate them above their peers.

The local Indigenous community also view different suburbs and streets as being more authentically black. It is advantageous for Indigenous families to congregate in the same area to support one another. The disadvantage is that some of these suburbs and streets have earned a notorious reputation for housing disadvantaged and troubled families⁸. A ghetto-like mentality is an appropriate description of a situation where the authentically black residents become antagonistic towards other Indigenous families who choose to reside elsewhere: “It’s almost like a badge of honour living there” (Paris, PI1, personal communication, March 02, 2015). Indigenous parents at the College recognise and understand this mentality. However, they also recognise that having this attitude limits Indigenous people from choosing a better way of life for their family: “But once you can get out of there and find a better place to live, find that nicer environment, neighbourhood and find a good job and stuff like that, you can do the things for your family” (Paris, PI1, personal communication, March 02, 2015).

Furthermore, participants dispute the inference that the Indigenous cultural identity is restricted to residents of a particular street or diminished by those residents relocating to a different suburb. Moreover, assigning authentically black status to Indigenous residents of one locality is stereotyping. Pedro resents being ascribed values on the basis of cultural heritage “... because we’ve all got different ways in our own homes. I’m not just black! I’m different to the Joneses down the road who are Aboriginal” (Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014).

Pedro concedes that this type of stereotyping that occurs within Indigenous communities is particularly hurtful: “To be ragged by your own black people saying ‘you think you’re white’ is really bad” (Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014). Moreover, this experience of discrimination and resentment within Indigenous families may be so debilitating as to influence parents to disassociate from their traditional community. Pim explains:

There’s a lot of obligation when it comes to being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. There’s so much political crap [*sic*] that goes on; and that’s why you would have kids here [at the College] that [*sic*] wouldn’t identify as Indigenous at all because their parents have decided ‘I’m over all the politics; I just want to

⁸ Murray Street in Manoora, Cairns, is densely populated with public and community housing rental properties and has a high crime rate. It is also the scene of a tragedy in 2014 which resulted in eight Indigenous children being murdered.

bring my kids up to be good humans, without all the extra'. (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015)

5.3.2.3 Establishing boundaries.

St Mary's Indigenous parents seek an education for their children that both liberates and celebrates cultural traditions. Parents manage Indigenous family obligations by establishing boundaries around their immediate and extended families. These boundaries ensure respect for individual family units. Indigenous elders acknowledge that family obligations may enable or limit personal lives and model boundary-setting behaviour:

With Uncle Adam's family, they go and visit him and they are quite close, but he has set his boundaries. His family respect his quietness. They ring him before they come over. He's set his boundaries over the years to suit him ... that he wants that and they respect that. (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015)

In contrast, a failure to establish boundaries may result in the inability to manage the expectations of extended family members:

They just rock up at any time. They need bread or milk or sugar or whatever or they need a cigarette price or they need a lift or some other thing ... I'll get phone calls from my cousins at 3 o'clock in the morning ... 'have you got cigarette price?' ... sometimes I just ignore their phone calls ... then they leave me alone for a while ... move onto the next cousin. But it's that family obligation where they think 'You're my first cousin, so you have to do this for me' ... I can see why a lot of your parents and Indigenous just cut off from that ... because you get enough of it. (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015)

Establishing boundaries around family enables parents to focus on the immediate needs of their children. Ironically, Indigenous parents have placed boundaries around their culture by cancelling cultural performances because other Indigenous children were to participate:

We [Indigenous parents] tend to put a spanner in the works when the school is trying to do good things ... and if you look into it too much, and that's what a lot of people do ... you can ruin it ... I mean, does it really matter if the Hula dance started in Hawaii? (Pim, PI4, personal communication, 20.02.15)

Similarly, Paris explains how some who identify as Indigenous people, have complex cultural heritages that are not limited to a particular area:

Even with our own family, we dance and some of the dances we do are from Murray Island and we've been doing them since I was young; and just recently, someone has been blowing up about us doing the Murray Island dances; but with our family history, we've got ties back there. (Phillip, PI1, personal communication, March 02, 2015)

Furthermore, participants acknowledge that not only cultural history, but also social history, may be detrimental to their children's learning and personal growth. The history of Indigenous people is one that has to be acknowledged. However, it should not confine the aspirations of future generations of Indigenous people.

Their thinking is still limited to the 1960s ... you have to leave things in the past and move on ... my Mum missed quite a chunk of her years living with her Mum and Dad because they were Aboriginal and they were seen as 'not fit to raise kids with lighter skin' ... she accepts that this happened in the past and says that 'these White people today didn't do this to me'. (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015)

Family, cultural and social boundaries are a challenge to parents who remain concerned for their children's future: "Can't they just be proud of somebody who is striving to be better? I'm frightened of that "crabs in the bucket" syndrome. 'Who do you think you are? You know ... look at your mob'" (Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014).

5.3.3 Conflicting priorities.

Indigenous parents are challenged by conflicting priorities in their experience of teaching and learning at the College. Five themes amplify this concept:

1. Pride in cultural heritage;
2. Recognition or segregation;
3. Inclusive education;
4. Racism; and
5. No one culture.

5.3.3.1 Pride in cultural heritage.

Indigenous parents appreciate how their cultural heritage is acknowledged by staff at the College. Indigenous teacher aides are positive role models for students. Parents consider these role models counteract the influence of less appropriate representatives of their culture:

[It's] good to see our colour in areas where they're looked up to and respected, for both black and white students. There's still that ... because they still got to go out there ... and if they see a black person begging or maybe off the street, they'll remember not all of them are like that. (Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

Not only staff, but also specific programs at the College demonstrate pride in Indigenous culture. However, parents are critical of programs that differentiate between Indigenous students. The following conversation with a child explains this issue:

I wish I was more black ... because, all the kids I know, if you're [*sic*] really, really black, then you get extra stuff. You get to go on these cool excursions and you get to do all this stuff; and so, if I was extra black, if I was blacker, then I could do those things. (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015)

Parents claim that such differentiations confuse their children's cultural identification.

Indigenous parents are aware of the stereotype that Indigenous children are poor learners. They are also concerned that their children use this as an excuse for lack of academic achievement. To illustrate this, parents referred to a popular television series, *Black Comedy*⁹, which portrays stock characters recognisable by many Indigenous families:

There's one particular skit where the girl [character] uses that [Indigenous identification] as an excuse for everything. It's so funny because you see it all the time ... but, when you think about it, it's not really funny at all ... it's pretty sad ... that people will use their culture when it suits them. (Phillip, PI6, personal communication, March 24, 2015)

While parents applaud Indigenous actors in this program, some are concerned with its negative portrayal of contemporary Indigenous society and the influence such media may have on their children. The characters' use of Aboriginal English has been interpreted by some as condescending of Indigenous people because they are seen to transform from figures of fun to objects of stupidity. Pedro explains: "My grandmother had the blackest skin and she could speak really good English" (Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014).

⁹ A sketch comedy shown on the ABC in 2015 featuring a cast of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander writers and performers.

Indigenous parents want their culture acknowledged and their children to be proud of who they are. However, they often have conflicting perspectives concerning what is important for their children to celebrate in that culture:

Celebrate us [Indigenous actors] being successful ... sure ... but that's not culture ... when I grew up we had silly shows on TV ... back then they had *Acropolis Now* where we laughed at the Greeks, but now we have the Indigenous ones. (Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

5.3.3.2 Recognition or segregation.

Parents experience conflicting priorities concerning how the College acknowledges their Indigenous heritage. While the College's inclusivity policies acknowledge students of all cultures, Indigenous parents consider that their children especially "deserve recognition as descendants of the first persons of Australia; that's different to recognising all the other cultures who have come here" (Percy, PI7, personal communication, March 02, 2015). Similarly, all students should "know the place they're living in ... the background, the people who lived here before ... how they lived" (Paris, PI1, personal communication, March 02, 2015).

This recognition of Indigenous heritage is acknowledged by Australian State and Federal governments through policies that allocate extra funding for schools. However, the College's receipt of funding for Indigenous students is identified by some Indigenous parents as contentious:

When Indigenous students obtain funding just on principle, I think that can be a real issue, especially when there are other children who may be disadvantaged for reasons similar to the Indigenous students and I think that the way that the funding is distributed to families who don't need to be financially supported can be an issue and can cause segregation rather than inclusivity. (Percy, PI7, personal communication, March 02, 2015)

St Mary's receives additional government funding on the basis of the number of enrolled Indigenous students, the need to offer special initiatives¹⁰, as well as for the employment of Indigenous teacher aides. Parents are appreciative of this support. However,

¹⁰ Opportunities exist for Indigenous students to attend meetings concerning historical and political debates.

they are also offended by the assumption that assistance is considered necessary for all Indigenous students. Phillip relates an experience that alienated him from fellow students:

At the Police Academy, I was given tuition. They didn't ask if I needed it ... they just did it because I was Indigenous. I had good mates that [*sic*] struggled a lot more academically than I did ... so it was 'How come you get it?' I was insulted by it ... just brought into the inspector's office and told 'sign this stuff for extra tuition'. After the first two exams they took it off me ... then I busted my backside to prove to the others that I didn't get the top marks just because I was tutored or Aboriginal. (Phillip, PI6, personal communication, March 24, 2015)

As a result, the College has generated practices "valuing all cultures ... not just focusing on one culture" (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015). Parents agree that cultural programs may be counter-productive, because they may segregate rather than encourage inclusivity. Consequently, the College offers these programs to all students: "It's OK to value that cultural heritage, but you should educate the whole school ... not just the Indigenous students" (Payton, PI8, personal communication, February 20, 2015).

5.3.3.3 Inclusive education.

Indigenous parents are concerned by the term, inclusive education. They support the initiative in principle, but are unclear on the processes the College may adopt to implement inclusive education policies. They consider it important that their children "feel a sense of belonging ... a sense of feeling safe ... a sense that this is part of their community for their age group at this point" (Pablo, PI2, personal communication, March 23, 2015).

While Indigenous parents appreciated that their children were learning "to be tolerant and to accept people for who they are, rather than what they look like or where they might have come from" (Pablo, PI2, personal communication, March 23, 2015), they were also concerned that Indigenous identification and specialised support programs may generate discrimination: "I'm not into it being differentiated. I think that it should be that 'we are just all here together'; that's how I feel about it" (Patrick, PFG1, personal communication, October 27, 2014). Paul likewise shares his concern about how inclusive education initiatives may cause division among students:

I'm glad that [son] is proud of his Indigenous culture ... I'm glad that there is a NAIDOC involvement and I'm glad that there is additional funding available to Indigenous kids, but ... I think that I'm always worried that a class of kids,

above and beyond those that need additional help, are singled out because of their culture. Because that is ... sets up an 'us and them' sort of attitude that has happened in the past. (Paul, PFG1, personal communication, October 27, 2014)

Uncle Adam agrees that specialised support programs for some students are necessary. However, he argues that such initiatives generate inclusivity.

All students should be treated fairly ... but there are times when they [Indigenous students] need additional help, for example, we have kids from Kowanyama, Aurukun, Pompuuraw and Wujal. They are traditional Aboriginal students and you can't compare them with the urbanised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids. They need that extra support, but we need for them to also feel included as one big family of students from all cultures. (Adam, PFG1, personal communication, October 27, 2014)

5.3.3.4 Racism.

Racism is another theme emerging from the data analysis. Participants agree that teachers are not openly racist. However, parents believe that some teachers at times exhibited behaviours that racially stereotyped their children: "Soren's Maths teacher ... I think he thought that Aboriginal people couldn't do Maths ... he said they didn't grasp it ... but we do know how to think that way and we have got a logical brain" (Pedro, PFG2, personal communication, November 03, 2014). Racial stereotyping is reflected in one teacher's response to an Indigenous parent: "I asked about my daughter trying, you know, doing her best and ... [the teacher replied] 'Oh, I had Indigenous friends and they worked hard' ... and that's a stereotype ... it's not a racist remark ... and the more you share, the more you break down that stereotype" (Paxton, PFG3, personal communication, November 17, 2014). Some teachers' propensity to racially stereotype Indigenous students is summarised appropriately:

Some white teachers have strange ways of thinking ... like they all think that black people are all the same ... because they've learned things or seen some Aboriginal kids and they think that what they're doing is what all Aboriginal kids do. They have funny ideas. (Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

In endeavouring to establish a rapport with Indigenous students, some non-Indigenous teachers adopt certain language conventions that reflect Indigenous speech conventions. However, some Indigenous parents find this patronising: "I don't like it when white people try to build a connection with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and they try to talk

like a blackfella. It's just so foolish, you know, and embarrassing. It's like your grandmother trying to be cool". (Piron, PFG2, personal communication, November 03, 2014)

In contrast, Indigenous teacher aides are appreciated by parents for role modelling correct speech patterns to students:

She knows she's Indigenous; she doesn't have to act in any certain way ... she doesn't have to use slang and stuff like that or anything ... so she's more professional, which I think is good because it's somebody to look up to. Just because you're black, you don't have to act like that and just because you're white and teach black kids, you don't have to talk like that.

Racist attitudes were identified between different Indigenous cultural groups: "It's not only amongst black and white. Some of the things that happened to me, coming from Thursday Island, and the racial stuff between Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people, you know" (Adam, PFG1, personal communication, October 27, 2014). Furthermore, Indigenous parents identified racist attitudes prevalent within the same Indigenous culture: "We go to feastings and she's [daughter] called a white girl because she behaves differently" (Piron, PFG2, personal communication, November 03, 2014). Such racism within the family group was identified as particularly hurtful: "So they cop that racism from their own mob, you know" (Prentice, PFG2, personal communication, November 03, 2014); "That's right. I reckon it's the worst" (Pedro, PFG2, personal communication, November 03, 2014).

Parents believe an important life skill their children need to learn at school is the ability to respond appropriately to racist attitudes. An Indigenous parent explains how identification as Indigenous is initially generated from the comments of others: "We didn't realise that we were black until someone said we were. Mr Jones said, 'Did you throw that rubbish in my yard, ya [*sic*] black bastards?' That's how you got to know it" (Pedro, PFG2, personal communication, November 03, 2014). Indigenous parents believe that their children will encounter racist attitudes in society. In contrast, the College is "a safe, learning place for them before they hit the real life out there" (Pedro, PFG2, personal communication, November 03, 2014).

5.3.3.5 No one culture.

While parents identified as having Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage, they emphasised that they and their children did not represent a homogenous group. Furthermore, they stated that there is no one cultural heritage to which all Indigenous people belong. Not only are Aboriginal people different from Torres Strait Islanders, but within

Aboriginal society there are different traditions. Similarly, Torres Strait people have different cultural traditions, dependent on the particular island to which their family has connections.

What is particularly insightful to appreciate is that all participants shared similar views concerning the word, Indigenous:

I hate the word ‘Indigenous’. Because you got [*sic*] Indigenous plants and animals ... everyone uses it as an umbrella ... but you can be from India and you can say you’re Indigenous. If you’re going to talk about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, say Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (Adam, PFG1, personal communication, October 27, 2014)

In the same manner, Pedro comments about how Indigenous heritage should not be used as the primary way of identifying people:

I don’t like being asked ‘am I Indigenous?’ ... it’s like the most important thing ... like a black stain ... the answer is ‘no ... I’m of Aboriginal heritage ... and Irish and God knows what else you want to throw in the package’. Where do you draw the line? (Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

While participants are proud of their cultural heritage and are committed to having their children share this pride, they believe such a goal is complex: “I’ve told [son] that it’s important that he recognise his Aboriginal heritage, but not more important than the other parts of him. All cultures should be respected. He should be proud of all parts of his heritage” (Paul, PFG1, personal communication, October 27, 2014).

5.3.4 Multiple histories.

Participants agreed that an appreciation of Indigenous culture and history should be a compulsory component within an Australian national curriculum. However, some versions of European discovery and settlement in prescribed texts are contradictory to the cultural memories of Indigenous people. Hence, there is disagreement among parents concerning both who might be an appropriate teacher to disseminate Indigenous information responsibly, and how cultural learning might be promoted.

5.3.4.1 Learning about culture.

Some parents considered that the teaching of Indigenous culture is the responsibility of Indigenous people: “It should come from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander educator ... from people who have lived it ... you can’t teach that [culture] from non-Indigenous teachers ... it’s really important to have Indigenous staff who are educators”. (Percy, PI7, personal

communication, March 02, 2015). However, because there are few Indigenous teachers, some parents advocate for local Indigenous traditional owners as guest speakers to address this issue appropriately in the classroom: “Probably best to get someone from the local area ... get someone that was a respected person and had the knowledge” (Phillip, PI6, personal communication, March 24, 2015).

However, this suggestion is contentious, as other parents emphasise that the College Indigenous community is representative of many localities and cultures. This dichotomy generates further confusion over the teaching of Indigenous culture: “Indigenous culture isn’t Indigenous culture ... there are different mobs from different country here ... there are some commonalities, but they are all so different ... there needs to be some agreement on what is going to be delivered”. (Prentice, PI9, personal communication, March 14, 2015). How to agree to such a resolution is a difficult challenge, as past proposals to introduce non-local culture or teach a non-local dialect were unsuccessful, primarily because of competing perspectives. Indeed, any such initiative may well offend local Aboriginal elders who have previously asserted that “This is Yindingi¹¹ land” (Adam, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014).

Other Indigenous parents argue that the teaching of cultural traditions that are particular to different localities is the responsibility of the family and not the school. These parents advocate a more general approach to the teaching of Indigenous culture:

It should be just put in the curriculum as mainstream and taught as history and that’s it. It’s up to their own [family] to teach their mob’s culture. Because it’s the same as ... if you’re teaching about the French, the French Revolution, you don’t have to be French to do that. (Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

5.3.4.2 Conflicting accounts.

Too often, the history of Australia commences with white settlement. Indigenous history is oral, passed from generation to generation. Historical accounts of Australia’s past differ according to the source and perspective. An Aboriginal elder explains: “This place is a lot older than what has been written down in your history ... in the history books, it says Captain Cook discovered Australia, when, in fact, Aboriginal people discovered him,

¹¹ The Aboriginal tribe known as the Yindingi people are the traditional owners of the land.

wandering around lost on their land” (Adam, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014).

Indigenous elders in the classroom are a valuable source of information and learning for both students and teachers. Their knowledge of local history is not generally acknowledged in texts. Uncle Adam explains:

When I go to classes, I like to tell about the history before Captain Cook, like about the Portuguese and the Spaniards and how come in the Torres Straits you got people with names like Pancho and Pedro ... and how come you got [*sic*] Muslims up there, you know, where did they come from? ... and there were Chinese, Malays [*sic*] and others. (Adam, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

Indigenous elders appreciate the common ignorance of pre-European Australia:

You can't actually blame the teachers in a way, because they haven't been taught ... they've been brought up in a different situation to us ... where they've been taught from the time of Captain Cook forward to us ... but we go back further than that. (Adam, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

Some teachers are challenged by Indigenous elders' sharing of knowledge in the classroom:

With the opportunities that I and other elders have had to speak, you know, in some of the classes, I've always said 'Well this is what you've been taught' and to the teachers there I say, 'I'm not trying to criticise, but I was taught differently by people that were there over time' and ... things like 'Torres ... like he didn't just sail past ... he stayed' ... I tell it the way I know ... and there has been a bit of [negative] body language there sometimes from some teachers [caused] by me saying things like that, you know, how it's not exactly how it's been written in the history books ... but it's the truth. (Adam, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

Nevertheless, many teachers recognise the educational benefit of having an elder on staff who can “play the bridge part between them [teachers] and the community” (Adam, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014). Indigenous teacher aides agree that having local Indigenous elders as guest speakers has challenged and enlightened teachers:

They [teachers] were hesitant before, but I've noticed a shift ... I find them more and more wanting to know more from Uncle Adam ... they're interested because the

history that gets taught in school isn't the history that Aboriginal people have.
(Anthony, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

5.3.5 Human resources.

Indigenous parents are appreciative of the assistance given to their children at the College. A constant theme emerging from the interview analysis is how much parents appreciate the work of teachers and Indigenous support staff.

5.3.5.1 Appreciation of Indigenous support staff.

The presence of Indigenous support staff in the classroom builds confidence in students and increases their sense of belonging to the College community. This sense of community is important to Indigenous parents and many communicate their concerns directly through trusted support staff. Payton explains the relationship between Indigenous support staff and students:

They're closer ... kids are shame [*sic*] ... they're shy and I think if you have staff that are Indigenous, those students have someone to talk to ... they bring out another side [of them] and it wouldn't happen if they were not here. (Payton, PI5, personal communication, February 22, 2015)

The College is fortunate to have an Aboriginal elder, Uncle Adam, who liaises with the Indigenous community. This is especially important to Indigenous parents: "I've known Uncle a while because he's family, so he probably knows what [my son] is capable of doing and the family that can help him get through that" (Page, PFG4, personal communication, November 18, 2014).

Some Indigenous parents express their appreciation of Indigenous support staff by referring to the discomfort they would experience if they were not at the College. The alternative would be to approach teachers who are perceived as authority figures.

It's almost like an ingrown thing, I think ... if you had a lot of years trouble with the police and family, anything that's like authority can be quite fearful ... all of a sudden you got [*sic*] to speak to them ... it's ingrained in the back of my head, you know, well they were the ones who came around and took my kids away, they were the ones who took Auntie ... it's almost like you think people won't understand. (Piers, PFG6, personal communication, November 25, 2014)

Given the respectful environment of the College and the relaxed rapport that exists between parents and teachers, Indigenous parents themselves do not understand their own

reluctance to be completely open to teachers. In contrast, they prefer to approach Indigenous support staff at meetings:

I feel more comfortable now, but initially I would be just nervous ... I think just knowing that they're [Indigenous support staff] here ... it's crazy ... I don't know ... just knowing that Uncle is here and I can just text him and go [sic] 'please come with me to the meeting' ... it makes me feel better. (Piers, PFG6, personal communication, November 25, 2014).

5.3.5.2 Appreciation of teachers.

The primary reason that Indigenous parents offer for sending their children to the College is to receive an academic education. The secondary reason is to receive important life skills that are taught by caring teachers.

Indigenous parents acknowledge that learning to form relationships is important for their children and that this occurs more naturally with people from a similar cultural background. However, parents prioritise an academic education and are not over-concerned about the cultural background of teachers:

If you were to put all Indigenous teachers in a school and you had all Indigenous kids, then they will relate to them well ... there's that underlying thing how they can relate in a different way with each other ... but are they going to be able to teach the same as what my children need to be taught? The social side of things is important ... it helps with their learning ... but they're not here to make relationships, but here for their education. (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015)

Nevertheless, parents acknowledged that their children learned more from their teachers than academic knowledge. Important life skills, such as resilience, are highly valued by Indigenous parents.

An example of [resilience] is where he's not done as good on an assignment or he's not spoken well ... the feedback he gets doesn't destroy him ... it's constructive ... but for him, it's very hard to hear ... 'my teacher said this to me and I felt like crap' ... does that help him be more resilient? Yes, when he asks 'where to from here, what can I do better?' So, I think that's good ... I think that is a life skill. (Pablo, PI2, , personal communication, March 23, 2015)

Teachers are viewed by Indigenous parents as caring professionals who take seriously their responsibility for students' learning. Comparisons are made to teachers at neighbouring

schools where: “If the kid [*sic*] don’t want to learn, then they just leave them sit there. They don’t care (Payton, PI5, personal communication, February 22, 2015). Likewise, school rules are viewed by Indigenous parents as instilling values:

You don’t tolerate as much as they [neighbouring schools] do, that’s the way I look at it ... because my other two daughters went there and they can do whatever they want. They want to go and have a smoke, and the teachers would say ‘Make sure you go across the road to the park, if you’re going to smoke. (Payton, PI5, personal communication, February 22, 2015)

Most Indigenous parents experience a positive relationship with their children’s teachers. However, a minority admit to being intimidated by educational authorities and institutions: Paulo understands this: “You [*sic*] got to win them over. A lot of them are shy. They think you are going to say something bad” (Paulo, PFGI4, personal communication, November 18, 2015.) Paulo explains how not all Indigenous parents have the same familiarity with systems of schooling and authority:

We don’t have a problem with coming here to talk ... there’s no problem, you know ... because we been [*sic*] in the system too. But, you know, a lot of them, they’re not in that system level, you know like working ... we [*sic*] got to work this week to get our pay ... and they maybe find it hard to communicate that way. (Paulo, PFGI4, personal communication, November 18, 2015)

College community liaison officers often accompany Indigenous parents attending parent/teacher interviews to assist them to communicate with teachers.

5.3.6 Values in action.

Another new understanding emerging from the analysis is about Indigenous parents’ recognition of the College’s value system. More importantly, parents understand that this value system is demonstrated in teaching and learning practices.

5.3.6.1 *The Christian ethos.*

An understanding of the concept, values in action, incorporates those values inherent in the College’s Christian ethos. While the College practises the Catholic faith and worship, parents believe that practice of values takes precedence over dogma and worship.

It’s not the Catholic theology. That’s not important to me ... the Christian principles that we all share, is [*sic*] really important to me ... and to see that demonstrated in behaviour is really important ... I know that they have that

inner environment here that supports that. (Percy, PI7, personal communication, March 02, 2015)

Likewise, Prentice conveys the message that religious observance is not as important as values practised:

Regardless of what religion or whatever they are ... I think, 'Treat people how you want to be treated' ... that's the main thing for me ... so it makes this place a little bit more [a] nurturing, caring environment". (Prentice, PI9, personal communication, March 14, 2015)

Symbols of Catholicism are observed and appreciated by Indigenous parents who perceive these as evidence of a values system in operation at the College.

Just from the monuments around the school and the Cross and on the uniforms, all the emblems and images and everything shows that this is a school that believes in God and that it's bigger than us humans. This is important to us ... going back in history, we were colonised and taught at the Missions so that we've all been affected by a religion of some sort ... from the grandparents it passes down ... so all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have an understanding ... it's been drummed into them to have a respect for God ... so it's important for us to have that grounding here with God first, then with the education. (Pim: PI4 20.02.15)

Parents value the recognition and encouragement of spiritual values at formal occasions and in the classroom: "I like the Christian outlook of [the College] ... it has a holistic approach to learning ... kids are allowed to grow academically, emotionally and spiritually ... that's important". (Percy: PI7 02.03.15)

Many parents referred to the need for the explicit teaching of values, which, they believe, offered protection for their children:

It's important for Christian values to be built into the school ... I'm sure that there's probably things that happen here, but it's never on the scale of police being advised or needing to respond to it. So, I mean, just at [neighbouring school], the school-based police officer got [*sic*] assaulted late last year. That won't happen here. It's safe. (Phillip, PI1, personal communication, March 02, 2015)

Furthermore, some parents claimed that the College was not only a physically safe environment, but that it also offered a form of spiritual protection: "It's a different

environment here and I believe that you're spiritually protected from some things ... I think that's why it is safe ... under the protection of the Lord's presence" (Percy, PI7, personal communication, March 02, 2015).

5.4 Research Question 3

The third specific research question is: How do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students experience the implementation of inclusivity and equity policies at St Mary's?

Table 5.6 is a synthesis of responses for the third research question. It demonstrates how the presentation of understandings regarding this specific research questions were generated.

Table 5.6
Synthesis of Responses for the Third Research Question

Research Question:	How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students experience the implementation of inclusivity and equity policies at St Mary's?		
	Codes	Themes	Concepts
	everyone is equal; we're all the same; fairness; respecting all; respect for differences; breaking barriers; one school family; many cultures; welcoming;	Espoused values	A value system
	Catholic traditions; Masses; liturgies; prayers in class; Hail Marys; both inclusive and exclusive; expectations; setting apart; family values; spirituality; similarities in different beliefs; RE classes: inclusive, social justice, recognise individual beliefs, respectful, welcoming, learning about different religions, honouring cultural beliefs, learning other religions; Catholic "road to follow"; guide; family tradition; not religion but values that religion teaches; good people; Christian messages: tolerance, forgiveness, try again, kindness, understanding, making friends;	The Catholic ethos	
	learning is for everyone; all equal in class; comfortable; acceptance of difference; focus is on learning in the classroom; no time to notice difference;	Classroom attitudes	Interpretation of policies
	help when needed; know where to find help; roles of teacher aides; Kuyam room; understanding; different ways of teaching; closer relationships with teacher aides; "homework help" program; maths	Available assistance	

Research Question: How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students experience the implementation of inclusivity and equity policies at St Mary's?			
	Codes	Themes	Concepts
	tutorials after school;		
	Indigenous aides: help in class, reliance, understanding, positive, role models, building connections, encouragement, persistence, engagement in learning, easy to communicate, inclusive;	Relationships with aides	
	teachers: student/teacher rapport, positivity, teachers as learners, abdication of responsibility, need to be more involved, taking the easy way;	Relationships with teachers	
	parent understanding; different priorities at home; parent/teacher connection; positive role models; absence of role modelling; parental influence; ownership of programs;	Importance of parent support	
	skin colour differences; facial features; comfort in numbers; "growing" pride; cultural, not biological experience; cultural feelings; guilt feelings re knowledge; depends on family; need to "fit in"; acting White; doubted by others; lighter skin is questioned; embarrassment; "shame"; future of mixed races; negative attitudes of family/friends; isolation from old "primary" friends; feeling excluded; confused; question identity; inner conflict; acting Black;	Identification	A personal journey
	many trying to bridge the gap; acceptance of racist attitudes; exceptions for "mates"; just the way it is; controlled anger; criticism from friends; avoidance of those with different values; hope for future understanding; communication; always some who don't listen; focus on learning; misunderstanding; teachers not aware; insensitivity; tolerance; stereotypes;	Acceptance	
	shame; stigma of needing help; habits of history; segregation; exclusion; needy; a derogatory thing; inferiority; negative view of support; resentment; criticism; exclusive club; extras; special programs; scholarships; lack of motivation; resentment at "convenient use" of culture; anger;	Discomfort	

5.4.1 A value system.

In order to interrogate this concept, it is appropriate to explore three themes:

1. Espoused values
2. The Catholic ethos
3. Classroom attitudes

5.4.1.1 Espoused values.

The College espouses values of inclusivity and equity and has generated policies to implement these.

Indigenous students experience the implementation of inclusivity policies positively: “We fit in great. I haven’t had any struggles with, you know, trying to fit in at this school” (Soren, SI2, personal communication, February 06, 2015). While students expressed an initial concern about teachers’ high academic expectations, they agreed that the College was “more of a nurturing environment for everyone ... all are included” (Sancho, SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015). They agreed that some Indigenous students might feel inferior in the classroom. However, there is also an acknowledgement that “this is not something that has been forced upon them by the teachers, it’s more of a subconscious thing, just who they are” (Sancho, SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015). Furthermore, inclusivity policies have empowered Indigenous students to be comfortable in confronting non-inclusive practices:

Because in this age, it’s not acceptable. I mean, you shouldn’t really be working in a multicultural environment if you can’t adapt to it. I’d confront them directly. Just, like, say ‘This isn’t a racist school; we don’t believe in that’ (Sancho, SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015).

Indigenous students have experienced the implementation of equity policies at the College in both positive and negative ways. While they appreciate programs and activities aimed at recognising their cultures and valuing the societal contributions that are made, students are also conscious of how these programs may cause segregation.

The things we do, it’s ... like, they’re good, but ... I don’t know that they’re good for just Aboriginal kids. We should try and get more kids, doesn’t matter what [culture] they are to come along and see ... have more white kids there ... what we do, it’s good for us, but it shouldn’t just be for special groups ... don’t separate us, make us different. (Sonny, SFG3, personal communication, November 11, 2014)

It is important therefore that Indigenous students are not differentiated from the student body. The ethos of the Catholic school supports this idea of an all-embracing culture.

5.4.1.2 Catholic ethos.

Inclusivity and equity contribute to the ethos of all Catholic schools. This ethos ensures that rules are honoured and people are treated with respect. Not surprisingly, some Indigenous students believe this ethos represents a form of protection for minority groups. Sancho explains how the Catholic ethos can protect Indigenous students:

Different cultures have different religions and beliefs ... I know that a lot of the students here are Catholic and part of that whole Catholic culture is about accepting others. They know that too. I know that in their mind, they might be thinking bad things about me or judging me, but at least I know that they won't show it, out of respect, because that's the Catholic ethos we have here. (Sancho, SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015)

Similarly, Indigenous parents who had attended Catholic schools agree that this ethos was experienced in their own education. Phoenix compares his experience of different types of schooling:

I went from a Catholic school to [local State school] and it just blew me away ... just how much racism and inequality there was ... because I'd come from the Christian Brothers ... every Brother had the strap, but everyone was treated the same ... there was [*sic*] other dark blokes there, but they weren't given crap because we were a Catholic school ... provided you had your tie done up and the blazer on in winter, they didn't care who you were or what colour you were. (Phoenix, PFG3, personal communication, November 17, 2014)

Thus, there is an expectation among students and parents that those who are involved in teaching and learning at a Catholic school will uphold Catholic values.

5.4.1.3 Classroom attitudes.

A final theme that relates to an understanding of the value system concept is how values of inclusivity and equity are demonstrated in the attitudes of classroom teachers.

Indigenous students agree that teachers at the College have no defined expectations of students based on their cultural background: "In the classroom they [teachers] expect me to do just as well as the non-Indigenous kids" (Saxon, SI8, personal communication, February 17, 2015); and "It's not like we're excluded ... it's all even ... everyone has the same expectations of us" (Sidney, SI5, personal communication, March 24, 2015). However, Indigenous students are challenged sometimes when they negotiate the limitations imposed by their own personal attitudes to academic achievement and acknowledge difficulty in overcoming these:

It's just that idea that's been built up for so long where they think, 'Oh, it's not really a place for me; I'll just stay here in my comfort zone' ... Some are very smart, but they fall into the trap, because they're maybe too afraid to try and reach that other level and be with those other students who are best at Science and Maths ... because they might be criticised because ... there's stereotypes, they're not supposed to be smart enough. (Sancho, SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015)

Indigenous students acknowledge the encouragement given to them by teachers and appreciate their efforts to be equitable in the classroom: "I think that's kind of raised the bar of academic learning [for Indigenous students] quite a bit. So, even if they're academically challenged, they [teachers] won't patronise them or treat them any differently" (Sancho, SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015)

In turn, teachers are aware of differences and implement equitable practices in their approach to Indigenous students:

It's all about good relationships, like with every student ... what works for one student is different to another student. The teachers have to have the time, make the time to see what's appropriate for the individual students; and I think also to listen to Aboriginal liaison officers and aides that can help inform the staff about the student. (Trevor, T11, personal communication, February 06, 2015)

5.4.2 Interpretation of values.

How students experience the implementation of inclusivity and equity policies is dependent on how values that underpin these policies are interpreted by staff, parents and students. There are four themes that assist in explaining this new understanding:

1. Available assistance
2. Relationships with aides
3. Relationships with teachers
4. Importance of parent support

5.4.2.1 Available assistance.

Programs and resources are available at the College to assist Indigenous students in their learning. However, teachers believe that attempts to involve students in these forms of positive discrimination are resisted.

Some kids are reluctant to use the resources and programs. They don't want to stick out. They don't want to take advantage of it. They don't want to be seen as using the system, like, slacker, shame, that's still big here. How do we encourage the students to use the system and not make them feel bad? (Theodore, TI2, personal communication, January 30, 2015)

Teachers support the College's policies of inclusivity and equity, but believe the implementation of these is challenging.

It's a responsibility under the Indigenous policy to make learning appropriate for every [Indigenous] student in the class. I think the high expectation has been set and that's great ... although we are trying our best, we are not meeting it". (Trevor, TI1, personal communication, February 06, 2015)

One way of addressing this challenge in teaching and learning is through the establishment of relationships with Indigenous teacher aides and support staff.

5.4.2.2 Relationships with aides.

The availability of Indigenous teacher aides in the classroom ensures a more equitable learning environment for Indigenous students. It is a strategy of recognising that certain people have a sensitive understanding of cultural backgrounds and, therefore, the individual students' family and personal values. Sam explains:

If I had any questions that I thought were silly, I was comfortable to go and ask them [Indigenous aides]. If I needed to talk about anything, they were there ... I just felt that they understood me better sometimes than a different teacher would. (Sam, SI13, personal communication, February 02, 2015)

Indigenous aides not only assist with classroom learning, but also act as counsellors and career advisers for students outside of class:

I haven't had [Uncle Alan or Uncle Anthony] come into a class and help me, but I feel like they've given me a lot of support that's motivated me to do well; and they've helped me with university looking and stuff like that; and they've helped me figure out how to get where I want to get and I've just been put on the right track. (Sam, SI13, personal communication, February 02, 2015)

An equally important influence on the implementation of policies of inclusivity and equity is the relationship between Indigenous students and their teachers.

5.4.2.3 Relationships with teachers.

Teachers implement policies of inclusivity and equity by endeavouring to build relationships with individual students in the classroom. However, students from Aboriginal communities appear to be reluctant to engage in a relationship with the teacher. There are many reasons for this non-communicative attitude of some Indigenous students. An Aboriginal elder associated with the College offers the following explanation:

I think it probably goes back to the scoldings that the mothers and fathers and the grandparents, they all got in the days of the old missionaries, you know. It's been handed down and ... no one was allowed to speak their own languages and ... if they did, they got them to stand up in class and say ...that sort of thing ... so the shame is always there and it comes out, not so much with the urban ones, but it comes out with the traditional ones ... they used to get into trouble for speaking up before ... the old, paternalistic method of teaching ... and never able to correct the white person if that person was wrong ... so to get out of trouble, they just shut up ... and that goes back to people like my mother and and her mother ... they never questioned anything ... because if they did, they'd get into strife or they'd be ridiculed or shamed. So it comes down ... people discuss these things and kids listen ... and it just passes on ... there's still a lot of shame. (Adam, AI1, personal communication, February 04,2015)

Indigenous teacher aides recognise that teachers strive for inclusivity in the classroom. However, some Indigenous students do not appreciate teachers' attempts as an initiative to build a rapport. They interpret the teacher's initiative as a personal challenge. Uncle Alan explains:

It's a survival thing ... they're not seeing that the teacher is making an effort to respond to them and enter a relationship with them. They're too busy thinking, 'What are they going to ask me? Do they know that I'm not understanding? Will they think that I'm silly? What are they seeing in me? Do they think that I'm different to other students?' and because they're mentally thinking those things, they're not hearing anything else. So teachers are making a good effort to make that relationship, but the students, they're in survival mode, so that they're not seeing or hearing anything else ... especially the Cape boys, they come down and their priority isn't education. It is survival. So for them it's 'How do I fit in? Am I wearing the right shoes? Do I have to wear shoes?' I know that a lot of students can't tell the time. They just listen to the bell. Those

sorts of survival things. So it's like 'OK, that's the third bell for the day, so that must mean first break'. Those sorts of things. (Alan, AI2, personal communication, January 28, 2015)

Many teachers at the College are aware of the different world views that separate them from their students. They are challenged by this knowledge in their attempts to be inclusive: "It's our world view, our paradigm ... and it's so hard to change because we don't know that we are in it ... we're oblivious to the filter that says this is how we teach" (Theodore, TI2, personal communication, January 30, 2015) However, Uncle Adam emphasises that change is needed from teachers and students:

Being inclusive means understanding on both sides ... so you [Indigenous students] have to teach them [teachers] too ... all people need to be accepting and willing to think about things in a different way if we are going to be one big tribe at this school. (Adam, AI1, personal communication, February 04, 2015)

Many Indigenous students at the College acknowledge and accept this responsibility: "It's hindering themselves [Indigenous students] just being in that nest ... you got to get out of there ... push the boundaries a bit. Because that's the only way things are going to change" (Sancho, SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015).

An important influence on changing attitudes towards teaching and learning for Indigenous students is the support of their parents and guardians.

5.4.2.4 Importance of parent support.

Indigenous parents understand the opportunities that are available to their children in a school where inclusivity and equity policies guide the learning and teaching programs. Parents are supportive of these programs and encourage their children's involvement. This encouragement, in turn, has a positive influence on Indigenous students. Saxon expresses this: "Because they didn't have an education like we do, we try harder to learn because we have that opportunity" (Saxon, SI8, personal communication, February 17, 2015).

Indigenous support staff agree that parent support and involvement with equity programs is the greatest influence on learning success for Indigenous students.

More than anything, it's really the family applying pressure to the student and pushing them ... it may not be the [biological] parent ... it has to be someone that's valued by them; because otherwise it's too easy for them to think 'Mum

or Dad – they did not pass year nine, they didn't do this ... I'm not going to do it either'. (Anthony, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

However, many Indigenous parents do not have the life skills to access support programs for their children. In some cases, parents experience a sense of 'shame' and are unable to approach teachers or school staff. Anthony explains this:

It all starts to go wrong because, a lot of the time, the parents don't have the capacity to support the child at home or get help because they never went to school. They find it really, really daunting and they don't want to talk about it ... the fact that they can't help. (Anthony, AFG1, personal communication, February 17, 2014)

However, inclusivity and equity programs acknowledge the need for community liaison officers within the College to work with parents to assist their children. Uncle Adam describes his role in assisting Indigenous students not only with academic learning, but, more importantly, with life skills.

We can show them the road forward ... and the road here is good and steady ... and there's good people along it ... I play the bridge part between yourself [non-Indigenous staff] and the community ... and for those students who come straight from community ... so, while they're here, they're learning about life. It's not white life or black life, it's just how to cope in this country. (Adam, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

Indeed, Indigenous support staff contend that the learned practices based on inclusivity and equity are arguably the most important experiences of some Indigenous students' learning:

We have an explicit curriculum that we have to teach, but for the boys from the Cape, there is so much more that they are learning. Just by being here, they're learning. Like, even how to organise their day. How to use a diary, how to socialise and be in a large group and not lash out and smack someone ... in Aurukun, you look the wrong way in the school yard, it's a fight on. There isn't that here. So they're learning that all these people can get along. They're learning social etiquette. (Anthony, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

5.4.3 A personal journey.

The final new understanding identified in this research question concerns the personal journey of Indigenous students. How students maintain their cultural identity in an inclusive setting is explored in the following themes:

- Identity
- Acceptance
- Discomfort

5.4.3.1 *Identity.*

A policy of inclusivity acknowledges that all cultures are unique and valued. However, a common misconception at the College is that Indigenous people represent one culture. Moreover, some teachers have assumed that students' outward appearances denote their cultural background. This assumption has been corrected by Indigenous elder, Uncle Adam:

When I first started here, there was a couple of teachers who thought that because for these black students this was expected, for these other black students it would be the same. Like, some teachers had taught in PNG [Papua New Guinea] and some of the islands and they told me ... like they thought that because those students were interested in gardening, then these others here would be too. But a lot of them [Aboriginal people] just moved around with the seasons. They couldn't care less about gardening. So I had to say 'all of these black students are not the same'. (Adam, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

Indigenous staff and students emphasise that their unique culture and identity need to be honoured before inclusive practices may be implemented. The challenge for school authorities is to repudiate a concept of inclusivity that implies an adaptation to the culture of the school. This interpretation is sometimes expressed by teachers as: "Well, they have to fit in. If they don't fit in, that's their problem" (Anthony, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014). This attitude from teachers alienates Indigenous students and frustrates the work of Indigenous aides. Anthony responds to this issue:

They still carry their culture with them ... everything is brought with them. They have to fit into a white school ... they do, but to say they've got to fit in and they have to leave behind everything from their own culture ... it's really hard trying to change that attitude ... it's not a white rule, it's a school. (Anthony, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

Students who identify as having Indigenous heritage, but are not physically recognised as such, admitted to struggling with their identity: “When you’re not black and you’re not white, it kind of does affect you, because you don’t know where you stand” (Soren, SFG5, personal communication, November 27, 2014). Moreover, this struggle with identity transcends generations:

My Mum was kind of bullied in high school ... because she was creamy ... she had a white Dad and an Aboriginal Mum, so the really dark kids didn’t want to have anything to do with her because she was seen as white and then the white kids were like ‘you’re dark, you don’t belong here’. (Sebastian, SFG2, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

Indigenous aides concur with this experience: “A lot of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids here with very fair skin don’t identify. They want to identify, but they’re embarrassed to identify. Even in themselves they feel ‘I don’t feel Aboriginal because I’m not black’ (Anthony, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014). This embarrassment and confusion is exacerbated when some teachers question Indigenous students’ heritage in class. This conversation is described by an Indigenous teacher aide:

There’s teachers when I go into classrooms who say ‘What are you here for?’ And I say ‘I’m supporting [Indigenous student]’ and they say to the kid ‘Are you Aboriginal? You’re not Aboriginal’, and to me, ‘I hope he’s not getting any money’. (Anthony, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

Fortunately, Indigenous students agree that the majority of teachers at the College are appreciative of any assistance that is available in the classroom to enhance students’ learning. Furthermore, there is an acceptance that further cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous staff may ensure a better understanding of appropriate responses to Indigenous staff and students. Indigenous aides concur that further cultural awareness training for College staff is a prerequisite “to raise people’s understanding ... because they really don’t know that they’re being hurtful ... it’s just plain ignorance ... I don’t believe that anyone is vindictive or racist here ... ignorance is the biggest thing” (Anthony, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

5.4.3.2 Acceptance.

There is an acceptance among Indigenous students of the need to be alert to forms of discrimination. However, Indigenous students agree that focusing on institutional and personal characteristics that unite rather than divide the College community may contribute

better to reconciliation and acceptance. This belief is encouraged by Aboriginal elders who, in response in group interviews to Indigenous students' examples of discrimination reply, "Yeh, you're going to cop that" (Adam, SFG4, personal communication, November 20, 2014). Uncle Adam relates stories from his time at school and work as a young person:

I used to accept the fact that I'd go to work or go to school and be called 'a little black bastard' ... none of those things happen now ... things are much better now ... things have changed. There are things we don't need to accept anymore ... but our kids need to think about how they're accepted, not about the few that treat them differently. (Adam, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

While implementation of policies of inclusivity and equity are attempts to address differences in the College, a more successful strategy may be through the attitude of the students themselves. Indigenous students display resilience in disregarding discriminatory remarks: "I've heard a lot of kids say that sort of thing. I don't really respond to them ... I don't say anything, because I'm the one with the better education in the end" (Saxon, SI8, personal communication, February 17, 2015). Sam agrees: "It just motivates me to show them that I'm doing really well here and I wouldn't want to be at any other school" (Sam, SI3, personal communication, February 02, 2015). Sancho displays an acceptance and resilience when he explains his reaction to racist remarks from mates:

A lot of the time, it's not so much, like racism that's supposed to hurt some person. It's just like a casual joke that's become some staple stereotype ... we're all friends here ... like family. (Sancho, SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015)

Sancho believes that discrimination is to be expected. Further, he states that all minority groups at the College experience some form of discrimination: "It's not just us ... other cultures get it ... 'you must be smart because you're Asian' ... I'd take that as a compliment". (Sancho, SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015). He describes his particular friendship group at St Mary's as multicultural and one in which he feels comfortable. Conversely, when he is required to be with students from only one cultural background, namely, Indigenous students, he is less comfortable. For Sancho, being with a friendship group of diverse cultures is more comfortable than being with those who share only his cultural background.

I'm a little bit Aboriginal, but it's more the Torres Strait ... it's kind of, like a chameleon ... it's not like you have to go this way or that way, you can just

change with your environment ... with my good friends, it's so diverse ... you got Indian, Asian, Irish and we all sit in one group and it kind of doesn't really matter ... but it's intimidating when I'm there with just other Indigenous people ... I kind of act a bit ... I don't know how to act. (Sancho, SFG5, personal communication, November 27, 2014)

Acceptance among Indigenous students is explained by Shane. He recognises that it is unfair when one culture is shown more respect than another. However, he also accepts that this occurrence is common in the world in which he lives:

There's no need for it ... I would hate myself if I said 'Oh, look at this white something', you know like they say black something ... I'm respectful to white people, I want to know that they're respectful to my culture back, sort of thing. Yeh, that's how I reckon it should go, but it's not the world we live in. (Shane, SFG2, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

Despite acceptance and resilience being displayed by Indigenous students, some level of discomfort exists in belonging to a minority group at the College.

5.4.3.3 Discomfort.

Some discomfort experienced by Indigenous students may be related to the implementation of College inclusivity and equity policies.

A program recognising equity allows for Indigenous teacher aides to work in classrooms with students experiencing difficulties with learning. Sancho explains how this may be a negative experience for some students:

But, some people don't want that ... programs that help people ... like kids who need the help ... they need it, but it's seen as 'shame' ... so what started as a good thing to help people, it's become like a derogatory thing ... like, not 'that's good you're having help' ... but yeh, 'well, you would get a better mark because you had a tutor, you're so special' ... it makes them feel bad to have to get the help. (Sancho, SFG5, personal communication, November 27, 2014)

In contrast, there are students—Indigenous and non-Indigenous—who welcome the assistance of the Indigenous aide in class as Anthony explains:

At first they [students] were like the teachers [thinking] 'what are you doing here', but then, once you're in there, whether they're Aboriginal or not they think, 'Oh well, he can help me' ... and they go don't go [*sic*] 'Oh, why is he getting help – he's Aboriginal', they just think, 'Oh good, he can help me too'

... but there's not a bitterness. It's not like 'Well, that's not fair' ... it's just like 'Oh, he gets help, so he can help me too'. I found that when I started that the kids, they sort of like, just looked, then after a while, they called, 'Can you help me'. (Anthony, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

Another way that programs designed to generate inclusivity and equity may cause discomfort occurs when students identify as Indigenous for the sole purpose of gaining an advantage or only when it is convenient for them to do so. This creates division amongst Indigenous students, many of whom concur with Seth's comments:

There's [sic] people here who identify as Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander just because ... only when they can get something out of it and I don't like it ... the ones who don't see themselves as, you know, who don't say it, don't show their pride or whatever, and then they go [sic] 'I'm Indigenous and I should get this' ... really? ... you're just wasting money that could be used for people who actually need it ... it's just pathetic and wrong. (Seth, SFG2, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

Many Indigenous students shared these sentiments of anger and disappointment with these fellow Indigenous students and concurred with Shane's comment: "Yeh, that mob make [sic] me sick too" (Shane, SFG2, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

Indigenous students were aware of criticism concerning fee relief and educational support received from non-Indigenous students. However, they were protective of their right to government education grants. In particular, all interviewed students were knowledgeable and defended their qualification for the QIndigenous¹² scholarship. Shane responds to criticism from non-Indigenous students:

It's not their right to criticise ... only Indigenous people know what actually happened back then ... I know it happened to my Dad ... the government took him off his family and he was put in a white family ... my grandfather's parents got murdered ... then they all got put on Missions ... they [critics] should learn more about history, what happened in the past, before they actually say things ... I find it quite disrespectful when people say that we shouldn't receive that

¹² Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Fund is an independent public trust. Initial capital was created through the toil of previous generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders who were not paid (QIndigenousF. (n.d.). Retrieved from <http://www.qIndigenousf.org.au>

money ... it's stolen money ... our grandparents' wages. (Shane, SFG2, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

5.5 Conclusion

This chapter identifies new understandings concerning Indigenous students' experience of teaching and learning at St Mary's. These are summarised conceptually in Figure 5.1.

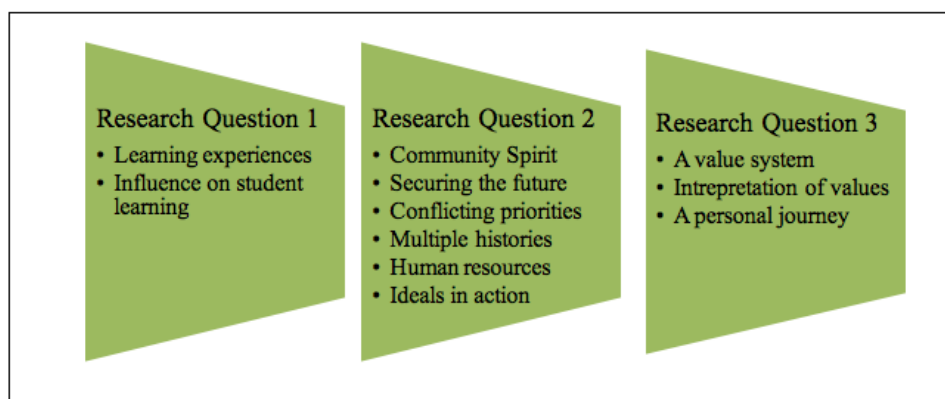


Figure 5.1. New understandings from the research questions.

These new understandings are analysed, synthesised and discussed in Chapter 6: Discussion of the New Understandings.

Chapter 6: Discussion of the New Understandings

6.1 Introduction

In this chapter I discuss and expand on the new understandings outlined in Chapter 5: New Understandings. The research has multiple new understandings. However, there are three issues that are particularly novel and invite further discussion. These are:

1. The influence of cultural background of students on learning and academic achievement;
2. The prioritisation by parents of a safe environment for learning, growth and identity formation; and
3. The responsibility for a shared vision of education.

These issues emanated through a synthesis of the new understandings engendered in Chapter five.

Table 6.1 illustrates the connection among the specific research questions, new understandings generated in Chapter 5 and the issues that structure the discussion.

Table 6.1

Generation of Issues for Discussion

How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and their parents experience education at St Mary's?		
Specific research questions	New understandings from Chapter 5	Issues for discussion
1. How do Indigenous students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Student prioritisation of learning and academic achievement • Cultural identification and equity in the classroom • Cultural diversity within St Mary's Indigenous community • Strategies for learning and teaching • Valuing teachers and support staff • Assumptions based on skin colour, generalisations and 	1. The influence of cultural background on learning and teaching

How do Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and their parents experience education at St Mary's?

Specific research questions	New understandings from Chapter 5	Issues for discussion
2. How do Indigenous parents experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?	<p>misinterpretation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Importance of cultural knowledge <li>• A safe environment <li>• Socialisation and learning life skills <li>• Influence of family pride, resentment and politics <li>• 'Crabs in a bucket' syndrome – finding a way of liberating and celebrating culture <li>• Differentiation or segregation <li>• Inevitability of racism and ignorance <li>• Diversity of Indigenous cultures <li>• Influence of cultural identity <li>• Learning resilience 	2. The prioritisation of “a safe environment” for learning and growth
3. How do Indigenous students experience the implementation of inclusivity and equity policies at St Mary's?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Accepted responsibility for education of all students <li>• Focusing on uniting rather than divisive aspects <li>• Accepted Catholic school ethos <li>• Commitment and accountability 	3. A shared vision and responsibility for educating all students

Note. Data in this table emanated from an analysis of the new understandings generated in Chapter 5.

Table 6.2 offers a diagrammatic structure of discussion of new understandings.

Table 6.2

Structure for Discussion of New Understandings

6.2 The influence of cultural background on learning and teaching

- 6.2.1 Cultural identification of students
- 6.2.2 Cultural heritage of teachers
- 6.2.3 Learning and teaching strategies
- 6.2.4 Expectations of teachers
- 6.2.5 Conclusion

6.3 Prioritisation of a safe environment

- 6.3.1 A safe place
- 6.3.2 Safe learning
- 6.3.3 Identity
- 6.3.4 Conclusion

6.4 Inclusivity

- 6.4.1 Commitment and responsibility of teachers
 - 6.4.2 The Catholic school
 - 6.4.3 Conclusion
-

6.2 The Influence of Cultural Background on Learning and Teaching

The first issue that invites discussion is the influence of cultural background for Indigenous students and their teachers at St Mary's. This discussion includes the cultural identification of students, the cultural heritage of their teachers, an understanding of teaching and learning strategies and teacher expectations.

6.2.1 Cultural identification of students.

St Mary's Indigenous students believe that their cultural identification has little influence on their learning and academic achievement. Some acknowledged that increasing the number of students from a similar cultural background may increase their sense of comfort and general belonging as St Mary's students. However, their identification as Indigenous students in the specific classroom setting is viewed by them as less important, having little influence on their academic achievement. Instead, they identify *focusing on classroom learning* and a *determination to succeed* as the primary reasons for their academic

success. They believe that their belonging to a cultural minority in a mainstream schooling environment did not influence their experience of classroom teaching and learning.

Indeed, many Indigenous students acknowledged that a focus on academic learning is prioritised before individual or cultural identification. There is a demarcation between what they refer to as classroom *learning mode* and *acting naturally* which occurs outside the classroom:

When you're outside of school, it's like 'This is me, this is who I am' ... that doesn't really come into it too much in school ... when you're in class, you're in learning mode ... you're treated as a student ... you're here to learn. (Sancho, SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015)

This phenomenon is inconsistent with previous research which concludes that Indigenous students experience disadvantage as a racial minority at school (Partington, 2003; Slade, 2001). This research draws on Bourdieu and Passeron's (1990) analysis of cultural reproduction. It suggests that schools are responsible for the transmission and legitimisation of the cultural knowledge, values and norms of only the dominant middle class culture. As a consequence, schools are also responsible for alienating and marginalising those students who do not belong to the dominant culture (Partington, 2003; Slade, 2001). However, St Mary's Indigenous students contest any suggestion of cultural disadvantage: "We're not disadvantaged or anything in the classroom ... culture doesn't matter there ... we're just all the same ... just equal" (Shaun, SI6, personal communication, February 03, 2015).

Some understanding of the issues that may explain these contrasting opinions is appropriate. Two approaches to educating Australian Indigenous students are commonly adopted. These are the assimilative and the culturally responsive models of education. Debate regarding the efficacy of both is ongoing. However, the assimilative model's rationale that it improves academic success has been challenged (Beaulieu, 2006; Brayboy & Castagno, 2009; Demmert et al., 2006; Klump & McNeir, 2005). Conversely, Boykin et al. (2005) propose that a culture-based education is most appropriate for meeting the needs of Indigenous students. New understandings invite scrutiny of previous research and resonate with Nakata's (2011) concept of knowledge convergence that occurs naturally in classrooms. Accordingly, this study contends that successful education of Indigenous students capitalises on opportunities that emerge through pedagogical relationships at a place of knowledge convergence.

Indigenous students at St Mary's claim that their cultural identification does not influence their attitude to learning or their academic achievement, as expressed by Saxon: "In the classroom, we're all the same ... it doesn't matter what culture you are ... I don't see

anybody thinking that they're not good enough or somehow different just because they're Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander" (SI8, personal communication, February 17, 2015). This observation confirms the conclusion of Matthews et al. (2003) that meaningful dialogue in pedagogical relationships, rather than cultural identification, is fundamental to Indigenous achievement. While acknowledging the catalytic influence of pedagogical relationships on student learning, this research suggests that the relationship dialogue need not necessarily be culturally framed: "It's good if the teacher understands what's happening with you ... sort of makes it easier for you to talk and learn, but, you know, being Aboriginal, doesn't really make a difference ... to your learning or your confidence" (Soren, SI2, personal communication, February 06, 2015).

Soren's comment emphasises the importance of the teacher/student relationship and the good teacher's willingness to engage with "what's happening" in local contexts and communities.

There are many different cultures at St Mary's. Some students identify with more than one cultural group and are encouraged by parents to "value all [their] cultures, not one more than the other" (Paul, PFG1, personal communication, October 27, 2014). For the purpose of this study, Indigeneity is recognised separately from other cultural minorities. Nevertheless, previous research has claimed that belonging to any cultural minority is disadvantageous to learning (Partington, 2003; Slade, 2001). However, St Mary's Indigenous students believe their cultural heritage is not a negative influence on their learning. Four possible explanations are offered for this inconsistency.

The first explanation concerns the beliefs held by St Mary's Indigenous students. These students prioritise individual educational expectations over cultural affiliations. In the context of the classroom, their one focus is on understanding the lesson. Indeed, the reason given consistently by Indigenous students for enrolling at St Mary's is their belief that academic achievement ensures their future success: "There's [sic] more chances in getting far if you are more educated in this school ... so you're able to get higher paid jobs, you're able to be known around the world" (Santo, SI1, personal communication, February 11, 2015).

In contrast to this belief about St Mary's, many Indigenous students believe that neighbouring schools do not offer the same opportunities. The expectations and commitment of St Mary's teaching staff and their concern for student wellbeing are perceived as contributing to a culture of success that is not evidenced at other schools. However, Indigenous students concede that these neighbouring schools may offer a more comfortable transition from primary into secondary education. This is thought to be principally due to the

larger number of students in attendance who are from a similar cultural background. Many of these students are members of the same extended family to whom St Mary's Indigenous students belong. However, there is also an acknowledgement that familiarity could be a distraction that may have a deleterious influence on academic achievement.

There's [sic] a lot of distractions there [in neighbouring schools] with family fights and taking sides and the students are negatively influenced by their peers, so they might not be able to do as well as they could if they were here. Like, it'd be easier [at neighbouring schools], especially to start with all the others, but ... that's not what I want ... I need to be focussed on understanding.
(Sam, SI3, personal communication, February 02, 2015)

For these St Mary's Indigenous students, achieving academic goals is a priority. This is recognised by their teachers who contrast the priorities held by the current group of St Mary's students with previous Indigenous students: "They [past students] were going in a bad direction ... it's very different now ... the group dynamic at present centres round striving to succeed; not belonging to a certain group" (Tyson, TFG1, personal communication, October 20, 2014). This noticeable shift in the priorities of Indigenous students is influenced by school leaders' collaboration with Indigenous elders and support staff. In turn, Indigenous leaders continue to work with Indigenous families to generate a positive culture for Indigenous students at St Mary's.

A second possible explanation for Indigenous students' belief that cultural identification was not disadvantageous to their learning at St Mary's relates to the concerns of their parents. Many parents emphasised the importance of their children valuing their cultural heritage. However, they were also wary of their children being perceived as belonging to a cultural minority group in the classroom:

In the actual classroom with the other students, well I think that differentiation shouldn't really be there. I believe that we are all equal and especially in a classroom ... it should be that 'We are just all here together' ... no belonging to groups. (Patrick, PFG1, personal communication, October 27, 2014)

Undoubtedly, these parental views have a positive influence on Indigenous students:

Mum says always be proud of your tribe, where you come from, your traditions ... but when it comes to classroom learning, you have to be responsible ... that [cultural background] shouldn't matter ... you can't fall back on that ... you

have to learn just like all the others. (Soren, SI2, personal communication, February 06, 2015)

A third possible explanation for why cultural identity has minimal influence on academic achievement concerns the behaviour of teachers. Students responded consistently that most teachers shared similar academic expectations for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students: “They don’t see us as disadvantaged or anything. We’re just all the same ... just equal” (Shaun, SI6, personal communication, February 03, 2015). This is because teachers considered that having equally high expectations for all students was a respectful way of teaching. They responded that this was particularly important when students came from different cultural backgrounds:

They will respect us if we expect them to do as well [as non-Indigenous students] ... it’s a racist attitude to do otherwise ... we need to help them if they need it, but I don’t think we should have lower expectations ... that would be insulting.” (Tyson, TFG1, personal communication, October 20, 2014)

This respectful relationship combined with students’ commitment to being engaged in their own learning has been described as the quintessential social relationship in education (Hattie, 2008). It allows for interaction between teacher and student to occur and ensures that student outcomes are likely to be achieved. In this interaction, cultural identities are undoubtedly acknowledged for what they bring to the learning equation. However, St Mary’s Indigenous students believe that their cultural identification is not a negative influence on this learning experience.

A fourth explanation for why membership of a minority culture is not viewed as a disadvantage relates to the diversity of Indigenous cultures and social backgrounds that are present at St Mary’s. Although there are similarities in beliefs and practices, there is no one Indigenous culture that is representative of all Indigenous students at St Mary’s. In contrast, a distinctive culture encompassing values common to all students is evident at the school. These values provide meaning for students and establish norms of appropriate conduct (Sergiovanni, 2000). At St Mary’s, these values include an acceptance of difference, social justice and a commitment to realising individual potential and goals. A sense of belonging to this school culture is important to all students irrespective of their cultural background. This cultural belonging is expressed by an Aboriginal elder as being “accepted as part of this one big tribe ... we are all part of this one big family ... like a tribal thing ... and that’s who we are when at this school” (Adam, AI2, personal communication, February 04, 2015).

In summary, all students share in the culture of the College. Indigenous students acknowledge that they are a cultural minority at St Mary's. However, they believe that their cultural identification as a minority group has little influence on their teaching and learning.

6.2.2 Cultural heritage of teachers.

This study emphasises conflicting beliefs concerning the influence of teachers' non-Indigenous cultural backgrounds on the teaching of Indigenous students. At St Mary's, Indigenous students believed that the cultural background of their teachers did not influence student learning outcomes. This issue invites discussion.

There are students from many different cultures at St Mary's. Indigenous students responded that most teachers were respectful of all cultures and demonstrated interest in learning about their students' different family traditions and celebrations:

It's not just like the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the odd ones out ... there's no disrespect shown ... I feel like there's no such thing as 'odd one out'. Because there's so many different cultures here ... everyone is welcome and respected. (Sam, SI3, personal communication, February 02, 2015)

Nevertheless, Indigenous students conceded that their teachers had little knowledge about Indigenous cultural practices or identity. Harrison (2008) and Hattie (2008) claim that a non-understanding of the cultural identity of students is a barrier to effective teaching and learning. However, St Mary's Indigenous students believed that a deficit in Indigenous cultural appreciation had little detrimental influence on their teachers' personal and professional relationships with students. Sidney gives practical reasons for his teachers' cultural identification being irrelevant: "Unless they're teaching about culture, their culture shouldn't make a difference to what they teach" (SI5, personal communication, March 24, 2015)

This understanding is inconsistent with previous research (Reid, 2004). The paucity of Indigenous teachers has been identified as a deleterious influence on the academic achievement of Indigenous children (Partington, 2003; Reid, 2004). In contrast, St Mary's Indigenous students believe that the teachers' subject knowledge was more important than teachers' demonstrating a substantial appreciation of cultural heritage:

If I don't understand something, there's always a couple of other people in class ... not just Aboriginal or Islander students, who don't understand either. The [teachers'] lack of knowledge of my culture doesn't affect their teaching ...

say ... of Maths or Chemistry. (Sam, SI3, personal communication, February 02, 2015)

Hence, the student gains an understanding of the abstract concepts of Mathematics or Chemistry because of the teacher's ability to impart these. This, rather than their knowledge of Indigenous culture, is more relevant to Indigenous students.

Similarly, Indigenous parents were unconcerned about teachers not having an understanding of Indigenous cultural traditions and ways:

I don't think it matters ... respect is important and knowing your stuff and how to teach, but you don't have to all be the same to teach or learn ... that hasn't affected her [daughter's] studies or her education. (Paris, PFG5, personal communication, November 24, 2014)

Hattie's research findings (2003) conclude that improving student academic achievement is dependent on improving teachers' relationships and their disciplinary and pedagogical knowledge. Indeed, Hattie claims that the teacher is the greatest source of variance that can make a difference (Hattie, 2003). Indigenous students and parents at St Mary's would agree that teachers can make a difference, but argue that their cultural heritage is not relevant to achieving student learning outcomes.

Two possible explanations for conflicting beliefs relating to the importance of the teachers' cultural heritage are offered. The first concerns the distinctive role of St Mary's Indigenous support staff. The second is how the role of the teacher is perceived by the Indigenous community as preparation for realities beyond school. Both these explanations invite further discussion.

The first possible explanation concerns the roles of Indigenous support staff at the College. These were established specifically to serve a distinct Indigenous community. St Mary's Indigenous community is a diverse group of people who vary in the depth of their cultural immersion and also their particular cultural background. Indigenous support staff form a vital link between teachers and Indigenous families that allows for enhanced learning of Indigenous students and for cultural differences to be understood.

Many non-Indigenous teachers at St Mary's have little knowledge of Indigenous cultural practices and traditions. However, Indigenous liaison officers and teacher aides are respected by the College community as the traditional elders of their culture and bearers of cultural knowledge. As such, their role in liaising with parents or as co-teachers in classrooms is valued highly. This is contrary to previous research (Demmert et al., 2006; Hill, 2008)

regarding the position of Indigenous support staff in schools. Indigenous support staff have a cultural understanding of Indigenous students and knowledge of their family backgrounds that are important to the individual learning needs of Indigenous students. However, in many schools, Indigenous support staff play only a minor clerical role as “merely assistants at the beck and call of their superiors” (Hill, 2008, p. 2). In these schools Indigenous support staff are not granted active responsibility in managing learning, but are disempowered and relegated to menial tasks in the classroom (Demmert et al., 2006; Hill, 2008). In contrast, the role of St Mary’s Indigenous teacher aides is to be a co-teacher in the classroom. In this role, they assist students in achieving learning outcomes, promote Indigenous culture and liaise between Indigenous families and teachers. As such, Indigenous students understand the role to be vitally important to their social and emotional wellbeing: “They are so important ... because they understand how we feel and why we might be having trouble ... like they understand more ... how our culture is” (Santo, S11, personal communication, February 11, 2015). In this context, cultural issues that may influence learning are illuminated by Indigenous support staff who, in turn, assist non-Indigenous teachers’ understanding of their students and further appreciation of Indigenous culture. This understanding of the difference in teaching and support staff roles was reflected in Indigenous parents’ responses, such as: “It’s great to have Indigenous role models at the school, but I don’t think it necessarily has to be the teacher, because their job is to teach” (Paul, PFG1, personal communication, October 27, 2014).

Given the diversity of cultural backgrounds found in St Mary’s classrooms, teachers appreciate resources that will enable them to enhance dialogue with individual students. Meaningful dialogue is recognised as crucial to the educational achievement of all, but particularly, Indigenous students (Macfarlane et al., 2007; Matthews et al., 2003). In turn, students value teachers’ endeavouring to improve their knowledge and understanding of different cultures (Bevan-Brown, 2005; Yunkaporta, 2009). St Mary’s teachers recognise the important role of Indigenous support staff in assisting the development of individual relationships in the classroom: “Having Uncle [Adam] and the other aides and the high profile that has been given to them in their role has been helpful to teachers and does not allow the needs of Indigenous kids to drop under our radar” (Theodore, TFG1, personal communication, October 20, 2014).

The second reason offered for the noted inconsistency in relation to teachers’ non-Indigenous heritage relates to parents’ expectations of teachers. St Mary’s Indigenous parents believe that teachers have a responsibility to prepare their children for their lives beyond

school. Indigenous parents consistently emphasised the importance of St Mary's being a safe environment. They valued classrooms that provided the conditions for their children to operate in different cultural contexts as important lessons: "This is a safe, learning place for them before they hit the real life out there" (Pedro, PFG2, personal communication, November 03, 2014). Thus, Indigenous parents considered St Mary's classrooms to be environments where their children could experience learning safely alongside non-Indigenous students and be challenged by non-Indigenous teachers. This experience is believed by Indigenous parents to be an important pre-cursor to life beyond school and was thought to be valuable in enabling their children to move to tertiary education or gain employment.

Furthermore, Indigenous parents responded that interactions with non-Indigenous teachers taught important skills:

How to interact with other people ... it's a major thing they learn at school ... between students and teachers and other adults. What you have to do when you leave school in real life is interact with people from different cultures ... that's going to carry them through ... teaches them the right way to do things. (Patrick, PFG1, personal communication, October 27, 2014)

In this context, the non-Indigenous cultural heritage of St Mary's teachers is viewed by Indigenous parents as a positive influence in the education of their children. However, the roles of Indigenous support staff at St Mary's need to be acknowledged in this discussion. While they do not possess esteemed academic qualifications, they do valuable work as Indigenous educators in the classroom and are esteemed by non-Indigenous educators. They also provide Indigenous students with positive role models for living and working in real world situations.

Nakata (2002) and Pearson (2009) confirm the belief that Indigenous students needed to learn in different cultural contexts. They contend that education fails Indigenous students if it does not ensure that they learn the necessary skills to achieve in non-Indigenous contexts (Nakata, 2002; Pearson, 2009). Indigenous parents at St Mary's value learning that will assist their children in their lives beyond school: "You give them plenty of keys now ... they have to learn how to use those keys out there" (Paulo, PFG4, personal communication, November 18, 2015). Hence, St Mary's Indigenous parents do not attribute a paucity of Indigenous teachers as a possible reason for poor academic performance of their children. In contrast to previous research in this area, these parents value their children's interactions with non-

Indigenous teachers. Indigenous parents believe these interactions to be beneficial learning for the inevitable different cultural contexts that they will encounter in their future lives.

6.2.3 Learning and teaching strategies.

The identification and efficacy of specific learning and teaching strategies for Indigenous students is another issue that invites discussion.

In 2013, the College was reviewed by the Department of Education, Employment & Workplace Relations (DEEWR) and also the Stronger Smarter Institute (SSI). They reported favourably concerning the demonstrable engagement and academic achievement of Indigenous students. These students identified their individual focussed engagement as the influential reason for academic achievement. Engagement in this context is defined as the investment and effort students spend in their own learning (Marks, 2000; Klem & Connell, 2004).

St Mary's Indigenous student respondents challenged the belief that there are inherent ways of learning that are more appropriate to or shared by Indigenous students (Yunkaporta, 2009). St Mary's students described the classroom as "the place where you don't really have friends as such with anything in common. You just zone in on the lesson ... that's the reason you come to school in the first place; to learn" (Sebastian, SI11, personal communication, February 05, 2015). Moreover, respondents were unable to identify any specific pedagogy that was supposedly more advantageous to them as Indigenous students. In contrast, Indigenous students emphasised and appreciated the commitment of their teachers to all students: "They teach us the same in the classroom; it doesn't matter what culture you are" (Shay, SI9, personal communication, February, 12, 2015).

St Mary's leadership and staff do not favour the adoption of specific Indigenous pedagogies for their Indigenous students. They believe that there is considerable heterogeneity among their Indigenous students with most having similar urban, middle class experiences as non-Indigenous students at St Mary's. Consequently, the need to adopt particularly appropriate Indigenous pedagogies is considered unnecessary. Instead, teachers adopt respect for Indigenous cultures, cultivate a supportive classroom atmosphere and commit to effective pedagogical relationships. These are strategies they consider influential in enhancing academic achievement of Indigenous students:

It's a responsibility under the Indigenous policy to make learning appropriate for every [Indigenous] student in the class ... however, it's all about good

relationships, like with every student ... what works for one student is different to another student. (Trevor, T11, personal communication, February 06, 2015)

Thus, St Mary's teachers consider their students to be separate entities, regardless of their cultural identity. In so doing, they endeavour to identify their learning strengths and teach accordingly. The focus on the student/teacher relationships and the importance of assisting the individual learner are supported in Indigenous research (Nakata, 2011). Culturally respectful teachers who establish caring and responsible relationships are influential in promoting academic success for Indigenous students in mainstream classrooms (Nakata, 2011).

However, research has shown marked differences in the learning behaviours of the Western and traditional Aboriginal education systems (Beaulieu, 2006; Boykin et al., 2005; Steinhauer, 2002). This concludes that learning may be enhanced by using teaching and learning approaches preferred by Indigenous students specifically (Battiste, 2002; Yunkaporta, 2009). It is argued that this is because creating and interpreting meaning is generated within particular cultural frameworks (Evans, 2011). Indeed, Hickling-Hudson & Ahquist (2003) have emphasised the need for teachers to study and adopt multicultural pedagogies judiciously. She contends that this may assist the learning of students who are from non-Western cultures who think and learn in particular ways (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). This perspective is supported by Battiste (2002) and Evans et al. (2009), who challenge educators to open the curriculum sensitively to all students. This is achieved by recognising and responding to multiple knowledge systems and pedagogies and integrating these into classroom practices. Further, they warn that unless cultural educational bridges are adopted by educators, Indigenous students may find Western learning overwhelming (Battiste, 2002; Evans, 2011).

St Mary's leadership and staff understand this rationale for adopting specific pedagogies for Indigenous students. However, St Mary's Indigenous students believe it more important that their teachers identify their individual learning needs rather than focus on preferred pedagogies for Indigenous students. Santo emphasised the importance of sensitive teachers who can identify and remedy learning problems: "Everybody understands differently ... so it's good to have some teachers who catch you up to where you should be ... like, they work with you [individually] on what you need to know better" (Santo, S11, personal communication, February 11, 2015). Consequently, at St Mary's, an education initiative prioritises the importance of encouraging positive teacher/student relationships rather than a specific Indigenous cultural intervention. St Mary's Indigenous students are encouraged by

teachers to identify enthusiastically with their culture and share this with non-Indigenous people. However, Indigenous students are also able to engage with contemporary classroom teaching and learning. This is important as it allows Indigenous students an opportunity to learn successfully within two knowledge systems and therefore assume responsibility of their futures confidently (Nakata, 2010).

It is also important not to generate a homogenised conceptualised understanding of an Indigenous student. Nakata (2011) cautions educators against perceiving Indigenous students as learners without knowing them as individuals. Indigenous students are increasingly diverse, with varying cultural backgrounds and experiences of cultural immersions. Although some Indigenous students originate from less populated areas and Aboriginal communities, the majority of St Mary's Indigenous students have urban families. These students identify as Indigenous through knowing their family histories and traditions taught by their parents and also through family gatherings on ancestral grounds. They believe that specific Indigenous pedagogies would be inappropriate for their learning context:

[It's] not particularly important for me ... doesn't affect me ... because I'm not very immersed in the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture ... I know the basics, but my family mostly live in the modern day ... I don't really have anyone who is kind of still immersed wholly in the culture. (Sebastian, SII1, personal communication, February 05, 2015)

The diversity of St Mary's Indigenous students ensures that there is no common way of learning that addresses the individual learning needs of all. Teachers recognise this and, consequently, teach to individual needs, regardless of cultural backgrounds. Tom, a teacher who has Indigenous heritage, expresses this view:

They [Indigenous students] might share an identification with a culture ... so do I on my grandmother's side ... but that doesn't mean we all think the same and have the same ways of understanding ... and you can't just go [*sic*] – 'we all learn the same way' ... so we should be taught the same way – because it's not going to work. (Tom, TFG1, personal communication, October 20, 2014)

The majority of Indigenous students at St Mary's live flexibly in both worlds and therefore particular pedagogies are not appropriate for them. This study honours the research of Battiste (2002) and Evans (2009) who argue that creating and interpreting meaning is generated from within particular cultural frameworks (Battiste, 2002; Evans, 2011). However, this study contends that St Mary's Indigenous students are able to create and interpret meaning in multiple frameworks.

Consequently, the adoption of one specific Indigenous pedagogy has not been appraised as an appropriate strategy to enhance academic learning of St Mary's Indigenous students. However, elements of project learning (Pascoe, 2007) two-way schooling (Harris, 1990; Purdie et al., 2011) or learning through culture (Yunkaporta, 2009) are considered and used appropriately. This research confirms Nakata's research (2010, 2011). He argues that the two knowledge systems, Indigenous and Western, are not irreconcilable but are complementary. Thus, both need to be privileged in the appropriate context for appropriate purposes (Nakata 2010). Further, Nakata believes that classroom learning and the everyday life learning of Indigenous students might co-exist comfortably. This insight is demonstrated particularly by Sancho: "... you learn different things from different people, like in different environments ... there's school learning and there's other learning ... but I think some might think that you can't have it both ways" (Sancho, SI7, personal communication, February 13, 2015). Thus, St Mary's educators are encouraged to adopt meta-awareness so that Indigenous students embrace multiple strategies of learning (Nakata, 2010). St Mary's endeavours to implement this meta-awareness by encouraging students and staff to think more about the conveyance of knowledge. Thus, the different knowledges and ways of teaching that Indigenous elders and staff bring to the school are valued and implemented through presentations, story-telling and classroom interactions. Students become knowledgeable about the existence of different ways of learning, knowing and doing and, by this means, feel their way confidently along both these paths (Nakata, 2010). Not only Indigenous students, but also non-Indigenous students benefit from the presence of Indigenous staff and elders in schools and the different pedagogies they employ. Supporting this view, McLaughlin and Whatman's research into preservice teaching practicums argues for a change in the discourse of teaching Indigenous students. They argue that Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies are not only relevant to teaching Indigenous students, but also, they advocate a new perspective that sees Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies as important for all Australian students (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015).

The presence of Indigenous support staff in classrooms is valued by non-Indigenous teachers who become learners of different pedagogies and also gain insight into their students' needs. In turn, Indigenous students observe non-Indigenous teachers valuing their culture and demonstrating an appreciation of Indigenous cultural knowledge. This is particularly important for Indigenous students from Aboriginal communities, who may not have seen their culture valued by non-Indigenous people elsewhere. These students have a traditional cultural background that is distinct from the majority of urban Indigenous students at St Mary's. As a consequence, they have distinct learning needs that may be challenging in

mainstream education (Yunkaporta, 2009). These students represent a minority group within a cultural minority and demonstrate the cultural diversity within St Mary's Indigenous students: "There's the traditional kids who come from the communities and then there's the urbanized ones who are just the same as everyone else ... it's a wide spectrum that we have here" (Anthony, A11, personal communication, January 29, 2015). Indigenous students are aware of their varying cultural backgrounds. They suggest this variety of background, rather than their identification as Indigenous, as a means of identifying students who may need assistance in the classroom:

It depends on the student's background. My parents are well-educated, they both have good jobs and so my teachers know that I'm at the same level as my peers ... but I'm not too sure about the kids from the Cape, because they are so different to us because of where they come from [Aboriginal communities], so they need that special teaching, that other Murri kids don't. (Sam, SI3, personal communication, February 02, 2015)

The majority of St Mary's Indigenous students have urban backgrounds and the success of learning and teaching strategies is evident in their achievement of academic outcomes. This research confirms Nakata's findings (2012) that encourage educators to use every possible resource to achieve the best results for students. He advocates implementing Indigenous pedagogies and knowledge into the classroom, but also concludes that it is "radically dumb to discard or not explore things that we know to work but not use them because they come from a dominant or white tradition" (Nakata, 2012, p. 7).

6.2.4 Expectations of teachers.

Another issue that invites discussion concerns conflicting beliefs about the expectations of teachers. St Mary's Indigenous students offered understandings concerning the complex relationships between students and teachers. While students believed their classrooms were equitable, they identified teachers whose interactions indicated that they held low academic expectations for Indigenous students.

Students are sensitive to their teacher's expectation of them through the manner of their communications (Kiger, 2003). Indigenous students identified some St Mary's teachers who had low academic expectations of Indigenous students. Santo explains:

The lighter skinned kids are in the higher expectations group ... the teachers expect more of them ... the White kids are expected to know more than the Black kids who

are not expected to be academic by some teachers. (Santo, S11, personal communication, February 11, 2015)

Furthermore, students identified teachers whose academic expectations of students were influenced by their skin colour:

Like sometimes ... I get told, straight up, to move to the front and [in those classes] I'm asked many times during the lesson if I understand the work, but there are other Murri kids or Islander kids there ... but they have lighter skin ... the teacher doesn't treat them the same as me. (Santo, SFG4, personal communication, November 20, 2014)

This type of teacher behaviour is labelled as an example of expectation theory (Babad, 1993; Brophy, 1982; Kiger, 2003). It maintains that teachers' expectations differ according to students' perceived racial and cultural backgrounds. Teachers who expect certain students to perform poorly approach their teaching in a manner that supports their low expectations. Consequently, students underperform because their teachers expect underperformance (Gray & Beresford, 2001).

An issue that invites exploration is that St Mary's Indigenous students did not respond to expectation theory. Low teacher expectations did not generate low student academic performance. Instead, students increased their determination to achieve academic success:

I just try to prove them wrong ... like I just work harder to get better grades ... it's going to happen sometimes ... no matter what they think of Murri kids ... like, you don't have to prove them right." (Soren, SFG5, personal communication, November 27, 2014)

Additionally, Indigenous students' failure to achieve educational outcomes is commonly conceptualised as "a process of power relationships: powerless Indigenous students resist powerful school processes because they are alien and unresponsive to them" (Gray & Beresford, 2008, p. 207). As a result, students may generate oppositional social identities and behaviours as counter-challenges to authoritative processes (Ogbu, 1992). These do not occur at St Mary's. Students do not consider teachers who demonstrate low expectations of Indigenous students to be racist: "No teachers are racist here ... they just don't have the knowledge and they make assumptions ... it's just ignorance 'cause they just don't know" (Sigmund, SFG4, personal communication, November 20, 2015). Such teachers are ignorant of Indigenous culture and this ignorance leads to misguided assumptions. For this reason, St Mary's Indigenous aides argue that further cultural awareness training for College

staff is needed “to raise people’s understanding ... because they really don’t know that they’re being hurtful ... it’s just plain ignorance ... I don’t believe that anyone is vindictive or racist here ... ignorance is the biggest thing”. (Anthony, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

Thus, the behaviour of this study’s Indigenous students is not consistent with previous research that concludes that students conform to their teachers’ negative expectations. Subsequently, these students develop antisocial, oppositional behaviour (Babad, 1993; Kiger, 2003; Ogbu, 1992). A possible explanation offered for this inconsistency is the influence of St Mary’s Indigenous support staff and elders on Indigenous students.

St Mary’s Indigenous teacher aides are respected for their knowledge of Indigenous culture and community. They liaise with teachers and families to influence the learning and wellbeing of Indigenous students. Additionally, a consultative committee made up of Indigenous elders advises the College administration on issues relating to students’ learning. The presence of these respected elders within the College is a positive influence that encourages understanding, acceptance and resilience in Indigenous students. It enables them to take responsibility for their own learning. Adam exemplifies this in his response to students who have encountered teachers’ low expectations: “You’re going to cop this by coming here from some teachers, but the thing is to keep being proud of yourselves and your school. It’s the way to beat it” (Adam, SFG4, personal communication, November 20, 2014).

Additionally, Indigenous students are encouraged by support staff to accept that many non-Indigenous teachers have little knowledge of Indigenous culture. Indigenous support staff offer explanations for this circumstance and encourage understanding in Indigenous students: “What you got to remember is that where they [teachers] go to become teachers, they’re not taught that about your culture, so there’s always going to be that gap there in their knowledge about you.” (Adam, SFG4, personal communication, November 20, 2014). This understanding is, in turn, reflected in Indigenous student responses concerning their teachers’ lack of cultural knowledge: “How could they [teachers] know if they haven’t been growed up [*sic*] that way?” (Steven, SI4, personal communication, February 11, 2015).

While a deficit in teachers’ cultural knowledge is accepted by Indigenous students and staff, there is also an appreciation by them that the College has attempted to redress this. Professional development for non-Indigenous teaching staff that relates to Indigenous history and teaching and learning behaviours that are common to Indigenous people has taken place. Also, local elders are invited to relate their personal family stories about education. These

have assisted non-Indigenous teachers to understand and appreciate Indigenous culture. This is expressed by Indigenous support staff:

People can only teach from what they know ... but I've noticed a shift which I think is really powerful ... that whole day with [Indigenous guest speaker] I think opened people's eyes ... provided a touchstone ... they now know that the history that gets taught in schools isn't necessarily Aboriginal history ... and they are wanting to know more from Uncle Adam ... where they were hesitant before, they now approach Uncle and they learn from him. (Anthony, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

Rather than engaging in antisocial or oppositional behaviour, Indigenous students at St Mary's accept that not only are they learners, but also teachers of their culture. This understanding of their position at St Mary's as a cultural responsibility is encouraged by Uncle Adam:

Don't forget they've [teachers] been brought up in a different situation to us ... but there is more appreciation for what we do now ... and they've [teachers] come along ... see, one of the things that we need to do is teach and there are a lot of teachers that would listen to us and take it further and pass it on ... but it's like we have to be one school together and doing things that keep us that way ... we all learn here together. (Adam, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

6.2.5 Responses to the first research question.

Most St Mary's Indigenous students experience teaching and learning to be respectful of their cultural heritage. This study creates an awareness of the diversity of cultural backgrounds and cultural relatedness of St Mary's Indigenous students and demonstrates conflicting beliefs concerning the influence of cultural background on learning and achievement.

There are four new understandings emerging from this research that respond to the first research question: How do Indigenous students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?

The first is that St Mary's Indigenous students believe that their belonging to a cultural minority has little influence on their learning and academic achievement. They attribute their achievement in mainstream education to their being focussed and motivated, the benefit of

pedagogical relationships, and the empowerment of Indigenous support staff within the College.

Second, St Mary's Indigenous students believe that the cultural background of their teachers has little influence on student learning outcomes. Instead, they claim that it is more important that teachers have subject knowledge and the ability to impart such knowledge. This belief is influenced by their perception of and reliance on trusted Indigenous support staff as being the conduit between themselves and their teachers. It is also influenced by Indigenous students' perception that their teachers are responsible for preparing their students for realities beyond school.

Third, Indigenous students in this study challenge the conclusion that there are inherent ways of learning peculiar to or shared by all Indigenous students. Further, they were unable to identify a common teaching pedagogy that was advantageous to them as Indigenous students. They believed that their teachers honoured their cultural background, but, more importantly to them, they were able to identify their individual students' learning strengths.

Fourth, Indigenous students believed that most classrooms' practices adopted by St Mary's teachers were equitable. However, they were able to identify some teachers for whom the Indigenous cultural background of their students influenced them adversely to lower their academic expectations. Indigenous students consistently responded that they did not conform to the low expectations of these teachers or respond with antisocial, oppositional behaviour. Instead, they responded that these situations increased their resilience and made them more determined to achieve. This response was encouraged by Indigenous support staff.

6.3 Prioritisation of a Safe Environment

The second issue that calls for discussion is the range of many perspectives concerning the prioritisation of the school as a safe environment.

New understandings from Chapter 5 identified ways in which Indigenous parents understood St Mary's to be a place of safety where learning and growth occurred. They valued their children's academic achievement, but, equally, their acquiring of life skills, social learning and resilience. Parents believed St Mary's was a safe place where they hoped their children would find ways of both liberating and celebrating their Indigenous heritage.

6.3.1 A safe place.

The primary reason given by Indigenous parents for enrolling their children at St Mary's was that it is a safe place. This is a term used to explain the College as both a haven

for protection and an opportunity for growth. Where students prioritised academic achievement, their parents responded that this was secondary to their children “being in a place where they felt safe” (Page, PFG4, personal communication, November 18, 2015)

Indigenous parents consider the College to be free from extended family dissonance that may extend into the school, possibly resulting in physical violence and pressure on students to take sides. This consideration is influenced by Indigenous parents’ knowledge and experience of neighbouring schools where this has occurred. It is important to note that family dissonance resulting in alienation from schooling is not restricted to Indigenous students but something shared with many low SES students. Parents reasoned that a school that is free from the distractions of family or cultural issues gives optimal educational success for children: “I wanted them to be in an environment where they felt safe ... just a safe environment where education came first, not outside influences from other kids and families” (Page, PFG4, personal communication, November 18, 2015).

However, in the environment of their extended family, Indigenous parents claim that their decision to enrol their children at St Mary’s may generate resentment. Paris explains how different circumstances and priorities may influence attitudes that cause criticism:

... we’ve got good paying jobs to provide for our daughters. Some are unable to do that. Some have other priorities in their lives ... priorities before education ... and then, people who can’t send their child to here, have that ... ‘oh, you send your child to St Mary’s ... you think they’re going to be better than their cousins’ ... that sort of thing. (Paris, PI1, personal communication, March 02, 2015)

This criticism is commonly referred to by St Mary’s Indigenous parents as “just family politics” (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015; Percy, PI5, personal communication, March 22, 2015; Paris, PI1, personal communication, March 02, 2015). While they consider their children safe from this at St Mary’s, criticism may be directed at their children when outside of school at important meetings or family events: “We go to feastings and she’s [daughter] called a white girl because she goes to St Mary’s and behaves differently” (Piron, PFG2, personal communication, November 03, 2014). Sarra (2008) relates incidences of industrious Indigenous students being called *coconuts* by their peers and relatives. He claims that this is an intentional attempt to insult them by suggesting that, like a coconut, they are white on the inside and black on the outside (Sarra, 2008). Indigenous parents at St Mary’s refer commonly to this type of criticism from Indigenous people as “the crabs in a bucket syndrome” (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015; Pedro,

PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014). It describes their struggle as parents who are seeking to improve their social situations and to provide opportunities for their children's future. However, they admit to being obstructed or held back by others in their extended family or community (Piers, PFG6, personal communication, November 25, 2014; Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015; Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014).

Research into Indigenous education concludes that contemporary Indigenous families want their children to be influential activists invested in an education that provides Western knowledge. Simultaneously, Indigenous families want their children to honour and identify with their Indigenous culture (Malin & Maidment, 2003; Nakata, 2002). Further, Indigenous researchers and educators claim that Indigenous students need to acquire skills necessary for achievement in non-Indigenous contexts (Nakata, 2002; Pearson, 2009). St Mary's Indigenous parents expressed similar beliefs. They recognise the importance of education for their children and want them to succeed and to be confident in both cultures, contributing positively to both (Malin & Maidment, 2003). However, it is a priority for students to retain their cultural identity.

Thus, in choosing to send their children to St Mary's, Indigenous parents considered the "best possible fit" (Page, PFG4, personal communication, November 18, 2015) based on "its reputation for academic success and the way it looked after Indigenous kids [that] seemed a better alternative" (Paxton, PFG3, personal communication, November 17, 2014). However, these parents are often criticised by others in the Indigenous community. Commenting on this phenomenon, researchers conclude that, in societies that are traditionally based on community rather than personal advancement, pursuing individual or personal goals rather than community goals may be interpreted by family as acting white (Harrison, 2004; Hughes et al., 2004). Moreover, it is suggested that for some Indigenous people, the terms "hardworking" and "Indigenous" are viewed as mutually exclusive (Sarra, 2008). Nakata (2011) is "sobered" by the findings of Carlson (2016) that some Indigenous people felt guilty or were thought to be deserting their Indigenous heritage by sending their children to private schools. St Mary's Indigenous parents are aware of the complex and sometimes negative perceptions of their culture that are perpetuated by some Indigenous families and reject these. Pim explains: "... even coming to St Mary's is making boundaries, you know. For the sake of your kids' future ... or otherwise, it's the same thing over and over" (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015).

Leadership and administration at the College assists Indigenous parents by employing Indigenous aides and elders who understand the complexities of the Indigenous community. They provide a sense of family and belonging at the College for Indigenous parents and offer support to Indigenous students that enables them to be positive and comfortable within school social structures. Family engagement has been endorsed as a valuable strategy for promoting student achievement (Weiss et al., 2010). However, in extended Indigenous families, this strategy may prove difficult to implement. Nevertheless, it is critical that parents/caregivers receive substantial support. Indigenous support staff at the College play a crucial role in establishing and maintaining relationships with Indigenous families.

Parents acknowledge that criticism from within the Indigenous community was particularly hurtful: “So they cop that racism from their own mob, you know” (Prentice, PFG2, personal communication, November 03, 2014) and “That’s right; I reckon it’s the worst type of racism” (Pedro, PFG2, personal communication, November 03, 2014). Nevertheless, most families are resilient. Indeed, Indigenous students have stated that criticism from extended family members becomes the stimulus to increase their determination to achieve at school: “It makes me want to learn more, just to prove to them ... you know, that they’re not going to bring me down” (Santo, SII, personal communication, February 11, 2015). However, another response to this criticism suggested by Indigenous parents is to disassociate from family and culture:

It’s [family criticism] the reason why you would have here [at St Mary’s] Indigenous kids that wouldn’t identify as Indigenous at all because their parents have decided ‘I’m over all the political jargon; I just want to bring my kids up to be good humans, without all the extra.’ (Pim, PI6, personal communication, February 20, 2015)

St Mary’s continues to aspire to the ideal of young generations of Indigenous people being able to walk confidently in two worlds (Pearson, 2009).

6.3.2 Safe learning.

Another issue that invites discussion concerns Indigenous parents’ conflicting beliefs about their children’s involvement in learning programs that are specifically designed for Indigenous students. These programs include excursions, cultural activities, celebrations and presentations that are facilitated by Indigenous support staff. They are designed to motivate and educate Indigenous students and, consequently, instil pride in their cultural heritage. Parents appreciate that the College would honour Indigenous culture and prioritise their

children's identification with their cultural heritage. However, some Indigenous parents express concern that these programs, although well-intentioned, may also be perceived negatively as segregation of Indigenous students. Parents were concerned that offering special programs to students of Indigenous heritage may lead to discrimination. In enrolling their children at St Mary's, Indigenous parents had hoped to avoid this.

In selecting a school for their children that was considered safe, some Indigenous parents explained that their priority was for their children to learn in an environment that was free from discrimination. Indeed, parents' considered decisions to enrol their children in a non-State school is the reason that some St Mary's parents are criticised by others in the Indigenous community who involve themselves in boundary policing "in order to meet and police the definitional criteria of Aboriginal identity" (Nakata, 2011, p. 5). This is an attempt to define Indigeneity on ways of living choices according to officially approved discourses (Nakata, 2011).

The legacy of the Stolen Generations is present in the psyche of many Indigenous families (Nakata, 2011; Pearson, 2009). As a result, many St Mary's families are cautious of attempts, even those underpinned by positive motivation, to separate their children from the general student community. Paul explains this mindset: "I think that I'm always worried that a class of kids are [*sic*] singled out because of their culture ... because that sets up an 'us and them' sort of attitude that has happened in the past" (Paul, PFG1, personal communication, October 14, 2014).

Positive discrimination is used at St Mary's on the basis of equity and classes and cultural programs are organised accordingly. These include attempts to differentiate the curriculum to enhance learning or initiate exclusive programs that recognise the cultural identity of Indigenous students. The aim of the latter is to generate cultural understanding and pride. However, these attempts may be viewed with suspicion by Indigenous parents: "I'm not into it being 'differentiated'. I think that it should be that 'we are just all here together'. That's how I feel about it. No belonging to groups" (Patrick, PFG1, personal communication, October 27, 2014).

St Mary's Indigenous parents give two reasons for their attitude towards differentiation. First, they are concerned that it could result in segregation and victimisation that would jeopardise their children's learning. Second, St Mary's Indigenous students are not a homogenous group. They consist of students whose diverse educational and social needs, like those of other students, cannot be commonly met through their involvement in special programs:

Who or what's special? ... you got so many different cultures here and they're all part of Indigenous Australia ... different kids need different things ... just because they're all Black or all got Indigenous heritage, doesn't mean they're all the same or need the same teaching or know the same about Indigenous culture ... they're too different to lump together. (Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

Nevertheless, students' learning about Indigenous culture and history is valued by St Mary's Indigenous parents: "The cultural programs that you run here are really good at teaching kids about their heritage ... that's important to us as parents" (Paris, PI1, personal communication, March 02, 2015). However, parents are apprehensive about their exclusive nature and argue that participation should be open to all students at the College. Most Indigenous parents agree with Pedro: "It shouldn't be just for Indigenous kids, all kids should learn about the Black history of Australia and the different ways and cultures" (Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014). This parental observation confirms research which contends that Indigenous knowledge and pedagogies are important and relevant not only to Indigenous students, but also to non-Indigenous students in Australia (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015).

Thus, Indigenous parents want their children to be informed about Indigenous culture, but not to be viewed as different or to invite discrimination. Therefore, they suggest that the cultural learning currently available to St Mary's Indigenous students should continue but include non-Indigenous students. Indigenous parents claim that this strategy ensures that differentiation does not develop into segregation. Differentiation involves the sharing of culture:

I just see it [cultural learning] from sharing the culture, really. You're not segregating ... not going backwards, just sharing that culture ... the more you share, the more you break down the stereotype ... but I wouldn't want it [cultural learning] disadvantaging your child by setting them apart because the real world isn't like that. (Paxton, PFG3, personal communication, November 17, 2014)

St Mary's Indigenous parents agree that cultural identity formation of their children influences their learning positively. Thus, it is considered important that schools initiate cultural learning programs specific to Indigenous students in order to assist in the formation of their identity (Groome, 1995; Harrison, 2008; Murphy-Haste, 2009). The aim of such

programs is to assist Indigenous students to focus on their present and future education, thereby enabling them to position themselves as learners and achievers (Pearson, 2007b).

Ironically, St Mary's Indigenous parents contend that cultural diversity impedes the implementation of culturally responsive identity formation programs that are relevant to all, a conclusion confirmed in the research (Gray & Beresford, 2008). Cultural knowledge differs among schools and their Indigenous communities and therefore there is no single response relevant to Indigenous students generally to the request to define "culturally appropriate" or to describe how cultural learning programs might reflect cultural knowledge.

Thus, St Mary's Indigenous parents argue that cultural programs should not be offered exclusively to students with Indigenous heritage, but, in general, should be open to the whole school community. Nevertheless, they make an exception for a minority of St Mary's Indigenous students from remote Aboriginal communities who have unique needs. These students are a distinct group requiring specialised learning of life skills and socialisation not needed for students from urban backgrounds. Indigenous teacher aides agree with this exception:

The boys from the Cape, they're so different and there is so much more that they are learning and need help with ... even how to organise their day ... how to use a diary ... how to socialise and be in a large group ... they're learning social etiquette ... they're learning that all these people can get along ... it's learning to be different in different places and in different contexts ... and they need extra help, that the others [urbanised Indigenous students] from around here don't need. (Anthony, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

Indigenous students from remote communities who begin secondary schooling at St Mary's have different educational and social needs compared with the majority of Indigenous students at the College. Students who are nurtured in different cultural settings have different approaches to education. This may explain the learning difficulties experienced by some Indigenous students in mainstream Western education (Rose, 2006; Yunkaporta, 2009). These students need assistance in learning life skills and how to socialise with other students. Moreover, their disadvantage is compounded when the pedagogical process is alien to their experience (Battiste, 2002; Yunkaporta, 2009). This can result in an environment of uncertainty and feelings of insecurity for these students at St Mary's. However, even though their social background and educational needs are different, Indigenous parents and aides, not

unexpectedly, prioritise the need for these students to feel safe. Consequently, they argue that it is important not to emphasise difference by separating them from others:

All students should be treated fairly ... but there are times when they need additional help ... for example, we have kids from Kowanyama, Aurukun, Pompurraw and Wujal ... they are traditional Aboriginal students and you can't compare them with the urbanised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids. They need that extra support ... anyone can see that ... but we need for them to also feel included and safe as one big family of students ... there's lots of things that are different with them, but there's lots that are the same too. Like we said about the urbanised kids ... it's a mistake to make that difference, like, the most important thing. (Adam, PFG2, personal communication, November 03, 2014)

Thus, Indigenous parents prioritise strategies adopted by the College that ensure the safety of their children. They consider learning about culture to be important; however, they are wary of cultural programs that may cause a separation from the general student community.

6.3.3 Identity.

Another issue that invites discussion concerns conflicting views about how Indigenous identity is constructed and maintained. There are many discourses about who is and what qualifies as being Australian Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people (Nakata, 2011). St Mary's Indigenous families are culturally diverse and most have mixed heritages. They identify as Indigenous because this part of their heritage is important to them. However, they state that cultural identification is increasingly being policed by the Indigenous community who impose precision about what constitutes identity and who qualifies.

The socio-economic status of St Mary's families ranges from the affluent to the poor and Indigenous families are represented across this spectrum. Parents claim that their identification as Indigenous people is sometimes questioned because they are successful in their lives and make positive choices for their families. There are certain markers by which high achievers are judged by the Indigenous community to invalidate them as Indigenous people (Carlson, 2016). These markers include: living in a nice street or house, enjoying cafe culture, and sending their children to private schools (Nakata, 2011). St Mary's Indigenous parents concur: "It depends on where you live, what house you live in ... if you don't live in [local suburb, local street], then you're not seen as 'black' black" (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015). This phenomenon is not new to Indigenous people:

It has happened for generation after generation ... my grandparents were part of that Stolen Generation ... when the Act changed and they were supposed to move back to the community, they said 'no'. They had kids of their own by then and they wanted them to go to school and have an education. So they moved into town ... It's only about two minutes drive from the community ... So, even though they are the traditional owners, they are not seen as [being as] black as those who live there. (Pim, PI4, personal communication, February 20, 2015)

Definitions of Indigenous cultural identity have proposed that two different Indigenous societies have evolved (Lane, 2007). The first reflects Indigenous people who have accepted the dominant society's categorisation of themselves as passive victims (Lane, 2007). Indigenous people living in this type of society externalise the problems they experience as either the responsibility of non-Indigenous bureaucrats or as a product of their own biology (Lane, 2007; Pearson 2007b; Sarra, 2008). The second society is represented by successive generations of Indigenous people who have improved their socio-economic status. Lane proposes that this has generated an upper stratum of Indigenous people who are employed typically in government and academia (Lane, 2007). They supposedly have forgotten what it means to be Indigenous. Indigenous people living in this latter society have been criticised for portraying themselves as spokespersons and champions of the welfare embedded population upon which they build and secure their careers. They are said to be both the primary contributors to and substantial beneficiaries of the Aboriginal industry (Lane, 2007).

Most St Mary's Indigenous families are representative of the second society. They refute criticism against them by arguing that one does not have to be personally oppressed to be outraged by oppression. Soren explains his family's perspective:

We know the stories of the past and we acknowledge them, we remember them ... it was an awful time that is horrible to think about ... we lost the war ... Mum says it was a war, but she says you don't take it everywhere with you, just understand it and make the most of your life now. (Soren, SI2, personal communication, February 06, 2015)

Nakata (2011) also refutes this criticism against the second society. He identifies the illogicality of protesting against Indigenous disadvantage while simultaneously excluding Indigenous people who are not disadvantaged. Further, the past cannot be undone and injustices against Indigenous people immediately resolved. Instead, Nakata encourages

Indigenous people to better understand the complexities of contemporary Australia and learn how to operate in it in order to nurture brighter futures for their children (Nakata, 2011).

A more complex analysis of the evolution of Indigenous society is urgently needed. In contrast to the two distinctly evolved societies advocated by Lane (2007), Nakata (2011) argues that there is no strict Indigenous and non-Indigenous separation, but contemporary Indigenous society is more accurately appreciated as having overlays, intersections, multiplicities and contested meanings. He argues for recognition of the complexity of the space in which Indigenous people now live. This is at the junction of Western and Indigenous cultures, indeed its new cultural interface (Nakata, 2002).

It is at this cultural interface that identity is sometimes challenged. Many St Mary's Indigenous parents call for an opening up of boundaries and an end to policing identity:

I don't like being asked 'am I Indigenous?' ... It's like the most important thing ... like a black stain ... the answer is 'no ... I'm of Aboriginal heritage ... and Irish and God knows what else you want to throw in the package'. Where do you draw the line? Can't they just be proud of somebody who is striving to be better? (Pedro, PI3, personal communication, November 10, 2014)

Understandings of contemporary Indigenous cultural identity have been constructed by shared histories and traditions, as well as shared experiences of colonisation. This has contributed to the internalisation by Indigenous people of the historical legacy of Australia's colonial past (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Pearson, 2007b). Further, some Indigenous students have accepted negative categorisations normalised by colonial legacies and have assumed a mentality of racial victimhood. This generates a debilitating mindset that educational achievement is not a possibility for them (Gray & Beresford, 2008; Pearson, 2007b).

While Indigenous people share common traditions and experiences, they have diverse experiences as families, individuals and localities. Nakata (2011) refers to this as the schism between the generally shared experience and the particularities of the unshared experience. It is in this Indigenous cultural identity that Indigenous people critique one another and debate what constitutes an authentic Aboriginal identity. In doing so, they may well be harming one another by behaving in ways governments once did by defining and dividing Indigenous people (Nakata, 2011).

St Mary's Indigenous parents want their children to know their family histories. However, they contend that these are not only about cultural connections, but also disconnections: "Yes, [Indigenous heritage] is important, but not more than the other parts ...

I've told [my son] that he should be proud of all parts of his heritage" (Paul, PFG1, personal communication, October 27, 2014). Similarly, Nakata (2011) states that knowing their history may mean coming to a better understandings of reasons for disconnection. There are many ways to construct and maintain wholesome identities for Indigenous students. While discourses of victimhood and disadvantage are legitimate stories of the past, they are not necessarily the future agenda for Indigenous people (Nakata 2011).

6.3.4 Responses to the second research question.

Emerging from this research are three new understandings that respond to the second research question: How do Indigenous parents experience the education of their children at St Mary's?

The first is that Indigenous parents prioritise their children's learning in an environment that is considered by them to be safe. This implies both physical safety and the freedom to learn outside the negative influence of Indigenous family politics and dissonance. Importantly, Indigenous parents value the crucial role of Indigenous staff at the College in liaising with families and supporting their children's learning.

Second, Indigenous parents challenge the value of specialised cultural learning programs at the College that do not include all students. They are concerned that well-intentioned differentiation may lead to segregation of their children. They also question the efficacy of offering specific cultural learning programs to students who are culturally diverse. Instead, Indigenous parents propose that learning about Indigenous history and traditions be offered to all students.

Third, Indigenous parents believe that definitions of what constitutes authentic Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander identity are contestable within the Indigenous community. They call for an opening up of imposed boundaries of cultural identification. They recognise the importance of identity formation and contend that it is increasingly important to acknowledge connections as well as disconnections in family histories. This may generate better appreciations of the complexity of the cultural interface for Indigenous people.

6.4 Inclusivity

The third issue that invites discussion is how Indigenous students understand and are influenced by the initiatives of the College leadership and teaching staff to provide inclusive education. This discussion focuses on three areas: commitment, responsibility and school culture.

The effective implementation of inclusive education is reliant on the commitment to this goal by both leadership and teaching staff. It involves a willingness of educators to reflect on and take responsibility for their own professional knowledge. It also involves teachers being willing to become learners of other knowledge systems. This is assisted by careful consideration and facilitation of relevant professional development for non-Indigenous staff by Indigenous people in conjunction with the leadership team.

The theme of inclusivity at St Mary's is a characteristic of the culture of the Catholic school. St Mary's Indigenous parents consider the inclusive culture of the Catholic school to be influential in their choice of education for their children.

6.4.1 Commitment and responsibility of teachers.

The success of inclusive education policies in schools depends on teachers' acceptance of their responsibility and commitment to provide education to all students, regardless of their cultural heritage or social background. St Mary's experience mirrors that of other educational institutions in this regard. It demonstrates that increasing the numbers of Indigenous students and widening access to cultural identity programs may not necessarily lead to social inclusion. To facilitate social inclusion, institutions are required to change their many regular practices (Nakata, 2012). Challenging ways of thinking about inclusivity and consequent reflection on teaching practices have been catalysts in the provision of inclusive education at the College.

The implementation of culturally responsive approaches designed to improve the educational experiences and outcomes of Indigenous students has been extensively researched (Barr & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2009; Yunkaporta, 2009). Consequently, teachers who have the most influence on Indigenous students are those who acknowledge and have an understanding of a plurality of how Indigenous students think, talk, behave and learn (Tanaka, 2009). Further, teachers who are familiar with multicultural pedagogies not only address educational disadvantage, but also engage appropriately with Eurocentric pedagogies (Battiste, 2002; Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003). This has led Australian politicians and educators, contending with educational disadvantage of Indigenous students, to aspire to attract more Indigenous Australians into the education workforce (MATSITI, 2014).

However, despite the fact that these policy discourses position support of aspiring Indigenous people into the teaching profession as crucial to the attainment of educational equality, Indigenous people remain underrepresented at approximately 1% of the teaching workforce in Australian schools. McLaughlin and Whatman (2015) have argued for a shift in this discourse from one that entertains Indigenous knowledges and ways of teaching and

learning as important to teaching Indigenous students, to one that acknowledges its value to all Australian students.

St Mary's endeavours to include Indigenous knowledge in teaching practices by establishing pedagogical connections with Indigenous people in the local community. Teachers become learners when they invite Indigenous elders into their classrooms, welcome Indigenous aides to become co-teachers or attend professional development that is recommended and facilitated by Indigenous people. As a consequence, St Mary's teachers learn differing and sometimes contradictory accounts of Australian history. Additionally, they gain an appreciation of how Indigenous peoples generate and engage with knowledges that enhance sensitivities to teaching. An Indigenous teacher aide explains the importance of teachers' learning and understanding of new knowledge:

It's good for teachers to learn things ... like for a kid from the communities, he won't show you what he doesn't know ... he has to feel competence [*sic*] ... and that's the way he knows and how he's learned ... an elder in the community won't let him do something until he knows that he can ... there's no such thing as 'have a go' or learning by your mistakes ... and it's good for teachers to know not to expect that and find a different way that he can show you ... 'cause he can do it. (Anthony, A11, personal communication, November 17, 2014)

Not only do non-Indigenous teachers learn new ways about teaching and learning, but their respect for Indigenous people as knowledgeable educators also encourages teachers to interrogate the homogenous standpoint of the dominant curricula (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003).

Some of Uncle [Adam's] talks and guest speakers have been a bit of an eye-opener ... it makes you think about the way you teach and reflect on the authenticity of information and it is different, you can't just assume that we all learn the same way ... it's not going to work. (Tyson, TFG1, personal communication, October 20, 2014)

The use of the word, standpoint, is significant in that it implies that where the knower is socially positioned influences the acceptance of knowledge (Nakata, 2012; Pohlhaus, 2002). Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist (2003) refer to knowledge from the dominant curricula as being socially positioned as acceptable knowledge, whereas Indigenous knowledges are not acceptable. Non-Indigenous teachers are therefore in a privileged position as agents of the dominant culture. By gaining access to Indigenous knowledge, they are privileged with the responsibility for engineering change to the benefit of Indigenous students (Hickling-Hudson

& Ahlquist, 2003). This is confirmed by Partington's (2003) research that concludes that the scarcity of Indigenous teachers creates barriers to the educational achievement of Indigenous students. These barriers may be removed with the support of non-Indigenous teachers who recognise the significance to the teaching profession of Indigenous knowledges, pedagogies and traditions.

Authentic partnerships and the building of community are critical to the achievement of inclusivity. St Mary's leadership and staff recognise that, in order to engage in learning, students must feel comfortable at school and in control of their lives (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003; Murphy-Haste, 2009). For Indigenous students, this is more likely to occur when their community leaders are valued by the school and have a role in their education. At St Mary's, this is achieved by having Indigenous staff and elders in the role of co-educators and experts in Indigenous knowledges. Positioning them in the classroom ensures a cultural interface that is simultaneously a place of intervention and a place of tension (Nakata, 2011). Two different knowledge systems can be viewed as irreconcilable or complementary. However, at St Mary's, the cultural interface of the classroom is viewed as a place of knowledge convergence, not divergence (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015).

However, prior to this process occurring, non-Indigenous teachers need to recognise and value Indigenous knowledge as important to both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students. More importantly, teachers need to be prepared to acknowledge that they are not the bearers of all knowledge. They also need to become sensitive to there being multiple etymologies that influence academic achievement: "I was trying to suggest how things could be said in a different way so as to help the student understand. I was told that [student] needs to understand that there's a White man's world as well" (Alan, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014).

St Mary's teachers value Indigenous people's contribution as co-teachers and acknowledge that, as non-Indigenous, they are often learners of Indigenous knowledge. An Indigenous elder confirms this change in perspective over time:

When we first started in this role there were a few [teachers] who came to ask me questions like, 'so what do you do that is different?' I had to explain that I play the bridge part between yourself [*sic*] and the community. I think it has taken a little while, but there is more appreciation for what we do now ... and they've come along. So there's that appreciation there ... they want us to be here now. (Adam, AFG1, personal communication, October 17, 2014)

A non-Indigenous teacher expressed a similar view: “The more I learn and come to know [about Indigenous people and culture], the more I know that I really don’t know” (Troy, TFG1, personal communication, October 20, 2014). If the goal of ending disadvantage for Indigenous students is to be realised, it is important that all educators recognise the significance of Indigenous knowledge to their professional work.

6.4.2 The Catholic school.

St Mary’s is a Catholic school and its leadership team’s implementation of initiatives that encourage inclusive education is influenced by the essential purpose of Catholic education—the pursuit of human dignity. Laghi and Martins (1997) express this purpose as: “The Catholic school sets out to be a school for the human person and of the human person” (para. 9). Further, they assert that this purpose may be realised at a school that has a truly inclusive community.

This perception of an authentic, inclusive community has influenced Indigenous parents to choose St Mary’s as a school for their children. Within this community, St Mary’s Indigenous parents give three reasons a Catholic school education is important to the wellbeing of their families. These are the integration of a faith and academic education; an alignment of home and school values; and the recognition of the importance of social justice policy and practice. Not surprisingly, the goals that St Mary’s espouses reflect those of many Australian Catholic schools: a fundamental quality education that fosters human community and a freedom from oppression (D. McLaughlin, 2005).

Nevertheless, the first reason which provides a rationale for Indigenous parents enrolling children in a Catholic school concerns holistic learning. Parents indicated that St Mary’s teachers endeavour to nurture students’ academic, emotional and spiritual intelligences in all subject areas: “I think it’s important to have the teachings of the Faith with their education, like built into the school” (Phillip, PI6, personal communication, March 24, 2015). This resonates with Flynn and Mok’s (2002) research about the nature of Catholic schools which they describe as an environment where the faith and life are integrated in students’ lives (Flynn & Mok, 2002).

Moreover, an Indigenous aide explains how parents want their children to experience a quality education in the Catholic tradition: “It’s not just about [academic] education ... they want a religious education ... the beliefs, the Catholic structure and everything that goes with it.” (Anthony, AI1, personal communication, November 17, 2014). In contrast to their parents, Indigenous students at St Mary’s are sceptical about the value of a structured,

traditional approach to religious convictions and practice (Belmonte, Cranston & Limerick, 2007; D. McLaughlin, 2005; van Eyk, 2002), a perspective shared by non-Indigenous students. Indeed, while they engage with experiences associated with spirituality, they do not believe that institutional Churches nurture a form of spirituality that is relevant to them (D. McLaughlin, 2005; Tacey, 2015).

The second reason given for Indigenous parents' valuing the Catholic school concerns the privileging of Indigenous perspectives in education. An Indigenous community consultative committee at St Mary's works collaboratively with staff to generate ideas that inform an organised and professional pastoral care program for students. For Indigenous parents, this represents an alignment of home and school values. The beliefs and values learnt in the home are complemented in the school. The instilling of values in their children is thought by Indigenous parents to be more easily accomplished when school and home are one and a rationale for acting/being can be articulated. In simple terms, "There is something to hang your hat on". (Pablo, PI2, personal communication, March 23, 2015). An Indigenous staff member and elder explains the importance for Indigenous students of St Mary's parents and teachers sharing similar values: "It gives them a road to follow and the road here is good and steady and there's [*sic*] good people along it" (Adam, AI1, personal communication, February 04, 2015).

While leaders in all schools honour values systems and hold behavioural expectations, Catholic schools situate these within a Catholic world view that Indigenous families believe resonates with their own values. An Indigenous aide explains this congruency: "They have expectations in the State school, but it's more around your behaviour, but the strength is not there around that belief system ... but here, it's bigger and deeper than that and they [Indigenous families] know it" (Anthony, AI1, personal communication, November 17, 2014).

A third reason that a Catholic school education is considered by Indigenous families to be important concerns the valuing of family connections and continuity with past histories. The specific honouring of a diversity in the cultural heritages of St Mary's Indigenous families ensures a familiarisation with varying spiritual belief systems that Indigenous students encounter at St Mary's. This initiative invites further explanation. The history of many St Mary's Indigenous families includes their forcible removal from ancestral lands and forced placement on mission settlements. Likewise, other parents are members of the Stolen Generation. While Indigenous families acknowledge the injustice and hurt experienced by family members, they also acknowledge the positive contributions of Christian missionaries.

Generations of Indigenous people have heard the Christian message from their parents and grandparents that originated within their families on the Mission. A positive sense of continuity and tradition is experienced when this message is encountered in a Catholic school. Christian beliefs learned at the Catholic school connect with important family traditions:

Going back in history when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were colonised and taught at the Mission, they learned about God ... and it's been passed down from the grandparents, you know, so these children of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent, all have that understanding about God ... the same God ... and it's been drummed into them to have that respect for God ... so learning about God here at this school is just going on from there ... it's just knowing that this is a school that believes in God ... it's bigger than us as humans and it's like following the same traditions, but in a different way ... it is important to have that grounding with God first, and then education. (Pim, PI4 , personal communication, February 20, 2015)

Clearly then, shared values are maintained:

Those very core values that you can get through a religion ... when they're being presented at home as well as being presented at school, just helps that being normal. It just helps them [children] to think this is our world and accept that that's normal and that things are all right. (Percy, PI5, personal communication, March 23, 2015)

In this way, the school becomes a catalyst of socialisation which is essential for the transmitting culture across generations (Morris, 1998). McCarthy's (2013) research suggests that Indigenous parents understand this socialisation process in schools. Not surprisingly, in choosing a school for their children, they sift through a school's culture to discover values that reflect their own (McCarthy, 2013). Similarly, this study contends that St Mary's Indigenous parents' choice of a Catholic school culture is influenced by the individual values and aspirations they have for their children. The values of the Catholic school are considered by Indigenous families to be an important aspect of the Catholic school culture. These values honour a dignity shared by all humans, ensure that decisions are based on the common good and generate policies that are underpinned by the provision of opportunities for poor and marginalised students (Scanlan, 2009).

However, the Australian schooling system is becoming increasingly stratified according to socioeconomic status (Savage, 2013). Australian Catholic schools have not only grown more disparate in terms of race, ethnicity and religion, but also have become more elite,

serving fewer disadvantaged students which mostly include Indigenous students (Fitzgerald, 2009; McGreevy, 2004). Selective admission practices marginalise the same students who Catholic schools were originally founded to serve (Scanlan, 2008). For this reason, Catholic schools which serve only the wealthy have been critiqued, challenged and found wanting by those advocating a return to social justice teaching (Scanlan, 2009).

However, the number of Indigenous enrolments in Australian Catholic schools has increased (National Catholic Education Commission [NCEC], 2013). This is mostly due to the significant increase in the level of Commonwealth Government support, but also to individual diocesan enrolment and support policies (NCEC, 2013). At St Mary's, there are Indigenous and non-Indigenous families whose fees are subsidised by the College. However, Catholic schools are increasingly dependent on tuition revenue which negatively affects their ability to include large numbers of students in poverty (O'Keefe & Evans, 2003). Indigenous aides and parents recognise this and conclude that this limits the number of Indigenous enrolments at the College: "You'd be overrun by Indigenous kids if the school didn't charge school fees ... that's the limiting factor ... some just can't physically afford it" (Anthony, A11, personal communication, November 17, 2014).

The implications of this financial inability to offer fee subsidies to large numbers of poor students in systemic Catholic schools are twofold. First, it emphasises the possible discrepancy between Catholic discourse and Catholic practice concerning the preferential option for society's poor and marginalised (Scanlan, 2009) in consideration of increasing financial demands and accountabilities. Second, it questions whether these demands that are justified by financial expediency are resulting in Catholic schools becoming exclusive to Australian society's educated middle class (Grace, 2003; D. McLaughlin, 2005).

The challenge for those who administer, teach and promote an authentic Catholic education is to find a way forward that is socially just and inclusive. It is a challenge that Catholic school leaders encounter regularly and struggle to put into practice.

6.4.3 Responses to the third research question.

There are two new understandings emerging from this research that highlight how policies that ensure inclusive education and the values of the Catholic school are inextricably linked. This responds to the third research question: How do Indigenous students and their parents experience the implementation of inclusivity policies at St Mary's?

The first new understanding is that the success of policies that provide inclusive education to Indigenous students at St Mary's depends on the commitment and preparedness

of school leaders and educators to acknowledge, respect and become learners of other knowledge systems. In so doing, they are fulfilling the rationale of the Catholic school's existence which is the pursuit of the enhancement of the human dignity of each person. Therefore, the implementation of an inclusive education policy occurs essentially when educators implement authentic Catholic school principles. In this context, the terms inclusivity and Catholic schooling can be said to be tautological concepts.

Second, Indigenous families place great importance on St Mary's being a Catholic school. They view Catholic education as holistic and values-laden. Given that Catholic schools operate in contemporary society that is secular, pluralised and individualised, it is important that St Mary's values be scrutinised to ensure that they are socially just and reflective of the authentic nature of the Catholic school.

6.5 Research Conclusions

The discussion of new understandings in this study has generated conclusions that have been distilled from the engagement of the research with the literature. This research highlights the capacity for Indigenous students to achieve quality outcomes in mainstream education and to experience a sense of belonging despite the cultural differences they may encounter in this environment. Leadership, teacher commitment to and acceptance of the responsibility for the education of all students, collaboration with Indigenous elders, appropriate staffing, and on-going professional development are identified as essential for the continuing success of Indigenous students at St Mary's.

The research conclusions contribute to new knowledge, practice and policy. The conclusions generated from this research that will be amplified in the next chapter are:

- St Mary's Indigenous students are not educationally disadvantaged because of cultural differences. Instead, they and their parents consider the different cultural contexts encountered in the classroom to be beneficial to the education of Indigenous students.
- The heterogeneity of St Mary's Indigenous students ensures that there is no common pedagogy or way of learning that addresses the individual learning needs of all. St Mary's Indigenous students are able to create and interpret meaning in multiple frameworks.
- Indigenous support staff form a vital link between non-Indigenous teachers and Indigenous students that enhances their learning and teaching. Indigenous educators

promote the realisation that Indigenous students are not only learners, but teachers of their culture.

- Recognition of Indigenous staff and elders in the role of co-educators and experts in Indigenous knowledges is vital to achieving inclusivity at St Mary's. In this respect, non-Indigenous teachers must be prepared to become learners in the classroom.
- Indigenous parents recognise the positive influence of identity formation for their children's learning. However, they are wary of exclusive programs and consider imposed boundaries of cultural identification to be harmful and divisive of Indigenous people.
- Indigenous families view the Catholic school as an authentic, inclusive community. A Catholic education is considered to be holistic, privileging of Indigenous perspectives and valuing continuity with past family histories.

These research conclusions are discussed in Chapter 7.

Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I present the conclusions and recommendations of the study which explores how Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and their parents experience education at St Mary's.

7.2 Research Design

The research design was focussed by three specific research questions that are justified from the literature review:

1. How do Indigenous students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?
2. How do Indigenous parents experience the education of their children at St Mary's?
3. How do Indigenous students and their parents experience the implementation of inclusivity policies at St Mary's?

Because the intention of this study was to investigate the issues from the perspective of Indigenous students and parents, an interpretive philosophical approach to the research was adopted. Constructionism is the epistemology adopted for this research. Constructionism explains the generation of knowledge as being negotiated, as humans interact with their environment. This implies that people in different cultures construct meaning in diverse ways, especially about the same phenomenon (Feast, 2010). Moreover, knowledge is not an objective commodity—something to be found. This research explores how the participants make sense of their world through their lived experience.

Symbolic interactionism is the focal lens that informs this study's theoretical perspective. This lens focuses on understanding another's perspective by interrogating the symbols used in communication such as language (Crotty, 1998). This study seeks to understand the perspectives of Indigenous students and parents through engagement with their perceptions and interpretation of their meaning through language and symbols.

Case study is the methodology adopted for the research design. The participants for this research included Indigenous students, Indigenous parents and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous teaching and support staff. The data gathering strategies employed in this research were:

- Focus group interviews—12 groups with 56 participants; and
- Individual, in-depth, interviews—25 participants.

There was a total of 56 participants. All interviews were conducted from October 2014 to March 2015.

Approaches to data-gathering, selection of participants and the organisation of this research conformed to the ethical criteria required of the Australian Catholic University Research Ethics Committee (Appendix A) and the Cairns Catholic Education authority (Appendix B).

7.3 Limitations of the Study

The first limitation for this thesis concerns transferability. Since the research focuses on one Catholic secondary college, the issue of transferability of research conclusions to other contexts invites discussion. Case study methodology honours specification, instead of generalisation. Further, there is an emphasis on the exclusivity of the case that involves thorough understanding of the phenomenon and of the case study itself (Stake, 1995). In this research, conclusions are suggestive, not authoritative. Readers in other settings may apply conclusions tentatively from St Mary's to their own contexts.

A second possible limitation concerns the researcher who is a non-Indigenous person engaging with Indigenous participants. This dynamic may be problematic because the researcher may impose Western approaches to research inadvertently, while ignoring Indigenous perspectives. Such a dynamic is not only culturally insensitive (McCarthy, 2013), but emphasises the failure of white intellectuals to register that epistemologies exist beyond the horizon of the Eurocentric self (Jay, 1994). In this study, the researcher is sensitive to research conducted with Indigenous communities which may reflect hegemonic values of Western researchers. Such researchers have approached Indigenous participants as objects under examination (Porsanger, 2004). In contrast, this study addresses the limitation of the non-Indigenous researcher purposely through critical reflection on the cultural assumptions implicit in both the design of the research and the values and assumptions held by the researcher. This researcher acknowledges the relationship between “an individual’s position within a social order and their social consciousness and thus their social theorising” (Cowlshaw, 2004, p. 68). Thus, the researcher is not an “indifferent, abstract, objective recorder or analyst of social events” (Cowlshaw, 2004, p. 68). In this study, the researcher’s position is described by Moreton-Robinson (2000) as a ‘situated knower’. This term refers to white academics whose understanding is “inextricably connected to the systematic racism they criticise but do not experience” (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. 250). Furthermore, the

researcher was guided by an in-depth knowledge of the St Mary's community as well as an adherence to Indigenous protocol as advised by a respected Indigenous community elder. This adviser was present during Indigenous student and parent interviews. Additionally, the research processes were discussed at St Mary's Indigenous consultative committee meetings (see Section 6.2.4). The Chair of this committee has read the new understandings and conclusions. He acknowledges that they represent defensible interpretations of the data gathered from Indigenous participants (E. Wymarra, personal communication, November 13, 2014).

A third limitation concerns the assumed positional authority of the researcher. The researcher was Principal of the school at the time of the study. This role may have had an inhibiting influence on how participants responded to questions. The value of this research is dependent on the trustworthiness and authenticity of the data and its interpretation. It is acknowledged that the perceived positional power of the researcher as Principal may have deterred participants from volunteering unwelcome information or responding truthfully in interviews. However, long-standing relationships based on mutual trust had been established by the researcher with the participants of this study. In addition, the researcher's regular attendance at Student Representative Council as well as student leaders' attendance at College Parents & Friends' meetings afforded opportunities for students to share their opinions on matters of school practice and procedures. An established routine of regular student/Principal meetings have promoted an honest, trusting relationship and a convention of listening to and valuing the voices of young people. Such a relationship has encouraged students to speak truthfully to this researcher (see Section 4.8).

For parents, the establishment of an Indigenous Consultative Committee, the presence of Indigenous elders within the school and initiatives that promote the recognition of Indigenous people is recognition that the researcher/Principal genuinely invited honest contributions from Indigenous people (see Section 6.2.4). Since 2006, the researcher had encouraged an atmosphere of trust with participants (Edwards, 1999). In the context of this case study, the maintenance of this trust ensures that the position of the researcher was perceived as a seeker of honest responses.

The value of this research may be reduced through possible unconscious bias by the researcher in the interpretation of the data. Strategies such as triangulation and participant review ensured the credibility of the data and the trustworthiness of interpretations (see Section 4.12). Importantly, participants were given the opportunity to verify the research interpretations of the new understandings. This strategy enabled participants to appreciate

how their perspectives have been interpreted by the researcher and respond appropriately (see Section 4.12.1.4).

7.4 Research Questions Addressed

In this section I address the specific research questions in this study in relation to the new understandings.

7.4.1 First research question.

The first research question is:

How do Indigenous students experience teaching and learning at St Mary's?

The research generated four new understandings.

The first new understanding is that St Mary's Indigenous students attribute their academic achievement to an individual commitment to learning and to their pedagogical relationships with supportive teaching staff. Nevertheless, two dynamics operate at St Mary's that Indigenous students consider as enhancing their learning experience through acknowledging and celebrating their Indigenous heritage. These are their involvement in cultural learning experiences and the network of support provided by Indigenous support staff.

The second new understanding is that St Mary's Indigenous students consider that meaningful dialogue with teachers is the important influence on student engagement in learning. Teachers at St Mary's respect cultural differences by seeking to understand the individual needs of all students. For this to occur, classroom roles are often reversed so that the teacher becomes the learner of other cultures and pedagogies. Consequently, differences in cultural heritages enhance learning and teaching and support opportunities for teacher and student growth.

The third new understanding is that St Mary's Indigenous students generally experienced that their teachers demonstrated similar academic expectations for all students, irrespective of culture. Nevertheless, Indigenous students identified some teachers who anticipated poor academic potential based primarily on the students' cultural backgrounds.

The fourth new understanding is that Indigenous students did not experience a preference for specific approaches to learning that were culturally preferable to them and not to other students. Indigenous educators at St Mary's are encouraged to take advantage of knowledge convergence, that is, spontaneous opportunities to establish Indigenous knowledges in their teaching (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015; Nakata, 2011), and do so.

However, these educators work in mainstream classrooms and, as such, these approaches to learning are available and recognised as important teaching strategies for all students, irrespective of culture.

7.4.2 Second research question.

The second research question is:

How do Indigenous parents experience the education of their children at St Mary's?

This research generated the following three new understandings:

The first new understanding is that Indigenous parents experience St Mary's as a safe place for their children's education and personal growth. Many parents prioritise the potential for their children to learn in a safe environment over the potential for them to achieve academically. College Indigenous staff members are important in generating this safe environment. Parents acknowledged that their children are assisted in their learning by Indigenous support staff who are knowledgeable about the curricula and are committed to the individual needs of students. Moreover, parents recognised that these educators have a sensitive understanding of the relationships and complexities of Indigenous families. As such, St Mary's Indigenous educators offer an important link between Indigenous parents and non-Indigenous teachers. Furthermore, this dynamic enhances cultural understanding, assists learning and teaching and encourages Indigenous parents to identify themselves as members of the College community.

The second new understanding about the experience of Indigenous parents at St Mary's presents a paradox. The College acknowledges Indigenous culture by celebrating the achievement of Indigenous students. These celebrations occur at award ceremonies that are initiated and organised by government departments and agencies outside the College. Some are associated with funding obligations and/or scholarships. As such, they are limited to those students who identify as Indigenous. St Mary's leadership and Indigenous staff welcome these celebrations and consider them beneficial as they positively recognise Indigenous students. Involvement in these celebrations also demonstrates how the College is appreciative of the diversity of its students. However, some Indigenous parents have criticised these celebrations, believing that they create an unnecessary separation of Indigenous students from the rest of the community.

Additionally, the College offers learning programs for students that encompass Indigenous family celebrations and cultural history. These are initiated and facilitated by Indigenous staff and are believed by them to both assist in the formation of identity for

Indigenous students and be a positive influence on student learning. However, St Mary's Indigenous families do not share a single culture or history and this has led some Indigenous parents to criticise this initiative. They argue that the cultural diversity of St Mary's Indigenous students prohibits the implementation of culturally responsive identity formation programs that are relevant to all Indigenous students.

The third new understanding concerns issues of cultural identity and family. Some Indigenous parents are criticised by extended family members and labelled inauthentic for choosing what they believe to be a better education for their children. This criticism was dismissed by parents as just family politics. However, they believe that, in order to offer better futures, it is important that their children are able to interact with educational opportunities that simultaneously nurture and celebrate Indigenous cultures. They believe this is achieved at St Mary's as it provides quality education in a culture that respects and celebrates Indigenous people.

7.4.3 Third research question.

The third research question is:

How do Indigenous students and their parents experience the implementation of inclusivity policies at St Mary's?

This research generated the following two new understandings:

The first new understanding is that inclusive education is reliant on the commitment of school leaders and educators to become learners of Indigenous knowledge systems. This is experienced by Indigenous students and parents when non-Indigenous teachers establish pedagogical relationships with Indigenous elders, share the classroom with other teachers and recognise Indigenous classroom aides as co-teachers. The culture at St Mary's encourages non-Indigenous educators to reflect on their own cultural assumptions to ensure they respect and promote inclusive, authentic learning for all students.

The second new understanding concerns Indigenous parents' perception of the Catholic school. Indigenous parents appreciate a Catholic education as holistic, as inclusive and as a promoter of values. Such reasons motivated parents to enrol their children at St Mary's where a Catholic education was perceived as an authentic Indigenous education. Nevertheless, some Indigenous parents believe that some well-intentioned initiatives aimed at inclusivity may promote exclusivity. Therefore, St Mary's inclusive education invites regular evaluation from stakeholders.

7.5 Conclusions

The research conclusions contribute to new knowledge, practice and policy.

7.5.1 Contributions to new knowledge.

The following conclusions, generated from the research, contribute to new knowledge.

7.5.1.1 Difference is not disadvantage.

This study concludes that St Mary's Indigenous students consider that their identification as Indigenous does not disadvantage them educationally because this identification is not relevant to their engagement in the learning process or to their achievement of learning outcomes. Further, a serious focus on school academic work is not inconsistent with the honouring of Indigenous culture and values. Indigenous students' capacity to purposefully move from cultural ways of interpreting meaning to non-Indigenous strategies for learning enables them to focus their attention on academic work. This awareness of being Indigenous and also being a student allows Indigenous students to take responsibility for their own learning and is the primary reason for their academic success.

St Mary's Indigenous parents value their children's participation in regular classrooms where teachers have high expectations of educational achievement. Moreover, Indigenous parents believe that this experience is an important pre-cursor to life beyond school. They want their children to recognise that they are capable of being successful in both Western and Indigenous worlds. They believe this goal is more likely to occur with the education offered at St Mary's. Indigenous parents' choice of St Mary's as a secondary school for their children rather than neighbouring government schools reflects their belief that the education that is provided and how it is experienced is more likely to generate higher academic results for their children. It also reflects Indigenous parents' prioritisation of education for their children over opportunities for them to socialise with other students from similar cultural backgrounds. Further, Indigenous parents are concerned that family politics, supposedly apparent in neighbouring government schools with a substantial Indigenous population, may inhibit their children's educational achievement.

7.5.1.2 Cultures and relationships.

This study concludes that St Mary's Indigenous students consider that the non-Indigenous cultural backgrounds of their teachers does not influence Indigenous students' learning negatively. Instead, they confirm research that concludes that cultural diversities in the classroom may positively influence Indigenous student achievement (Nakata, 2012). This occurs when teachers capitalise on opportunities that occur naturally in culturally diverse

classrooms that become places where knowledges from different cultures converge (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015; Nakata, 2012). As a consequence of this convergence, new ways of learning and teaching are generated.

Subsequently, this study confirms that the quality of the student/teacher relationship is the premier influence on improving student educational achievement (Hattie, 2008). Meaningful dialogue in pedagogical relationships is recognised by St Mary's Indigenous students as fundamental to their educational success. However, this dialogue needs to be culturally framed.

Differing cultural identities are valued for their contribution to the learning experience. St Mary's Indigenous students recognise that many of their teachers are unfamiliar with Indigenous cultural norms and traditions. Nevertheless, they do not consider this knowledge deficit to be a detrimental influence on the quality of student/teacher relationships. Conversely, they believe that teachers who are sensitive, and keen to learn about Indigenous culture from their students establish respectful and responsible relationships with them. St Mary's Indigenous students believe these relationships are influential in promoting the success of Indigenous students in mainstream classrooms. Furthermore, they believe their teachers exhibit multiple pedagogies that ensure they address the individual learning needs of culturally diverse students confidently. In turn, St Mary's teachers encourage quality learning from all students.

Although St Mary's has few Indigenous teachers, Indigenous parents do not consider this to be a negative influence on their children's academic outcomes. Instead, they believe the quality of interactions with non-Indigenous teachers to be beneficial learning experiences for their children. Such classroom diversity prepares their daughters and sons for future contrasting cultural contexts.

7.5.1.3 A positive Indigenous community.

This study concludes that St Mary's Indigenous parents, although having diverse cultural backgrounds, are committed to provide quality education for their children. For many, their decision to enrol their daughters and sons at St Mary's has drawn criticism from extended family members. This criticism is accepted by Indigenous students and parents as family politics that is inevitable, and rationalised as a consequence of the history of a colonised people. Nevertheless, St Mary's Indigenous parents consider these opinions, supposedly justified by cultural identification values, to be harmful and divisive of Indigenous people. Indeed, family politics is offered as the reason some Indigenous families become disassociated from their cultural identity. St Mary's Indigenous parents recognise justifiable

anger about the past, yet claim there is no future in holding people to commit to a single story. Rather than defining and dividing closely related people to maintain boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, these parents consider a more productive approach is to focus on a positive future for their children.

7.5.1.4 An inclusive community.

Indigenous families consider St Mary's to be an authentic, supportive and welcoming community for all school members. Parents believe that the school's respect of Indigenous peoples and cultures reflected a fundamental characteristic of Catholic education.

Catholic education occurs in welcoming, inclusive, and connected communities. Our schools seek to provide a genuine, safe and caring experience of community, to encourage students to appreciate the intrinsic worth of who they are, to value diversity and treat each student with dignity, enabling them in turn to promote and respect the dignity of all. (Catholic Education Diocese of Cairns, May 2016a)

St Mary's Indigenous parents believe Catholic education promotes the wellbeing of their families because it has:

- an integration of a faith and an academic education;
- an alignment of home and school values; and
- a recognition of the importance of social justice policy and practice.

These reasons are often referred to as a well-structured framework designed to keep children safe. This is a priority for Indigenous parents. Indeed, safety takes precedence before the academic aspirations they have for their children.

In contrast to their parents, St Mary's Indigenous students prioritise academic achievement as their primary reason for attending the College. However, they also value the policies and practices of inclusive education that honour their cultural identities and offer them a sense of belonging to an authentic community.

7.5.2 Contributions to practice.

This study has four conclusions that contribute to new practice.

7.5.2.1 A culturally diverse group.

The diversity of cultures in St Mary's student population challenges reflective educators to adopt multiple pedagogies in order to communicate authentically with all students.

Moreover, these teachers acknowledge that such communication is generated from within particular cultural frameworks (Evans, 2011). Indeed, the learning of Indigenous students is enhanced by the use of pedagogies specifically preferred by them (Battiste, 2002; Yunkaporta, 2009). Moreover, the presence of Indigenous educators in St Mary's classrooms is appreciated by Indigenous students. However, diverse cultural backgrounds exist within St Mary's Indigenous student population, so, consequently, a single Indigenous pedagogy is not appropriate for all St Mary's Indigenous students. Therefore, this study concludes that Indigenous students consider it more educationally advantageous that teachers identify and address their individual learning needs rather than employ specific pedagogies considered to be preferred by Indigenous students.

7.5.2.2 A meta-awareness of knowledge.

As a cultural minority at St Mary's, Indigenous students recognise themselves as having increasingly diverse backgrounds and experiences of cultural immersion. Therefore, they appreciate teachers who consider them individually as students with varying learning needs, rather than being treated collectively, as representatives of a homogenous group. However, they are able to identify some St Mary's teachers whose strategies and actions indicate that these teachers hold different beliefs. These teachers employ a limited range of pedagogies and the quality of the student/teacher relationship in these classrooms inhibits productive communication. College leadership has attempted to address this situation through professional development that challenges teachers to become knowledgeable about and sensitive to the different ways of learning that are equally legitimate and appropriate in diverse teaching contexts. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate a meta-awareness of knowledge approach so that Indigenous and non-Indigenous students embrace multiple strategies of learning (Nakata, 2010). This study concludes that appropriate professional development would assist teachers to engage in a meta-awareness of knowledge generation and integration.

7.5.2.3 Teachers as learners.

This study concludes that recognising and valuing Indigenous aides and elders as co-educators in the classroom is foundational for the successful implementation of an inclusive education policy for Indigenous students. It involves non-Indigenous teachers being prepared to engage with Indigenous co-teachers to become learners in the classroom. These role exchanges challenge non-Indigenous educators to consider their individual knowledge bases and teaching practices.

In accepting this challenge, teachers acknowledge Indigenous support staff as legitimate educators. More importantly, non-Indigenous teachers recognise other ways of learning as valid and advantageous for all students. Sensitivities to teaching are enhanced as non-Indigenous teachers learn that new ways of engaging with knowledge are not irreconcilable with their own beliefs. In this way, the cultural interface of the classroom is accepted as a place of knowledge convergence, not divergence (McLaughlin & Whatman, 2015).

Additionally, when teachers become learners of these other knowledges, they are influenced to interrogate the legitimacy of dominant curricula. They are alerted to the existence of standpoint theory (Pohlhaus, 2002). As a consequence, teachers appreciate that where the knower is socially positioned influences the acceptance of their knowledge. This study recognises that when non-Indigenous teachers engage with Indigenous knowledge, they enhance their pedagogy and practice, and cultivate reflective learning among their students (Hickling-Hudson & Ahlquist, 2003).

7.5.2.4 Cultural identity: Formations and boundaries.

This study concludes that some school initiatives aimed at ensuring inclusive education for Indigenous students may result in practices that Indigenous parents interpret as being exclusive. This phenomenon is supported by research about social inclusion practices concluding that “what makes a good argument in the interests of student participation and access does not always serve Indigenous students’ best interests” (Nakata, 2012, p. 2). Therefore, initiatives aimed at promoting social inclusion and identity formation need to be considered carefully for how they might be valued by a diverse Indigenous community as being beneficial for Indigenous students.

St Mary’s Indigenous parents recognise the positive influence of identity formation on their children’s learning. School initiatives that encourage their children to take pride in their cultural heritage are important in combating negative identities relating to their cultures (Sarra, 2008). However, Indigenous parents are not convinced that St Mary’s well-intentioned programs offered only to Indigenous students are appropriate initiatives to promote inclusive education. They are concerned that these programs separate Indigenous children unnecessarily from non-Indigenous students.

7.5.3 Contribution to policy.

A conclusion that contributes to new policy has been generated from the research.

7.5.3.1 Indigenous support staff: The essential link.

This study concludes that St Mary's Indigenous support staff offer important relationships between Indigenous students and their families, non-Indigenous teachers and the College leadership. These relationships promote clarity about cultural differences while encouraging positive learning outcomes for Indigenous students.

The presence of Indigenous support staff in classrooms populated by students from diverse cultural backgrounds promotes meaningful dialogue with individual students. This meaningful dialogue between educator and learner is considered key to the educational achievement of Indigenous students (Macfarlane et al, 2007). However, all students benefit from having Indigenous educators in the classroom. Their sharing of different knowledges and pedagogies also assists non-Indigenous teachers to better appreciate Indigenous culture, which subsequently informs their teaching.

Additionally, St Mary's Indigenous support staff are valued for their knowledge of Indigenous culture and community. Cultural issues that may have negative influences on learning are addressed promptly by them. This assists in generating a positive learning environment for Indigenous students and encourages confident communication with Indigenous parents. Furthermore, for Indigenous students, St Mary's Indigenous staff promote a perception of belonging to a school culture and cultivate the realisation that not only are they learners at St Mary's, but also teachers of their culture.

7.6 Recommendations

This study offers recommendations that emanate from the research conclusions. They represent an endeavour to offer a forward direction for all those involved in the education of Indigenous students.

7.6.1 Policy.

The recommendations for policy are:

- That CES review the positions of Indigenous Community Liaison Officers and Teacher Aides by undertaking a comprehensive assessment of their roles in the Cairns diocese. This review should consider the significance of these roles to the education of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, teaching staff and school leadership. It may also consider the contribution of Indigenous Community Liaison Officers and Teacher Aides to the promotion of the Catholic school in carrying out its mission of education and social justice authentically. A review may also

investigate appropriate remuneration that is commensurate with the role's complexity and specialisation rather than complying with generalised role descriptions for school support staff.

- That school Principals be given autonomy in relation to decisions concerning the allocation of resources needed to address complex issues of Indigenous students and their families.
- That those responsible for appointing Principals to schools where Indigenous families and communities are part of the school population and culture consider candidates with particular attributes that align with an ongoing commitment to community building and support for Indigenous students.
- That CES liaise with universities concerning the offering of post-graduate *Indigenous Studies* courses for teachers. Ideally, such study may include a practical component of involvement in a local Indigenous issue or community and will require support from schools and negotiations with community elders.
- That CES change the current discourse concerning education of Indigenous students from one that places more Indigenous teachers into classrooms to one that maintains that all teachers, regardless of cultural background, are responsible for educating all students. Consequently, the cultural diversity of Indigenous students is recognised and Indigenous perspectives are celebrated as legitimate pedagogies that assist both Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

7.6.2 Practice.

The recommendations for practice are:

- That learning about Indigenous cultural understandings, historical legacies, perspectives, pedagogies and relationships form the agenda of ongoing professional development for teachers. Such professional development not only enhances teachers' understanding of Indigenous knowledges, but also generates authentic partnerships with Indigenous parents and the local Indigenous community.
- That schools encourage non-Indigenous teachers to reflect on their role as educators of Indigenous students. As members of the dominant culture they have a responsibility of effecting change for those in a cultural minority. Hence, teachers are encouraged to be sensitive to the fact that Indigenous students do not belong to a homogenous group, but are instead an increasingly diverse cohort in the classroom. It is therefore increasingly important that teachers identify individual learning needs.

- That school initiatives aimed at inclusive education are reviewed regularly by stakeholders to ensure that they address the needs of Indigenous students and their families.
- That consideration be given to succession planning for key positions of Indigenous staff whose role incorporates knowledge and understanding of Indigenous communities and cultures as well as school communities and cultures.

7.7 Conclusion

The impetus for this study originated from my relationships with Indigenous students in diverse education systems, schools and geographical areas. Such relationships sensitised my commitment to provide these students with an authentic education, honouring principles of justice and respect.

This research explored how Indigenous students and their parents experience education at SMCC. Indigenous parents and students experience St Mary's to be a safe learning environment that exemplifies their understanding of an authentic Catholic education.

From a leadership perspective, these positive experiences are possible through the development and maintenance of a school culture that emphasises social justice and equity and through a school community that responds to diversity. Underpinning this school culture and community are respectful relationships between learners and educators.

This study emphasises the importance of ongoing reflection on how schools address the needs of Indigenous students from increasingly diverse cultures. This is appropriately undertaken when the members of a diverse school community work in respectful relationships. In particular, this study identifies the value to be gained when people from diverse cultures work in partnership for the education of all students.

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Appendices

APPENDIX A: Human Research Ethics Approval Document



Human Research Ethics Committee ~~Committee~~ Approval Form

Principal Investigator/Supervisor: Professor Elizabeth Warren Co-investigators: N/A Student Res Appendices APPENDIX A Human Research Ethics Approval Document researcher: : Ms Patricia Jones

Ethics approval has been granted for the following project: The experience of Australian Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and their families in a Catholic secondary school for the period: 25/10/2014-28/11/2015 Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) Register Number. 2014 2070
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Special Condition/s of Approval

Prior to commencement of your research, the following permissions are required to be submitted to the

ACU HREC: Catholic Education Office (Cairns Diocese)

The following standard conditions as stipulated in the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Research Involving Humans (2007) apply:

- (i) that Principal Investigators / Supervisors provide, on the form supplied by the Human Research Ethics Committee, annual reports on matters such as: o security of records o compliance with approved consent procedures and documentation o compliance with special conditions, and
- (ii) that researchers report to the HREC immediately any matter that might affect the ethical acceptability of the protocol, such as: o proposed changes to the protocol o unforeseen circumstances or events o adverse effects on participants

The HREC will conduct an audit each year of all projects deemed to be of more than low risk. There will also be random audits of a sample of projects considered to be of negligible risk and low risk on all campuses each year.

Within one month of the conclusion of the project, researchers are required to complete a Final Report Form and submit it to the local Research Services Officer.

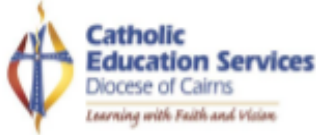
If the project continues for more than one year, researchers are required to complete an Annual Progress Report Form and submit it to the local Research Services Officer within one month of the anniversary date of the ethics approval.

Signed: Date: 28/08/2014....

(Research Services Officer, McAuley Campus)

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'K. Pashley'.

APPENDIX B: Ethics approval from Catholic Education Services, Cairns



130 Lake Street | PO Box 5296, Cairns Q 4870
Tel: (07) 4050 9700 | Fax: (07) 4051 2859
office@ces.catholic.edu.au
www.ces.catholic.edu.au

25 September 2014

Mrs Pat Jones
St Mary's Catholic College
PO Box 259E
EARLVILLE QLD 4870

Dear Pat

Re: *Approval for Research Project*

Thank you for your letter requesting permission to conduct research at St Mary's Catholic College.

Permission is granted to proceed with your research proposal on the topic: *The experience of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families in a Catholic secondary school.*

We wish you well in this important research. We will be very interested to see your completed work in this area.

If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ursula Elms".

URSULA ELMS
ASSISTANT EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR – LEARNING AND TEACHING

0884 42 400 340 004

The Roman Catholic Trust Corporation for the Diocese of Cairns



APPENDIX C: Participant Information Letters and Consent Form (Student)



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER (STUDENT)

PROJECT TITLE: The experience of Australian Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and their families in a Catholic Secondary School.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Mrs Pat Jones

Dear Student,

You are invited to participate in a Doctor of Education research project described below.

St Mary's Catholic College community (staff, students and parents) are participating in this research project.

What is the project about?

The aim of the project is to explore how Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island students and their parents experience education at St Mary's.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the issues that influence the educational experience of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students at St Mary's.
2. Explore the cultural issues experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and how these may influence attitudes to learning.
3. Investigate how non-Indigenous teachers might become more aware of cultural differences and be better able to assist Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students in the classroom.

The benefits of this study are to:

- Provide a better way of understanding how teaching and learning might be more inclusive of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island culture.
- Providing a voice to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and their parents within the St Mary's community about ways to improve teaching and learning.

Who is undertaking the project?

The project will be undertaken by Mrs Pat Jones.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this study.

What will I be asked to do?

- First, you asked to participate in a 45 minute group discussion with other Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students in a similar age group about your experiences as a student at St Mary's. This will include your views on how you are experiencing classroom teaching and learning and how this might be improved. To assist with the collection of information, this discussion will be recorded.
- Second, you may like to volunteer for a further individual interview where you can individually focus on comments previously made in the group discussion concerning teaching and learning experiences at St Mary's. This interview will be recorded.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

The results from this study will be made available to the Australian Catholic University and also Catholic Education Services in Cairns. The data collected will be identifiable to the researcher only and confidentiality will be maintained. Participants will not be identifiable. During the data collection process, participants will be consulted about the perceived assumptions of the researcher and clarification and correction is welcomed.

The researcher recognises that the use of Indigenous knowledge for research purposes should benefit Indigenous peoples. It is also recognised that the knowledge gained from Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students, parents and community members, who are participants in this study, remains the property of these participants.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

Results of the project will be provided on request.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the researcher (Mrs Pat Jones) at St Mary's. (Please phone 40444202 or email piones@smcc.qld.edu.au, or alternatively, make an appointment at the front office of the College).

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number 2014 2070). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Research of Ethics Manager

Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)

Australian Catholic University

North Sydney Campus

PO Box 968

North Sydney NSW, 2059

Phone: (02) 97392368

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?

If you agree to participate in this project, please ensure that you sign both copies of the consent forms and return the researcher's copy to the researcher (Pat Jones) at St Mary's Catholic College.

Yours sincerely,

Pat Jones

APPENDIX D: Participant Information Letters and Consent Form (Parent)



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

(PARENT)

PROJECT TITLE: The experience of Australian Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and their families in a Catholic Secondary School

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Pat Jones

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a Doctor of Education research project described below.

St Mary's Catholic College community (staff, students and parents) are participating in this research project.

What is the project about?

The aim of the project is to explore how Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island students and their parents experience education at St Mary's.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the issues that influence the educational experience of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island students at St Mary's.
2. Explore the cultural issues experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island students and how these may influence their attitude to learning.
3. Investigate how non-Indigenous teachers might become more aware of cultural differences and be better able to assist Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island students.

The benefits of this study are to:

- Provide a better way of understanding how teaching and learning might be more inclusive of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island culture.
- Providing a voice to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and their parents within the St Mary's community about ways to improve teaching and learning.

Who is undertaking the project?

The project will be undertaken by Mrs Pat Jones.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project? There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this study.

What will I be asked to do?

- First, you are asked to participate in a 45 minute group discussion with other Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander parents about your experiences as a parent at St Mary's. This will include your views on how your son and/or daughter are experiencing classroom teaching and learning and how this might be improved. To assist with the collection of information, this discussion will be recorded.
- Second, you may like to volunteer for a further individual interview where you can focus on comments previously made in the group discussion concerning the teaching and learning of your son and/or daughter at St Mary's. This interview will be recorded.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

The results from this study will be made available to the Australian Catholic University and also Catholic Education Services in Cairns. The data collected will be identifiable to the researcher only and confidentiality will be maintained. Participants will not be identifiable. During the data collection process, participants will be consulted about the perceived assumptions of the researcher and clarification and correction is welcomed.

The researcher recognises that the use of Indigenous knowledge for research purposes should benefit Indigenous peoples. It is also recognised that the knowledge gained from Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students, parents and community members, who are participants in this study, remains the property of these participants.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

Results of the project will be provided on request.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the researcher (Pat Jones) at St Mary' Catholic College. (Please phone 40444202 or email pjones@smcc.qld.edu.au).

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number 2014 2070). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Research of Ethics Manager

Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)

Australian Catholic University

North Sydney Campus

PO Box 968

North Sydney NSW, 2059 (Phone: (02) 97392368)

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?

If you agree to participate in this project, please ensure that you sign both copies of the consent forms and return the researcher's copy to the researcher (Pat Jones) at St Mary's Catholic College.

Yours sincerely,

Pat Jones

APPENDIX E: Participant Information Letters and Consent Form (Teacher Aide)



AUSTRALIAN CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER

(Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Support Staff)

PROJECT TITLE: The experience of Australian Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island students and their families in a Catholic Secondary School

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Pat Jones

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a Doctor of Education research project described below.

St Mary's Catholic College community (staff, students and parents) are participating in this research project.

What is the project about?

The aim of the project is to explore how Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island students and their parents experience education at St Mary's.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the issues that influence the educational experience of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students at St Mary's.
2. Explore the cultural issues experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and how these may influence their attitude to learning.
3. Investigate how non-Indigenous teachers might become more aware of cultural differences and be better able to assist Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students.

The benefits of this study are to:

- Provide a better way of understanding how teaching and learning might be more inclusive of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander culture.
- Providing a voice to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and their parents within the St Mary's community about ways to improve teaching and learning.

Who is undertaking the project?

The project will be undertaken by Mrs Pat Jones.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this study.

What will I be asked to do?

- First, you are asked to participate in a 45 minute group discussion with other Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island support staff about your experiences at St Mary's. This will include your views on how Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island students are experiencing classroom

teaching and learning and how this might be improved. To assist with the collection of information, this discussion will be recorded.

- Second, you are asked to participate in a further individual interview where you can focus on comments previously made in the group discussion concerning the teaching and learning of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island students at St Mary's. This interview will be recorded.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

The results from this study will be made available to the Australian Catholic University and also Catholic Education Services in Cairns. The data collected will be identifiable to the researcher only and confidentiality will be maintained. Participants will not be identifiable. During the data collection process, participants will be consulted about the perceived assumptions of the researcher and clarification and correction is welcomed. The researcher recognises that the use of Indigenous knowledge for research purposes should benefit Indigenous peoples. It is also recognised that the knowledge gained from Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students, parents and community members, who are participants in this study, remains the property of these participants.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

Results of the project will be provided on request.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the researcher (Pat Jones) at St Mary's Catholic College- (Please phone 40444202 or email pjones@smcc.qld.edu.au).

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number 2014 2070). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Research of Ethics Manager

Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)

Australian Catholic University

North Sydney Campus

PO Box 968

North Sydney NSW, 2059 (Phone: (02) 97392368)

Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?

If you agree to participate in this project, please ensure that you sign both copies of the consent forms and return the researcher's copy to the researcher (Pat Jones) at St Mary's Catholic College.

Yours sincerely,

Pat Jones

APPENDIX F: Participant Information Letters and Consent Form (Teacher)



PARTICIPANT INFORMATION LETTER (Teacher)

PROJECT TITLE: The experience of Australian Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and their families in a Catholic Secondary School.

PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR: Mrs Pat Jones

Dear Participant,

You are invited to participate in a Doctor of Education research project described below.

St Mary's Catholic College community (staff, students and parents) are participating in this research project.

What is the project about?

The aim of the project is to explore how Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island students and their parents experience education at St Mary's.

The specific objectives of this study are to:

1. Examine the issues that influence the educational experience of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Island students at St Mary's.
2. Explore the cultural issues experienced by Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and how these may influence attitudes to learning.
3. Investigate how non-Indigenous teachers might become more aware of cultural differences and be better able to assist Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students.

The benefits of this study are to:

- Provide a better way of understanding how teaching and learning might be more inclusive of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander culture.
- Providing a voice to Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students and their parents within the St Mary's community about ways to improve teaching and learning.

Who is undertaking the project?

The project will be undertaken by Pat Jones.

Are there any risks associated with participating in this project?

There are no foreseeable risks for participating in this study.

What will I be asked to do?

- First, you are asked to participate in a 45 minute group discussion with other teachers about your experiences as a teacher at St Mary's. This will include your views on how Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students are experiencing classroom teaching and learning and how this might be improved. To assist with the collection of information, this discussion will be recorded.
- Second, you are invited to participate in a further individual interview where you can focus on comments previously made in the group discussion concerning the teaching and learning of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students at St Mary's. This interview will be recorded.

Can I withdraw from the study?

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. You can withdraw from the study at any time without adverse consequences.

Will anyone else know the results of the project?

The results from this study will be made available to the Australian Catholic University and also Catholic Education Services in Cairns. The data collected will be identifiable to the researcher only and confidentiality will be maintained. Participants will not be identifiable. During the data collection process, participants will be consulted about the perceived assumptions of the researcher and clarification and correction is welcomed.

The researcher recognises that the use of Indigenous knowledge for research purposes should benefit Indigenous peoples. It is also recognised that the knowledge gained from Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander students, parents and community members, who are participants in this study, remains the property of these participants.

Will I be able to find out the results of the project?

Results of the project will be provided on request.

Who do I contact if I have questions about the project?

Any questions regarding this project should be directed to the researcher (Pat Jones) at St Mary's Catholic College. (Please phone 40444202 or email pjones@smcc.qld.edu.au).

What if I have a complaint or any concerns?

The study has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at Australian Catholic University (approval number 2014 2070). If you have any complaints or concerns about the conduct of the project, you may write to the Chair of the Human Research Ethics Committee care of the Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research).

Research of Ethics Manager

Office of the Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research)

Australian Catholic University

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Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated. You will be informed of the outcome.

I want to participate! How do I sign up?

If you agree to participate in this project, please ensure that you sign both copies of the consent forms and return the researcher's copy to the researcher (Pat Jones) at St Mary's Catholic College.

Yours sincerely,

Pat Jones

APPENDIX G: Issues generated from Focus Group interviews that inform questions for Individual interviews

STUDENTS	PARENTS	AIDES	TEACHERS
Minority group status	Inclusivity = recognition, not segregation	<i>Wabu Minjin</i> = school family	Deficit of Indigenous cultural knowledge
Importance of Indigenous support staff	School experienced as family/community	Understanding their role as a 'vital link' between parents and teachers	Fairness to ALL cultural minorities
Relationships with and expectations of parents	Relationships with Indigenous support staff are important	Importance of establishing classroom relationships	Understanding of equity issues
Unavailability of 'help' with school work at home	Role of religion in instilling values	Understanding and overcoming 'shame' factor	Overcoming 'shame' factor
Criticism/resentment from extended family	Involvement of Indigenous parents in school matters	Influence of 'home family'	Indigenous or personality trait?
Resentment from non-Indigenous students	Awareness of Australian Indigenous history	Influence of Catholicity	Assumption of Indigenous students being content at St Mary's
Teachers having little knowledge of Indigenous culture	Stereotyping/racism in non-Indigenous and Indigenous communities	Misunderstandings and generalisations of cultural issues	Finding common values
Racism experienced in classrooms	School programs for Indigenous students		St Mary's identity is prioritised over cultural identity
Anger experienced over exploitation of Indigenous culture	School as preparation for future		
Appreciation of 'inclusive' culture of school	Cultural awareness programs for teachers		
'Cultural education' in History lessons	Catholic/non-public school as a 'safe' option		
Learning the Catholic ethos	Inherent values of a Catholic school		
Appreciation of teacher support and commitment	Appreciation of 'learning support' programs		
Teachers' low expectation of Indigenous students	Appreciation of teachers' commitment		
Pride in academic achievement	Cultural pride		
	Importance of relationship with teacher		
	Importance of resilience in Indigenous children		
	History effects communication with		

	Indigenous parents		
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