Aboriginal Pedagogies at the Cultural Interface

Thesis submitted by

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Statement on the contribution of others

Nature of Assistance	Contribution	Name
Intellectual Support	Cultural Knowledge	Kristi Chua, Pat Doolin, Veronica Brodie, Doris Shillingsworth, Jenny Robinson, Di McNaboe, Yvonne Hill, Brad Steadman, Cyril Hunter, Clancy McKellar, Greg McKellar, Murray Butcher, Brenda McBride, Rose Fernando, George Rose, Beryl Carmichael, Dr Bob Morgan, Margaret Gilson, Dharriwaa Elders, Phil Sullivan, Alma Sullivan, All My Family.
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Glossary

Note: The spelling system in this glossary is irregular, reflecting use by the people I work with and have key relationships with, rather than representing a unified orthography. The spellings of many words can be highly contested issues in some Aboriginal communities, so I apologise to those groups I exclude by my selection. Additionally, the meanings of these words can differ in different contexts and communities – the definitions here accord with the parameters of my personal worldview within the field of study and the terms I use to describe it in this work. Many of these are responsive to the demands of significant Aboriginal mentors or family, but some also carry my own shades of meaning. The glossary is placed here for reader convenience and also to foreground some of the themes that emerge in the thesis. Additionally, it is an expression of my conviction that a person's language holds the key to defining their worldview – so in identifying my language for this thesis I am identifying myself to the reader. This is a point of protocol.

Aboriginal/Indigenous

> In the Western region of New South Wales, many Aboriginal people are offended by the term "Indigenous". The preferred term is Aboriginal, although in the north and in my worldview "Indigenous" is a familiar term. Here I use "Aboriginal" when referring to local Aboriginal people in NSW and often native people in general. I am comfortable with calling myself Indigenous.

A-colonial

> This is a term I use to describe a non-oppositional Indigenous standpoint I am striving for as part of the reconciling ethic of this research. However, I must acknowledge that much of my discourse is still anti-colonial or post-colonial.

Ancestors

These are considered not to be part of the past or of mythology, but the eternally present ones who have gone before, who constantly guide us through signs and messages. They are revered and respected entities whose exploits often appear in Dreaming stories. *Synonyms: Old ones, hero ancestors, old people.*

Bundi *(Boon-dee)*

In western NSW this word is used in Aboriginal English for a club made of wood. *Synonyms: waddi, nulla nulla.*

Bunji *(Bahn-jee)*

In many Aboriginal Englishes this may mean friend, but in my worldview it specifically means cousin.

Business

This refers to a framework of processes, activities and Law that has tremendous gravity and significance. It can refer to specific activities in which people meet to develop or use customary knowledge or to discuss matters of great significance spiritually or culturally. It is capitalised to distinguish it from the English economic meaning of business. Ceremony is one point within the framework of Business. So this research project is Business, but certain events within it can be defined as Ceremony.

Ceremony

This is any event that has ritual significance and follows a process designed to increase relatedness. It is capitalised when it is an abstract noun, lower case when it is not (e.g. The ceremony was long; research as Ceremony.)

Cleverman/woman

This is a title I use for people who have supernatural knowledge or skills. Sometimes these people are twisted from what they know and seek to do people harm out of greed and jealousy.

Country

In standard English this may mean nation or countryside, but in Aboriginal English it refers to different abstracts involving political, spiritual and cultural claims to land and place. Concepts of Law are tied in with this, so that when you are "on country" you are bound by protocols for speech, behaviour and thought.

Dhumbaay *(Doom-bye)*

A drawing stick once used by Gamilaraay people to map out plans and processes and to augment verbal conversation with symbols.

Dreaming

I prefer this term to "Dreamtime". Dreaming refers to the continuous action of creation in the present as well as the past, a dynamic interaction between the physical and spiritual worlds. This action allows us to innovate and is the source of our immense adaptive capacity and ingenuity.

Dwongtjen

A Yaidtmidtung word from the Snowy Mountains in Victoria, referring to the pluralistic ability to adopt multiple worldviews.

Extra-ordinary

An adjective I use to describe events and data that fall outside of the mainstream academic view of what is real.

Flash

An Aboriginal English word used to describe an object that is new or expensive, or a person who displays these kinds of resources.

Non-Aboriginal knowledge or habits can be another kind of resource that would make a person "flash". Can be complimentary or derogatory depending on the intent of the speaker and the perspective of the listener.

Fulla *(fah-lah)*

Aboriginal English derived from "fellow". I use it to refer to other Aboriginal people, usually males.

Ganma *(Gahn-mah)*

Yolngu word referring to the dynamic balance between fresh and saltwater in coastal areas during the wet season.

Garma *(Gahra-mah)*

Yolngu word referring to the balancing or coming together of different social groups and systems for innovation and dialogue.

Gidjiirr *(Gi-jee)*

A kind of acacia tree found in western NSW, claimed by many locals to be the hardest tree on the planet. It gives off a pungent odour when rain is coming. *Synonyms: gidjee, stinking wattle*.

Growling

While in Standard English this takes a preposition (e.g. growl <u>at</u> you), in Aboriginal English it doesn't (e.g. growl you). It means telling a person off for a wrongdoing. If you get a growling from an Elder, you take it very seriously.

Gubba *(Gah-bah)*

NSW Aboriginal English term meaning non-Aboriginal person. When I'm up north I say "waipal" or "kaa' pach", but in the south I've fallen into the habit of using this Koori word. My preferred term is non-Aboriginal. I don't like the term "white people".

Kapool/Kabul *(kah-pool)*

Carpet snake creation ancestor for several east coast Peoples.

Keepers of knowledge

Aboriginal community members who are recognised by their community as owning particular knowledge, stories or Law.

Kinship

This describes the complex systems of relationships that define the way people relate to one another and define their roles, identity and obligations. Often knowledge is not shared until a person is placed within a family role of reciprocal obligation with a keeper of knowledge. Kinship extends beyond genetic relationships in this way, and also through marriage and customary adoption.

Kinuw *(kin-oow)*

Dugout canoe.

Koori *(koo-ree)*

Generic term meaning Aboriginal person, encompassing many language groups in NSW and Victoria. However, this is applied problematically as many NSW language groups refer to themselves as Mardi.

Language group

Language group is the term I usually use instead of “tribe”.

Lawman/woman

Similar to a cleverman/woman, only with specific obligations to land, community and ancestors in maintaining relatedness regarding a particular item of Aboriginal Law or an entity of land, climate, skies, waterways, plants or animals.

Manday *(mahn-day)*

Gamilaraay word meaning “whoops”, stairs, steps cut in a tree, stages in a process or procedure, or places on country that are sung in a particular order.

Medicine people

Similar to clevermen, only they work specifically with substances or totemic magic to influence wellbeing and relatedness.

Meta-knowledge

In the way I’m using it in this work, it means knowledge about knowledge, or awareness of the processes of learning and knowing (rather than the content of what is known).

Mob

Aboriginal English term referring to family or language group and sometimes Aboriginal people in general.

Ngak lokath *(ngahk lock-at)*

Wik term for the brackish water formed by the mingling of freshwater and saltwater in the wet season.

Ngamadja *(ngah-mah-jah)*

Wangkumarra word for mother. In this thesis it refers to a specific female hero-ancestor from a Wangkumarra Dreaming story.

Non-Aboriginal

My preferred term for people who aren’t Aboriginal. I don’t use the terms “black” and “white” if I can avoid them. Mostly this is out of respect for the myriad distinct cultures that form the arbitrary group we often refer to as “whitefullas”. Also, my ties to this group through marriage and descent limit my language here.

Nungar *(nahng-gah)*

A generic term for language groups in South Australia, similar to "Koori" and "Mardi" in NSW, or "Murri" and "Bama" in Queensland.

Nyoongar/Nyungar *(Nyoong-ah)*

A language group in Western Australia. Sometimes erroneously applied as a generic term for all Western Australian Aboriginal people.

Oldman

For me this means grandfather, although I sometimes use it as a term of high respect.

Pakarandji *(Pah-kah-rahn-jee)*

Wangkumarra word for boomerang.

Protocols

Some of these are rules that are fixed for behaviour in certain places or contexts on Aboriginal land and in Aboriginal communities. Sometimes they are guidelines for how to live your life and relate to others. Often protocols are fluid and change all the time with changing moods, relationships and circumstances. You need to maintain strong relatedness to be genuinely responsive to protocol. You can't follow it like a list.

Relationally responsive

My own term to describe an analytical approach that recognises the fact that I am related and accountable to everything in creation. I use this in data analysis to maintain a holistic view of data in terms of relatedness to the field and beyond. This also allows me to include spiritual aspects of my cosmology in the research process, like paying attention to signals from weather and animals.

Ritual

Any action that utilises metaphor as a catalyst for transformation or the shifting of energies associated with spirit/Dreaming.

Saami *(Sah-meh)*

Indigenous people of Finland, Denmark, Sweden and Russia.

Sand painting

Ritual artwork traditionally done on the ground with different coloured sands, sometimes now done on canvas with glue.

Shame

An Aboriginal social mechanism to maintain balance between independence and relatedness. This Aboriginal English term can equate to notions in Standard English of shyness, embarrassment, or the breaking of a protocol or taboo.

Songman

Similar in status to Lawman or cleverman, only a songman keeps Law in songs and can often work magic through music.

Spirit

The way I use this word is usually as an abstract noun referring to the Dreaming world and the forces from it that overlap and interact with the physical world.

Traditional Owners/Custodians

Members of the language group that holds the original claim to a place. Often a very problematic word to use in NSW as many sites are contested between competing language groups.

True-god

Precedes a statement I wish to identify as truth, or as my Word – my Word being something that I "know" in the sense that it is knowledge I am accountable for through Law and relationships.

Turnaround

A Dreaming event in which the spirit world separated from the physical world. Can also be a present event created through ritual.

Umpan *(oom-pn)*

In Wik this means do, cut, make, carve and write.

Unc

A familiar term of address in Koori English meaning Uncle, or older man whom the speaker respects.

Wamba *(Wom-bah)*

Gamilaraay word meaning crazy.

Word

See "True-god".

Work

Often I use this word to refer to ritual actions or Business. Also used in the sense of "working" magic.

Yarning

"Yarn" means dialogue, meeting, or discussion. The genre varies depending on the context and community. A yarn carries certain protocols and processes that are implicit. These are negotiated non-verbally between the speakers.

Yolngu *(yoohl-ngoh)*

A language group from the Northern Territory.

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I must acknowledge the traditional owners of the many language group areas of Western New South Wales who gave permission for me to be here on country for this work. I offer a silent moment of remembrance for Baru, Mum Wal Wal Tybingoompa and others who set me on the path to Law and have since passed. Also I pay my respects to the many Elders, Lawmen/women and keepers of knowledge in this region and beyond who guided my research directions, decisions and protocols. Special thanks for the endorsement, direction or support of the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group, western NSW Regional Aboriginal Education Team, Muda Aboriginal Corporation, Dubbo Aboriginal Learning Knowledge and Practice Centre, Dharriwaa Elders Group, Board of Studies Aboriginal Education Unit, Murdi Paaki Regional Assembly and Western NSW Department of Education and Training.

Abstract

This research project investigates two questions and proposes two answers. The first question asks how teachers can engage with Aboriginal knowledge. The proposed solution involves applying a reconciling theory of Cultural Interface to staff development. The second question asks how teachers can use Aboriginal knowledge productively in schools. The proposed solution lies in the application of Aboriginal processes rather than content, specifically the application of Aboriginal pedagogies.

In investigating these questions participants sought to incorporate authentic Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum in ways that increased intellectual rigour and supported mainstream academic success for Aboriginal learners. I propose that this outcome is currently blocked by an oppositional framing of Aboriginal and western knowledge systems, caused by shallow perceptions of Indigenous knowledge as being limited to token cultural items. This tokenism serves only to highlight difference and marginalise Indigenous thought. I propose that these issues can be addressed by introducing a reconciling theory for working with multiple knowledge systems and by focusing on Aboriginal meta-knowledge, particularly native knowledge of pedagogy.

So the dual aims of this thesis are to demonstrate how teachers can embrace deeper Aboriginal knowledge through reconciling processes, and how this knowledge can be integrated into daily classroom practice. This problem is explored in Aboriginal communities and their schools across Western New South Wales, Australia. A tool for integrating the common-ground pedagogies of multiple worldviews has been developed and incorporated into the regional education strategy as part of the study. Participating teachers engaged with this knowledge through training activities, planning days and trials, then reported on their activities via wiki, email, and informal interviews. The results of their work speak to the question of how to meet the New South Wales Department of Education and Training's mandate of incorporating Aboriginal perspectives across the curriculum (DET, 2009).

The reconciling principle that grounds the work is the theory of Cultural Interface, the dynamic overlap between systems previously defined as dichotomous and

incompatible. The Aboriginal pedagogy framework used for the project is drawn from local language, stories and cultural experiences and supported by the literature about Aboriginal ways of learning. This is combined with the best available western models of pedagogy used in the region, with the overlap between the diverse systems determining the teaching and learning methods used in the study.

The methodology employed in this work was an Indigenous standpoint methodology developed through a process of auto ethnography. This resulted in a methodology that was named ‘Research as Business’ grounded for the purposes of this study in a metaphorical framework of traditional carving processes. The sections of this thesis are also organised around the carving process:

1. Place, Story, Protocol and Wood
2. Bringing the Tools
3. Rough Cutting
4. Carving the Shape
5. Grinding
6. Smoothing

The figure below represents visually some of the actions that occur within this cultural process, using photographs taken during some of my carving activities that took place during the project.

Figure 1: Visual representation of carving process

The practical goal of the study is Indigenous knowledge production, with products

placed in the Aboriginal community for community ownership, use and benefit. Those knowledge products have been found to be effective tools for engaging students, teachers and community with Aboriginal processes for successful learning. These results support my claim that when knowledge is deep there are more similarities than differences between culturally diverse systems, and that a reconciling approach to engaging with these knowledge systems facilitates school-community dialogue and cooperation, as well as opportunities for increased student engagement and improved learning outcomes.

This thesis is characterised by an imperative to 'walk the talk'. Thus the content and meaning are reflected in the form. The text represents a dialogue and ongoing negotiation for meaning at the Cultural Interface between Aboriginal and western knowledge. Parts of the text are written with Indigenised genres and voice, and parts are written with westernised genres and voice. However, each contains aspects of the other as well. For example, academic metalanguage and structures sometimes appear in the oral-style sections. Similarly, in the academic writing, Indigenous ways of imparting knowledge influence the structure. For example, the academic imperative to explain, reference and justify a concept in detail at the moment it is introduced is often eclipsed by the Aboriginal protocol of introducing knowledge in incrementally deeper stages at the 'right moment' rather than immediately.

Sometimes important items are repeated several times, when they are concepts that require repetition at different stages of learning for deeper levels of understanding. For example, a gesture shown to me by an old man is described three times during the thesis. This kind of spiralling repetition is familiar to me personally as a highly effective Aboriginal way of learning, and does not seem too far removed from one of my non-Aboriginal supervisors' instructions for academic writing – "Tell 'em what you're going to tell 'em. Then tell 'em. Then tell 'em what you told 'em." As such, the written style of this thesis represents an attempt to reconcile dual intellectual systems, mirroring the integrative ethic of the research study itself.

During my research, a Law Woman told me the things I need to reveal about our higher knowledge, not the content but the processes for working with it, to bring about an awareness of the depth and capacity of Aboriginal intellect. So I share in this

work as much as possible my processes of knowing as they occur in the act of researching and reporting. The knowledge produced/revealed in my research is, as with all bodies of knowledge, an entity with its own spirit. It appears to me as a serpent winding around a series of objects – club, boomerangs, spear, a shield and nine stones. There is a pattern on the serpent's head that is mirrored on the shield.

Figure 2: The thesis as a shield

The shield shape is a powerful metaphor based on the shape formed by the overlap of two circles. This represents the concept of dynamic Cultural Interface between different knowledge systems. For me this is paramount Law from Dreaming actions that spark creation events, both past and present. I hope to bring that Law, which may be found in many cultures, into the project of Aboriginal education reform. This will allow genuine engagement in ideas like 'partnership' and 'walking together'.

The pattern on the shield shows the structure of the total thesis in its non-verbal form. The triangular parts represent the field work done with teachers and the analysis of that work. If I translate the entire shield pattern into a diagram with parts labelled in English, it looks like this:

Figure 3: The thesis as a diagram

This thesis is an attempt to translate as much of the research knowledge as possible into verbal concepts, then into print. The text translates specifically the knowledge of the shield pattern into a linear sequence of verbal learning (based on my carving process). The thesis is centred on the two questions represented in the middle of the diagram, but as the solutions to those problems are contained in the three rings around the outside, a lot of space is given to inducting the reader into this knowledge before addressing the research questions specifically. As the answers to the questions are contained in Aboriginal knowledge processes and Aboriginal concepts of synergy and balance, these are outlined in great detail. The Indigenous methodology and auto ethnography processes are given precedence, making transparent my own transformative journey in the research and offering this as an example of productive engagement of Aboriginal concepts and processes within mainstream education. The intent of this is to show that these are not only effective in primary and secondary schooling, but in tertiary education as well.

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Chapter One

Place, Story, Protocol and Wood

Thousands of years ago, on Wangkumarra land near Tibooburra, there was a magical being who took the form of a white owl. She loved the Wangkumarra people and often flew into their camp, but they always chased her away. One day she changed herself into human form, so that the people would welcome her and understand the things she wanted to tell them. (Excerpt from Ngamadja story, from Clancy McKellar).

Figure 4: First view of Ngamadja

This chapter reflects the stage of the carving process that occurs before the actual carving begins. That stage involves negotiating a system of permissions and protocols that grounds you in who and where you are, and what you know. It determines what purpose the products of your carving will serve in the community and how the act of making them will increase relatedness. It is about negotiating your role in the field of cultural activity. It is also about finding the right wood for the carving and knowing all the properties of the wood and the meanings and relationships around it. There are three sections in this chapter, introducing the researcher in relation to the field and the research problem, then outlining the methodology and ethics and the way these were negotiated, then finally inducting the reader into the Aboriginal pedagogy framework that was developed for teachers to use in this study.

The Researcher, the Field and the Research Problem

First I must acknowledge those Elders of the past, same way I acknowledge those Elders of today in this region, Elders I've met with for protocol, making sure they know this work and that it's allowed for me to do it here. It's good to think of the Elders of the future at these times too, because like those of the past and present, they are always around us, watching everything we do. Those are amongst the children right now, our students and relations, and they look to us to see how they are going to lead in the future.

The past, present and future are not separate concepts in all worldviews. Wal Wal Ngallametta, a Kugu Songman, Oldman, once told me about this – the way past, present and future are only one time and place, that creation is forever unfolding yesterday, today and tomorrow. In this way our hero ancestors still walk the land, and always will. He saw an overlap between things that others see as separate domains. He talked about "Kangk nanam, nyiingk inam", a concept that has always been around on this continent, the idea of a common ground or interface between old way and new way that keeps cultures alive and in motion.

For me this middle ground between opposites is who I am. I'm coming from multiple heritages – non-Aboriginal cultures from Europe, Aboriginal families from north, south, east and west, by descent, by adoption and extended kinship ties. The families I am related to by blood are the ones that impact the least on my identity and reality – having never lived in those places or even stayed in one place longer than five years in my whole life. I cannot claim those ancestral mobs, or those countries, as I have not been given any roles or responsibilities from them yet. The people who claim me are the members of the Wik family I belong to by customary adoption. That is where my name of Kaawoppa Yunkaporta comes from. Yunkaportas speak for me, determine how I live and do my work. So I'm mindful that in this work I'm representing Apalech clan from Wik people, and that the work I do here must benefit our countrymen in some way. I have to reconcile multiple protocols, obligations and

responsibilities from my mob, from my ancestors (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal), from the peoples and families of this region here in New South Wales who have taken me in and shared their knowledge with me, and also from my employers. Also I have to know the things I can't say, as well as the things I mustn't leave unsaid. The interface between these competing realities is a complex space, very difficult to navigate without offending somebody – but this is the space I live in, here in an overlap of worlds. The Cultural Interface. While it's a difficult space, it is also synergistic and dynamic, a space where creation and innovation can be found. When I view it this way, I can focus on my culture as an intellectual *advantage*, rather than just a social *dis*advantage.

When I think about the spaces of my reality, I think of that idea of an interface between opposites. I think of the song lines following those codfish Dreaming stories down the Darling River, where that hero ancestor started up here in Western NSW and chased that cod down to the junction at the Murray River, then south-west and finished at the sea, at a place where I have relatives I hardly know. Then the other cod story of Manala running east from that junction, hunted that way by those two brothers Jalanara and Jarramarra, out towards the country of other relatives I have never met. I think of other stories of two brothers then, stories that I've been given from all over. I think of those brothers from North Queensland fighting over a sawfish, splitting it and going their own ways North and South, making a line that links up many peoples today from top to bottom. I think of what I've been told about the kinship systems here – how the eight-way system in this place is a combination of the two different four-way systems from North and South.

I think of Ngul Mungk, Storyplace for Yunkaportas, where there is a huge stone that moves around, so that you often see it in a different place. Originally that came as a pebble on a whirlwind from China, then landed at Ngul Mungk, where it travelled to the water every day to drink, and grew to its current size. There are beings like dragons and lions there, in Story from that place, which makes me think of similar beings in Chinese traditions. I think of mermaid Dreaming stories we have in Australia, and how they are similar to those from all around the world. I think of the constellation of the seven sisters, the way they have been called this all over the world since ancient times, and have very similar Dreaming stories from Australia, Africa,

Indonesia and ancient Greece. This reminds me that at that *higher level* of spiritual knowledge, there are things that are the same no matter where you come from in the world.

The diagram below (figure 3) shows the way this common ground, or Cultural Interface, increases at higher levels of knowledge and decreases at lower levels of knowledge.

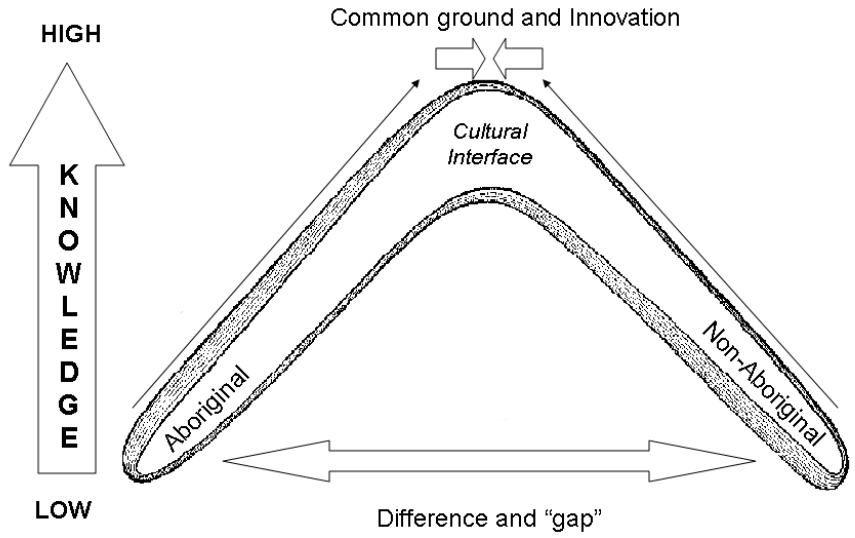

Figure 5: Boomerang Matrix of Cultural Interface Knowledge
(2008 training resource for teachers I developed during work on the first research question.)

This principle does not only apply to spiritual knowledge. It holds true for higher levels of *intellectual* knowledge too – and this is what I'm working with today, what I've been researching in this region since 2006. The higher knowledge focus of this work is pedagogy – so, not looking at *what* we learn, but *how* we learn it. The difference between process and content – I'm talking about learning *through* culture, not *about* culture. My employers speak to me of this in terms of making sure Aboriginal perspectives are *built in, not bolted on*. Words like 'embedded' are used to describe this requirement. And it is a requirement of the NSW Department of Education and Training's (2009) Aboriginal education policy – all teachers must include Aboriginal perspectives.

There is an injustice in this for non-Aboriginal teachers. They are expected to do something that nobody has shown them how to do. This is because nobody really knows how to do it. There is plenty of research and training around *what* it is, and *why* it is important, but there is very little out there that deals with the *how*. Teachers can receive 'cultural awareness' training, but this is mostly around aspects of Aboriginal legislation, history of dispossession, community dysfunction, anthropological studies and items of 'traditional' material culture. It may be useful for teachers to have this knowledge, but arguably it still does not answer the question, "How do I teach Aboriginal perspectives in my classroom?" That poor teacher – the same question might come up a hundred times a week in different forms, like, "How do I bring an Aboriginal perspective to a lesson on capillary action?" That teacher must revert to his/her training, and bolt on some Aboriginal content as an extra-curricular activity, or at best as a separate unit. So once again, the Aboriginal perspective is bolted on, marginalised. This damages relatedness - and in teaching, *relatedness is our business*.

This leaves us divided as Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal members of the school community. All we see are irreconcilable differences between us in thought, speech and behaviour. This is because *at the surface levels of knowledge, there are only differences across cultures*. You have to go higher or deeper, then you will find the vast common ground, the interface between different cultures. I've had this message from many Elders from all over. They see me working with these ideas, and they recognise them, and pass on more knowledge to build onto them. One old fulla from Dubbo showed it to me with a gesture, hands starting low and wide apart, then coming higher to meet together above his head.

The following chapters build upon this knowledge I've been given, bringing together community knowledge with academic knowledge to find that common ground. This is explored and solutions are proposed, developed, tested then positioned in the community for local benefit and ownership. That community comprises all the peoples of Western New South Wales, including Wangkumarra, Ngiyeempaa, Ngemba, Wayilwan, Wongaaypuwan, Kurnu, Wilyakali, Yuwaalaraay, Gamilaraay, Baakindji, Murruwari, Wiradjuri and other Nations. (This includes the thousands of Aborigines who are of non-local or uncertain descent, who are nonetheless members

of local Koori communities.) Many of these Peoples have experienced great losses of kin, language, land, identity and culture during colonisation. This work is intended to assist efforts to retain and develop endangered knowledges in this region, not as cultural artefacts, but as powerful ways of knowing that can inform the development of systems relevant to present and future but grounded in the past.

Developing and Implementing an Indigenous Ethical/Methodological Framework

Establishing Principles and Protocols

Indigenous methodologies tend to be anti-colonial, promoting resistance, political integrity and the privileging of Indigenous voices (Rigney, 1999). However, as this study focuses on the reconciling principle of the Cultural Interface as a means to engaging teachers with Aboriginal knowledge, the aspect of resistance needs to be reframed to avoid oppositional logic that might damage relatedness and sabotage the project. Knowledge will be problematised rather than criticised, and the standpoint will be 'a-colonial' rather than anti-colonial in an attempt to situate the subject beyond the confines of binary oppositions. The aim of this is to avoid the trap that Nakata (2007) refers to as taking sides, in the spirit of the reconciling principle of the Interface and Indigenous concepts of balance, synergy and reciprocity (Yarradamarra, 2007).

At the same time, I am aware of my responsibilities in this work to communicate the research to the community, to benefit the community and to centre the Aboriginal voice. I am also aware of my relational accountability (Steinhauer, 2002) to my land and people, and the community obligations and reciprocal duties I accrue in the course of acquiring Indigenous knowledge. In creating my own Indigenous standpoint and methodology in relation to the communities in which I am working, I am reclaiming, reframing and renaming the research endeavour (Smith, 1999; Martin, 2002). So while I cannot claim political neutrality, I can strive for integrity in promoting reconciliation as a non-oppositional form of resistance. Further, I am guided by the words of Pat Dudgeon (2008) who said that as Indigenous researchers,

> *Our first priority is the wellbeing of our people and that guides our ethical practice* (24).

I begin first with general Indigenous research principles, but avoid identifying a specific methodology arbitrarily in the early stages. Jelena Porsanger (2004), Saami Indigenous researcher, concurs with this approach. She insists that Indigenous researchers must not start with a specific method in mind, but allow their methodologies to grow from local ethical protocols and metaphors encountered in the research. This can also be seen in the processes used for developing Kaupapa Maori research methods in New Zealand (Smith, 2003). My adherence to this protocol means that research ethics and research methods cannot be presented in separate sections here, as they both grow from the same process and must sit side by side.

There are some general principles involved with Indigenous ethical research processes, outlined by many groups, departments and researchers, such as the Australian National Health and Medical Research Council's (2005) framework of Spirit and Integrity giving rise to Respect, Reciprocity, Protection, Responsibility and Equality. As another example, the Purga Project (Sheehan and Walker, 2001), outlines principles of Indigenous research as respecting the living and culturally-managed nature of knowledge, being present, listening deeply, learning and enriching community learning, being real, respecting all things, engaging in relations (cultural, environmental, historic and social), and understanding that while these principles may be generalisable, methods arising from them in a particular community are not. Generally speaking, there seems to be a consensus in the literature (Weber-Pilwax, 1999) that principles of Indigenous research include:

- interconnectedness
- clarity of intent
- foundation of lived experience
- theory grounded in Indigenous epistemology
- research as transformation
- sacredness and responsibility of integrity
- culture as a living process

Another point of consensus is that Indigenous research is about a level of relational accountability that goes far beyond the ethical concerns of mainstream research. Steinhauer (2002) asserts that our obligations as Indigenous researchers are "horrendous" (13). This is because Indigenous methodology is grounded in relational knowledge rather than individual knowledge – meaning you are related to everything in creation, and accountable to all your relatives (Wilson, 2001).

Processes and Spirit Work

My process for negotiating this ethical minefield with a degree of cultural safety was influenced by other Indigenous researchers (e.g. Martin, 2008; Wilson, 2001) and emerged as follows: figure out your ontology (what you believe is real), then your epistemology (way of thinking about that reality), then from this develop your methodology (a tool to make your epistemology further inform your ontology), all within a framework of your axiology (ethics and values). This is a general process for negotiating an Indigenous standpoint theory (Wilson, 2001). I worked through these dynamic stages using written and oral dialogues with Indigenous researchers and mentors. I also used auto ethnography writing over a year to explore these steps, drawing on my experiences of working at the Cultural Interface in education, community, cultural and land contexts. This sounds straightforward enough, but for me it opened up a complex world of paradoxes, challenges and dangers. Fortunately, some of the complexities of this project were marked for me in the literature, as signs, by people who had gone before me.

Nakata (2008) stated that an Indigenous standpoint theory is negotiated within the dynamic, contested space of the Cultural Interface, exploring the social relations in which the knower constructs knowledge, answering to the logic and assumptions on which it is constructed, rather than simply recording the subjective experiences of the knower (213). Further, Foley (2002) conceived this epistemological standpoint as grounded in Indigenous knowledge examined from a critical Indigenous perspective within Indigenous concepts of spirituality and philosophy.

I was comforted to find that this requirement of working with spirit has become part of Indigenous education research internationally, for example in Sarangapani's (2003) work in Canada on Rainbow literacy (a reading program informed by aspects of Indigenous cosmology). Spirit-based theory is also driving the innovation of new research tools and methodologies, such as the Cree reframing of the research process as Ceremony (O'Reilly-Scanlon et al, 2004) and in Australia in Karen Martin's (2008) Quandamoopah methodology, which draws on Noonuccal intellectual traditions informed by an ancestral core of spiritual knowledge. Another example is Steinhauer's (2002) method of drawing upon revealed knowledge from dreams and cellular memory. Revelations from such mystical sources are enshrined in many circles as being an essential element of Indigenous research methodology at the Cultural Interface with western knowledge systems (Castellano, 2000).

However, this is also dangerous and contested ground. It could be argued that these spiritual methodologies are sometimes oversimplified and subverted by indolent new-age agendas; this presents a clear danger that these methodologies will be defined in terms of the exotic, which only serves to marginalize Indigenous perspectives in the world of research (Urion, 1995).

This tendency can be detected in much of the literature, even in some of the most intellectually rigorous work. For example, in Kahakalau's (2004) excellent *Indigenous Heuristic Action Research* model, the interface of western and Indigenous methodologies is described as an adaptation bringing out an Indigenous flavour. She mentions working with visions, dreams and ancestral endowments, but she doesn't include any of this in the serious business of data collection and analysis, or show how it informed any of the research outcomes. Similarly, in West's (2000) *Japanangka Teaching and Research Paradigm*, an extremely rich spiritual narrative is presented at the start, containing deep knowledge that might have informed the structure and methodology of the project. However, it is set aside as mysterious knowledge and not referred to again at any point in the thesis.

In my own standpoint, spiritual matters need to be more than just 'flavour' or 'mystery' to lend an image of authenticity. For authentic work in this area, I need to include explicitly my extra-ordinary sources in the body of the work, not just allude to

them in the margins. These sources include places and beings within a sentient landscape (Marker, 2006) and beyond, giving rise to revealed knowledge from neither oral nor print texts. This is central to conceptualising an Indigenous methodology of research that suits my peculiar circumstances of culture, interests, experiences, location and vocation – identifying my standpoint (Rigney, 1999).

Producing an Indigenous Standpoint Theory and Methodology

I enfold aspects of Pathway as an Indigenous methodology, as this framework incorporates spiritual processes, beginning with auto ethnography methods centring the self, then moving into the scholarly discourse and the group cultures of the research site (Fredericks, 2007; O'Reilly-Scanlon et al, 2004). This ensures that research occurs from the inside out, centring the Indigenous voice through self-narrative and answering that crisis of representation which has arisen from post-modern discourse (Houston, 2007). This use of Aboriginal narratives and auto-ethnographies as research tools has been recognised as a radically empirical technique that brings both Indigenous and colonial notions of being into dialogue and revalidates everyday lived existence for the Indigenous subject (Simpson, 2006). It frees us from the façade of objectivity and allows us to decolonise the research process (Fredericks, 2007). From the Pathway methodology emerges notions of research as story, research as dialogue, and research as Ceremony (O'Reilly-Scanlon et al., 2004), all of which I drew upon in constructing my methodology. This was achieved by means of the auto ethnography and Indigenous dialogue process though which I established my standpoint.

The standpoint theory and methodology took a year to construct, working with field notes, narratives and reflections written during my experiences working as Aboriginal Education Consultant for the Department of Education and Training in schools and communities all over western New South Wales. This work involved intensive consultation with Aboriginal communities and schools to develop school programs incorporating Aboriginal language, processes and knowledge. The daily interactions and experiences of this job provided me with rich data, wisdom and solutions which I organised in field notes according to the abovementioned steps of establishing

ontology, epistemology and methodology in a framework of axiology. This process also contributed findings that spoke to the research questions, and so data from the field notes was incorporated into the analysis. Each month the field notes were forwarded to my academic supervisors and Indigenous mentors to extend the discussion and gain insight into the strengths, subjectivities and inconsistencies of my standpoint. This was a very difficult and transformative journey that cannot be adequately described in this genre, so is related in detail in Chapter 3, using a more culturally appropriate format.

In the end a process of 'Research as Business' was articulated in the field notes, drawing particularly on my framework of knowledge around carving practices. (Note: as this is grounded in men's Business, I use *his* rather than *his/her*.)

- Knowing your Business: Indigenous researcher explores and defines his standpoint and cultural capital, inside and outside of the field. Also explores the knowledge and stories of locals as they are offered.
- Induction to new Business: Indigenous researcher accepts invitations, permissions and inductions for protocols and Business shared by the Aboriginal community where the research is taking place, and also explores the knowledge made available from other communities he is connected to in this work (e.g. education researchers). Accepts and fulfils obligations that come with knowledge. Takes on a community role.
- Exchange of cultural resources: Indigenous researcher brings stories of relatedness from first two steps alongside the research participants' stories and works through these in ceremonial or cultural activity, allowing these to shape the research questions.
- Gathering more cultural resources: Indigenous researcher collects or replenishes the physical and non-physical goods needed for the research.
- Practise Ceremony and craft using cultural resources: Indigenous researcher trials and implements the action of the research.
- Refine and renew Ceremony and craft: Indigenous researcher reflects, analyses and improves on practice.

- Position social goods arising from Business for benefit of people and land: Indigenous researcher produces, shares and positions knowledge products, then closes the Business of research with Ceremony when it is certain that this Business has served the purpose of strengthening relatedness.

I later came across a Yolngu research methodology (Murakami-Gold and Dunbar, 2005) that showed significant congruence with my methodology and affirmed it for me as having integrity in terms of Business. That methodology contained the following steps (translated from Yolngu language):

1. Properly in place
2. Reminding each other of lawful ways of doing things
3. Sharing the tasks to be done
4. Bringing back what we must share
5. Putting what we have produced in place

After identifying 'Research as Business' as the pathway I was on, it only remained to continue following that path. Over the duration of the auto ethnography process, I had spent a lot of time engaging Elders, community members, teachers, school administrators, education officers, Aboriginal leaders and mentors in the research questions. These questions were:

- How can teachers come to Indigenous knowledge?
- How can teachers use this knowledge productively in their classes*?*

Crafting the Research Tools

These questions were given to me in many forms and from many government and community sources during that first year. In working with these and following those journey paths (detailed in Chapter 3) research tools were both found and produced in accordance with the cultural framework of carving traditional tools and weapons. This was both a metaphorical framework for the Research as Business methodology and a practical way to access solutions informed by ancestral knowledge (i.e. drawing

insights and processes from the physical act of carving objects). Soon I formed a team comprising Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal colleagues, and we engaged with each other and with community to explore the Cultural Interface at the deep level of meta-knowledge. The aim of this work was to design a pedagogy framework combining the best elements of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal pedagogies. This was intended as a tool to assist in the research around bringing teachers to Aboriginal knowledge.

The team refined the pedagogical tool by working with it in twelve schools across the region over six months (schools cannot be named due to government department protocol). These schools and communities were visited as few as four and as many as twenty times during that year for consultation, promotion and induction around the pedagogy tool, depending on distance from the office (the schools being up to ten hours drive away). Staff from these and other schools across the region were also engaged in the pedagogy tool through my presentations and addresses at ten regional conferences and over thirty school workshops and training events.

Teachers, consultants, administrators, community members and mentors invited me to induct them into the use of the Aboriginal pedagogy framework. This invitation was important, as I had a strong personal protocol as part of my Indigenous methodology that I could not enter or approach a school or community until I was invited first. People had to approach me to become part of the research, hearing about the new pedagogy framework on the grapevine. The local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group endorsed, advised and supported the project. It was presented to and received favourably by the Murdi Paaki regional assembly. There was a buzz about it, and following a presentation at the Western Region School Education Directors' conference in 2008, the new Aboriginal pedagogy framework was adopted as part of the regional education strategy for 2009 and included in regional planning documents.

In the development of this tool can be seen the authenticating power of the Research as Business methodology (applied through my personal metaphor of traditional carving practice) – the learning, the story, the protocols, the collection and exchange of resources, the chipping, the shaping, the grinding, the smoothing, the testing and the placing. After it was developed and refined in this way, a two month period was approved for the final data-gathering stage. That stage was designed to test this tool

formally and then position it in the community for community benefit, while also utilising the tool to illuminate the question of how teachers can come to Aboriginal knowledge. The work of making it a genuine part of the field, invited, endorsed and advised by both the Department and community organisations (and negotiated within the complex protocols of both), positioned the project as an authentic education program, rather than an independent experiment.

Method and Data Collection

It was important that I offered multiple modes of participation to suit the diverse needs of the participants (approximately 50 teachers in western New South Wales public schools with an interest in engaging with Aboriginal knowledge through their work). Teachers were given access to Aboriginal knowledge in various ways – power point presentations, lectures, hands-on reflection using carved objects, structured yarns with community members, modelled lessons, one-on-one dialogue, emails and an interactive wiki (http://8ways.wikispaces.com). Often it was a combination of a number of these methods. Data was collected via email, wiki discussion, handwritten feedback following my presentations, or notes handwritten by the researcher of observations and informal interviews.

This flexible method was grounded in the notion that in Indigenous research, methods for data collection are really expressions of our ways of knowing, being, and doing (Martin, 2008). Therefore methods must follow codes and protocols that demand adjustments to behaviour and ways of communicating in different settings with different participants. So it was important for me to offer multiple modes of participation for the heterogeneous group of teachers contributing to the project, both to adhere to my own cultural protocols and to honour their own diverse identities.

The next stage was to address the key question: how can teachers actually integrate Indigenous knowledge into their practice? This stage involved drafting, team-planning, team-teaching and sharing lesson/unit design between participants, followed of course by implementation. Planning documents were collected as data, along with teacher feedback on how the lessons went. Feedback once again took the form that

participants were most comfortable with, including email, direct lesson observation with note-taking by the researcher, wiki discussion, personal reflection/statement writing, or yarns (informal interviews) with the researcher taking notes.

The data was then collated at the end of the approved period (May and June) from all the emails, wiki posts, wiki site statistics (hits, page views etc.), yarning notes and lesson observation notes that had been volunteered by participants. Data from the previous year's field notes that gave vital insights into the research questions was also included. I printed this collated data out and sat with it for many weeks, carrying it on a journey to Cape York to confirm family permissions to proceed with writing up the research. This began my process of relationally responsive analysis. Up north I was given hard lessons on finding the right focus and not being distracted by fears or emotional issues, in activities on country such as spearing crabs and stingrays while wading waist-deep in water with crocodiles and sharks visibly present. This was a specific mental process that involved naming and acknowledging the emotive issue (shark!) and then firmly placing it outside of my mind to focus completely on the pertinent issue (stingray to spear). This experience informed a preamble to the analysis that acknowledged and set aside the divisive issues and oppositional baggage encountered in the data. On that journey up north it was also decided by family that I needed to remain in western New South Wales for an extra year to follow up with communities and Elders and meet my obligations that were accrued during the course of the research. These were 'Big Bora' things that needed to be settled and closed in the south before returning north again, things that would be dangerous to myself and others if carried for too long.

Upon my return to New South Wales, I arranged and rearranged the collated data in ways that were 'right' according to my Indigenous standpoint. I used my process of relationally responsive analysis to arrange items in this way, and to determine which things were important and which realisations should inform the written analysis. This was a holistic technique focusing on the interrelatedness between all aspects of the data, the participants' relationships (with myself and others), my standpoint, participants' standpoints and the field (including realms of land and spirit). Observations of messages from land and ancestors guided this relationally responsive

analysis, and I carried all of the data on paper and in my head in sleeping and waking for over a month to make sure I missed none of these messages.

Eventually, my understanding of the messages contained in the collated data took a shape in my head that was ‘right’; my criterion for this being that it was perfectly symmetrical. I worked through this shape and confirmed its ‘rightness’ by carving over a dozen coolamons, boomerangs, woomeras and other objects that expressed either parts or the whole of the knowledge. When this was right I made a very large carving that I won’t describe here for cultural reasons, although part of that carving was reproduced on a shield which I can share safely (see Figure 2 in Abstract, pg xviii). Sitting with this, I placed the symmetrical, symbolic understandings I had of the data within a verbal, sequential framework that would make the knowledge accessible in written form. The two halves of the body of data were divided according to the two research questions and then those were divided into elements that had emerged from the Business mentioned above. All the data was moved around in a Word document to sit within these sections, then I had to sit with each of those sections for a day and a night to find the patterns from the whole inside the part – the patterns that carried ‘revealed knowledge’ about the messages of integrity that had emerged from the Business of gathering and sitting with the data.

At this point it would be appropriate to provide a definition and list of steps for relationally responsive analysis. However, my understanding of the process is that it can only be properly understood through experience or a narrative of lived experience. So I offer the story told in the previous three paragraphs as an explanation and example of relationally responsive analysis.

Writing the analysis (Chapter 5) was a way of grinding and smoothing the wording of my arguments into a shape that best resembled my understandings from the Business. The linear nature of print brought the dimension of time/sequential reality to the activity, so I had to consider the right ‘times’ in the text to introduce certain concepts, considering the way the reader would be coming to each item in relation to all others in the process of reading the analysis, and also within the whole thesis. For this I also took cues from the relationally responsive analysis.

Processes for coming to Aboriginal knowledge and examples of ways to use it in education were tabulated, compared and analysed in relation to other dimensions such as protocol. I used the process of writing the analysis to transform the implicit knowledge in the data into a number of knowledge products that could be used for community benefit (e.g. a set of protocols for working at the Cultural Interface).

By the end of this process, local Aboriginal people identified themselves as appropriate people to begin inducting teachers into use of the Aboriginal pedagogy framework that was developed for the project. Gradually a number of local people were established as appropriate keepers for this knowledge, and assumed custodianship of the framework. The cultural resources and carved objects that embodied the eight Aboriginal pedagogies were placed in the Aboriginal Knowledge and Practice Centre in Dubbo. Those Aboriginal pedagogies are introduced in the next section.

The ultimate goal of the project was to spark the ongoing collaborative production of transformative education systems from local knowledge/resources and ensure that ownership and benefit of these systems remained with the Aboriginal community into the future. To this end, the research project and my involvement in it would have to continue for at least a year after the final thesis was completed and graded.

Oral and Visual Text

This section takes the reader through the same process of words and concepts used to induct teachers into the pedagogy framework used for the research. This text is a ‘written yarn’ – a similar genre to the introduction at the beginning of this chapter, in that it is written in an oral style, with use of second person and first person plural to invite an instructional, dialogical exchange between speaker and listener. Narratives and visuals are used as part of this written yarn genre. Some non-standard English forms are present. Questions are asked, but these aren’t rhetorical – they are for the reader to engage with through reflection. Repetition is used in a cycle as ideas are reinforced at different levels through the text. References are not included, as these would be intrusive, so the knowledge represented here is referenced in other areas of this thesis that deal with literature reviews and analysis.

Generally, oral forms appear in the corpus of literature at the beginning of a paper when Aboriginal writers are following protocol of saying who they are and where they are from (e.g. Dudgeon, 2008). However, as I aim to bring Indigenous knowledge out of the margins and into the structure and body of this project, I am ensuring that these forms are appearing throughout the text.

Yarning for Induction to the Eight-way Aboriginal Pedagogy Framework

When I first learned how to make boomerangs, there were a lot of things going on at once to bring me to that knowledge. I was told stories about how boomerangs were used locally and non-locally, and stories relating to the places they were made and the people who made them. I had to tell the stories I knew as well. I had to know everything about the land, plants, animals and landforms where different kinds of wood came from, the seasonal signs and changes in those places and the cultural meanings of all these things. Ideas were shared with gestures, silences, implied meanings and metaphors. I had to reflect on these things on my own and I had to find

the ancestral knowledge that resided in my body already for this activity, the skills and orientations I was born with that I could bring to the table. Images of the procedures I needed to learn were mapped out for me, drawn in the air, drawn in the dirt, and drawn in my mind. Completed boomerangs were shown to me, with explanations of the stages the carver had to go through to make them. Community protocols were reinforced to determine how, where and when I would be allowed to approach the activity. The purpose of the boomerangs was made clear to me as part of family business and the local economy. Shapes and designs were examined. There was no particular sequence to this learning activity, and often seemingly unrelated conversations and activities would be suddenly related back to the business of carving to highlight an important point.

I know that this way of learning gave me a depth and integrity of carving knowledge that I could not have learned through a simple program or class. But I also know that when I have applied the same orientation of learning to my western tertiary education, I have enjoyed a level of academic success higher than ever before. More than that – I know my children do well at school because these are the values of learning that they have picked up from me. This makes me question whether my culture really does disadvantage me intellectually and academically, as many people in the past have led me to believe.

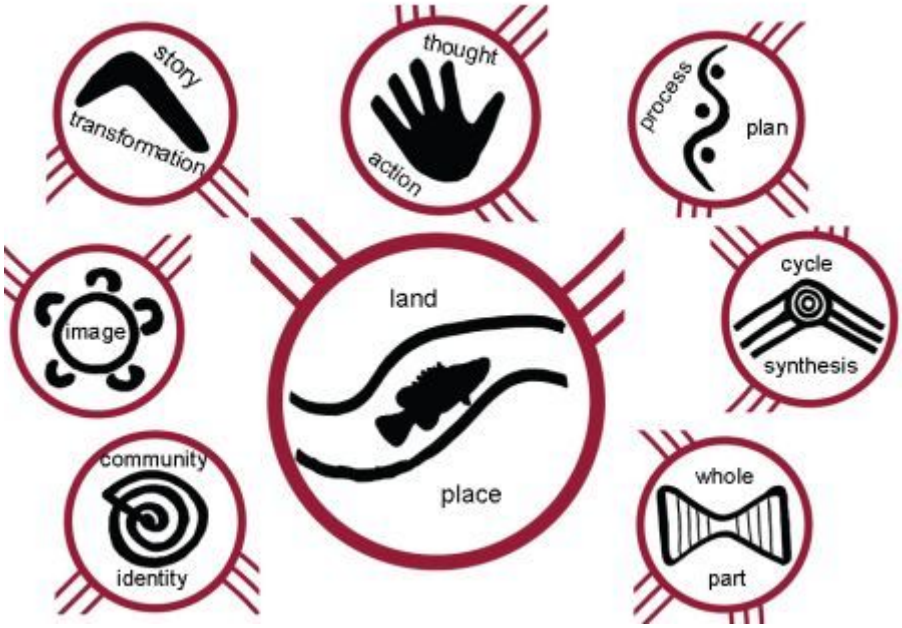

Figure 6: Eight ways of working with knowledge

Culture way, there are patterns and processes coming from land and place that impact on the way we do things, the way we think, learn, feel, live and learn. In the image above, you can see some of the ways we work with this knowledge to create and recreate our cultures and realities.

- We connect through the stories we share.
- We picture our processes of knowledge.
- We see, think, act, make and share without words.
- We keep and share knowledge with art and objects.
- We work with lessons and metaphors from land and nature.
- We put different ideas together and create new knowledge.
- We work from wholes to parts, watching and then doing.
- We bring new knowledge home to help our mob.

I'm going to yarn about these things now, try to show how I see these ways as a common ground across all cultures, try to explain how these ideas might be used to improve education for all students. First I have to talk about where this knowledge sits at the overlap between different systems.

At the surface level of knowledge, there are only differences across cultures. You have to go higher or deeper to find the vast common ground, the interface between different cultures. This deep digging or high flying for knowledge at the Cultural Interface needs to become part of how we think about education. I've had this message from many Elders from all over. One old fulla from Dubbo showed it to me with a gesture, hands starting low and wide apart, then coming higher to meet together above his head.

To illustrate, let's look at this use of gesture, that non-verbal communication, from a colonial perspective – but from a way of lower order thinking, shallow knowledge in that tradition. In that way, we might talk about how blackfullas talk a lot using hands rather than words, and how whitefullas talk too much. How blackfullas are experts at reading body language, and can tell everything there is to know about a whitefulla within three seconds of walking into a room. How blackfullas are best at learning

things that don't require words, like sport, art, craft and labour. How this non-verbal orientation is a barrier to cross-cultural communication and educational success. But then at the same time, we'd probably also claim that Aboriginal society is an oral culture, another orientation said to bring intellectual disadvantage. This example is coming from a perspective of extremely shallow knowledge. As you can see, at that level there is no common ground, and all we see are differences and deficits – mismatch and lack. What we see is a *gap*. We talk about 'closing the gap', but this is a gap in understanding, not ability. We can't eliminate *that* gap with solutions informed by shallow understanding. So let's see what that example looks like at the deep end, where the Cultural Interface or common ground comes out.

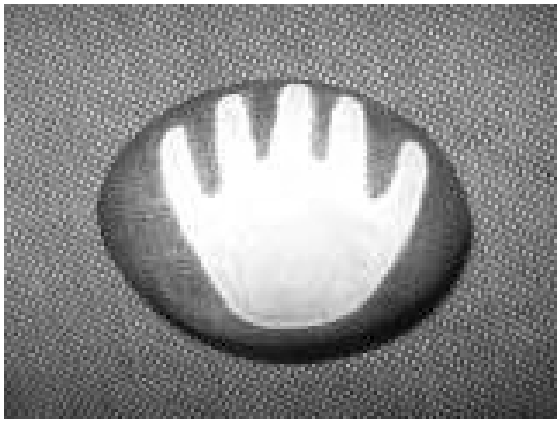

Figure 7: Non-Verbal Knowledge Text

This one is an emu egg. The hand carved in it represents the power of knowledge that is learned without words. It indicates a non-verbal way of learning that can be spiritual, as in dreams, inspiration, inherited knowledge (cellular memory) and reflective meditation. It also indicates non-verbal learning that is physical, as in practical activities and sport, or reading visual information through signals given by people or land. Once again, this is only a brief summary of part of a text. The emu egg has at least nine layers, and so does this text. It refers to just one way of learning, a way of learning that people from anywhere in the world share in various ways.

Are we still thinking about the gap, or are we now aiming for a higher level of awareness? Have we found a common ground? Can we seek that in our classroom practice? For example, in mainstream education we talk about least to most intrusive behaviour management, with the least intrusive being non-verbal. Is this method

effective only for Indigenous students, or is this for everybody? Do we have this in common? Yes, we do.

Figure 8: Tokenistic versus Embedded Approaches

Suddenly now, right here, our Aboriginal perspectives and 'cultural awareness' are not just coming in at the level of content. Suddenly, we're moving away from tokenistic cultural information and towards embedded knowledge (see figure 8). Not just looking at what we know, but our best ways of knowing it. Ways of learning. Suddenly, we've taken Aboriginal perspectives out of that arena of content and cultural items, and we're exploring those Aboriginal perspectives in pedagogy.

Aboriginal culture is not the *topic* for learning now – suddenly it's become part of our *framework* for learning. We've gone deeper, used some higher order thinking, synthesised, and found that Cultural Interface.

We didn't find this knowledge here in this yarn by taking a straight path. We had to take some risks to get there, and we found the knowledge along the way, not at the end. We didn't use linear thinking to get there. We used non-linear thinking. Here is another text that is about that non-linear way of learning.

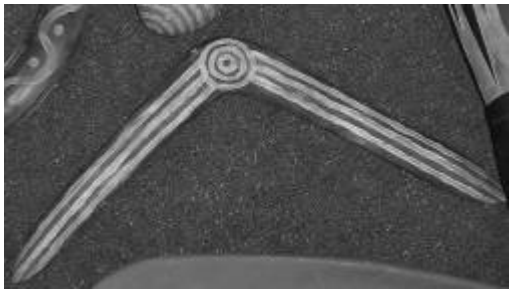

Figure 9: Non-linear Knowledge Text

It might seem crazy to think of a boomerang as a text that can be read. But this text tells me that in learning, the shortest distance between two points is *not* a straight line. You have to go off the beaten track if you want to find knowledge rather than basic information. Sometimes those directions might seem crazy or irrelevant, but in an Aboriginal holistic worldview in which all things are connected, this is what makes your knowledge deep, personal and experiential. Is this a cultural difference? Is there no holistic, non-linear thinking in western knowledge? Once again, you have to go higher, and you'll see that fields like science, maths and engineering are all holistic in their most complex work. This crosses over into other disciplines too – like complexity theory has moved from science and into organisation management and leadership models. Formulae from econometrics are used for climate change models.

You can see that two-way interface there in the boomerang too – there are two ways coming to meet in the middle, to find common ground, but also to create synergy and innovation. This synergistic principle of balance and interface is a cornerstone of Aboriginal worldviews. For example, in Yolngu culture there is that concept of Ganma, where freshwater and saltwater meet to make brackish water. Apart from being an important ecological catalyst in the wet season, this concept also informs their social system and values, and the idea of Garma which is a model for cultural exchange. You can see a similar concept in the design of the boomerang, as a way of thinking and learning through using different perspectives. At the middle of the boomerang there you see circles too, representing circular logic. In our way you can see that in kinship systems, in story genres and language structure. In western science you can see it in studies of life cycles and such.

But the most important thing here is the way the two sides meet in the middle. We're not trying to snap off one half of the boomerang. We're not trying to 'close the gap' between the tips by trying to bend them together. The knowledge is not found by moving from one end to the other at the lowest part. It's there in the middle at the highest part. The boomerang in its shape and flight doesn't go straight – it goes out to the side. This can be a problem solving strategy. One Aboriginal teacher I know from the western region told me a story about a short-sighted girl in her class who refused to wear her glasses. Now, to take a straight path to solving this problem, many teachers would bribe, threaten, or cajole the girl. Some might confront her with the problem to talk it through, or even have meetings with parents and family. Not this teacher. She just brought herself a pair of fake glasses and started wearing them every day, making it seem like a cool thing to do. Soon the student was wearing her own glasses with pride. So can you see the problem solving strategy there, that way of finding creative solutions by approaching problems indirectly or from a new angle?

The boomerang, rather than being a wall ornament or exotic artefact, actually carries a thinking strategy. Is that present in non-Aboriginal cultures too? Yes it is, if we dig deeper and look for that concept of Lateral Thinking. If we study de Bono, we can find that same idea of avoiding linear thinking and going off in new directions, using what he calls 'provocation'. In this way, innovative thinking takes the shape of a zig-zag pattern, similar to the design painted on this carving of a blue-tongue lizard.

Figure 10: Learning Maps

Once again, there is overlap here across cultures. In work with a western region language group to map out local ancestral logic systems, some Dreaming Stories were found to hold the common ground between lateral thinking and Aboriginal logic. There were stories of ancestral heroes who had broken the law by travelling in a straight line. They were punished for this, as the right way to travel is taking a winding path. The idea of a winding path as a map for learning was explored in local cultural contexts like painting, and it was found across many activities relating to native knowledge and learning. It came out in shapes in the landscape as well, in winding rivers and old pathways.

One day I was discussing this winding path as a map for learning with Dr Bob Morgan, a Gamilaraay man, as we were travelling around the Menindee lakes. We talked about research literature we'd both read about the Aboriginal way of visualising processes. We talked about the way this linked to Quality Teaching and scaffolded literacy programs through the notion of explicit pedagogy. We talked about the Gamilaraay traditional use of *dhumbaay* – sticks for drawing processes and concepts on the ground during conversations and meetings. We talked about the way learning processes were inscribed in the stars of the Gamilaraay night sky to follow those winding paths that the old Dreaming stories spoke of. We were excited about this metaphor, drawing the winding path symbol in the air and yarning through the ideas, when we stopped to look at a blue tongue lizard. As the lizard walked away, it left that same winding path shape in its tracks in the dust. We took this as a strong sign, a message that the old fullas were confirming this work. The symbol of a winding path carried a lot of knowledge from the interface of western and Aboriginal pedagogy. Uncle Bob asked me to carve him a blue-tongue lizard to carry that knowledge (see figure 10) and now he keeps that carving and holds the knowledge for this Aboriginal way of visualising learning processes.

Here is another carved text that carries all that knowledge – the boomerang I carved later to assist in passing this knowledge on to teachers.

Figure 11: Learning Maps Text

Those spots show that outcomes are not achieved at the end of a learning experience, but are gathered along the way. Can this help us in our thinking around formative and summative assessment? It also shows that all learning has a shape, and that this shape can be mapped out visually for students. Learning is not a straight progression of memorised facts – it is a journey, and these journeys can be planned or recorded as a visual map that makes outcomes explicit for students right from the start. Learning maps work well in classrooms – from simple mind-maps and timelines to huge colourful pieces covering entire walls, mapping out units or even an entire year of work. This allows students to navigate visually through the process of becoming self-directed learners.

This visual orientation is important. It is another way of learning that sits in the interface between Aboriginal and western ways. Symbols and images have been used for millennia around the world to carry and communicate knowledge. In local traditions that some people call ‘pre-literate’, this might bring to mind message sticks, and also the drawing sticks that were once used in this region as a normal part of conversation, for sketching out ideas on the ground. Use of symbols and diagrams to assist with learning and communication is something that sits solidly in the interface between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures. Here is a text that carries a lot of knowledge about this way of learning.

Figure 12: Symbolic/Imaginal Knowledge Text

This also brings to mind again that concept of balance. When you play clap sticks, you can't hold them too tight – *dum dum* – this makes a muffled sound. Too loose and they chatter – *drrrrrrr* – but that place between tight and loose – that's the way to get the best sound – *chip chip*. It's the same with our children – in Aboriginal society we know to give them that balance between communal support and independence. That delicate balance between relatedness and autonomy is central to Aboriginal worldviews. But is this just the right way for *Aboriginal* kids? No, this is supported in western ideas of warm-demandingness, and also in scaffolded approaches to learning.

You see this scaffolding in Aboriginal learning styles as well. My son is young yet, and he watches me carving, and will keep watching for years to come. He joins in sometimes for small parts of the activity, when he is ready, and gradually he will take on larger parts until he is carving for himself. This is ancient pedagogy, tried and true. When you learn corroboree, you see the whole dance first, learn the whole stories and places behind it, with increasingly finer details understood until you are learning each individual step. Then you join in for small parts when the dance is performed, gradually increasing your role in it until you're dancing the whole thing. As I said previously, all learning has a shape, and this way of learning looks like a double funnel, with the two necks of the funnels coming together at the centre. You can find that shape of learning in this text:

Figure 13: Deconstruct/Reconstruct Pedagogy Text

This drum from the Torres Strait Islands shows that shape of learning, with your model text here at the drum skin, broken down into increasingly smaller parts until we reach the narrow part at the centre with the most basic elements of the text, which is then built back up again independently to make a new text at the other end.

This way does not only exist in the Aboriginal world. The same shape of that double funnel diagram can be found in literacy scaffolding approaches – all scaffolding follows this same shape of learning when it comes to the teaching of texts. And I hope by now we have a more flexible idea of what a text can be. This is not just about print literacy. Everything is a text – a sum is a text, a basketball game is a text – and texts need to be modelled before we can expect our students to reproduce them independently. You can't just construct something out of nothing, with no plan or prior knowledge. First, you must *de*construct a model, then *re*construct it. Deconstruct, reconstruct – that's this way of learning. I'm using this way of learning in this written yarn – modelling a framework for learning then breaking it down into smaller parts that the reader can take away and work with independently. In the figure below you can see this structure in the way I teach young men how to make boomerangs – the same way I learned.

Figure 14: Deconstruct/Reconstruct

I can't speak for that text, that drum, because I have no Islander heritage or family base and can't speak for Islander people, or carve these drums. So while I carved the other objects you've seen here, I had to buy this one up north. But it is important to include this culture here – we say Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or ATSI, but we often ignore the TSI part of that in the southern parts of Australia. You'll notice that even though I can't speak as an authority on Islander culture, and can't demonstrate use of exotic cultural items, I *can* acknowledge that culture when I'm working with higher order thinking, in this case talking about pedagogy. There is a lot of story too here, about the theoretical base of this work, the concept of balance and the interface, that is grounded in deep knowledge originating in the Torres Strait.

Dr Martin Nakata, a Torres Strait Islander academic, is the person who first coined the phrase "the Cultural Interface". He has been my mentor in this work since 2003, and his writing has provided model texts for my own work as a post-graduate student. So it took a lot of years to develop these ideas to this point. He approves of my use of these cultural items as texts containing deep knowledge, as he has always condemned the teaching of simple cultural items without intellectual rigour. The first time he saw this work, he was very excited, and had tears in his eyes. He had to call his wife to tell her about it. Like many of us, he's been waiting a long time for the 'how'.

Did you see there, I couldn't help it – I have to tell stories. This is because story is also a vitally important way of learning. Story has carried and passed on our knowledge forever, not just for Aboriginal people, but all the people of the world. Here is a text that carries the shape of story as a way of learning:

Figure 15: Narrative Knowledge Text

This is a killer boomerang, so the two sides aren't the same length – with a long handle and a short blade. This is the shape of how we learn through story. And this shape is not unique to the Aboriginal world – I've seen the same shape in diagrams of western narrative models as well. Story takes you up, then down, leaving you in a place that is higher than before. (There, I've shown you the model text, now I'll break it down – deconstruct it.)

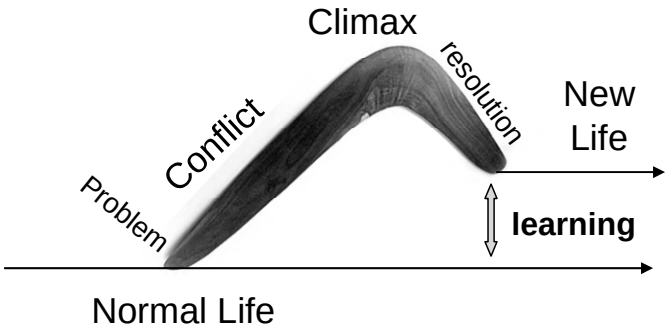

Figure 16: Killer Boomerang Narrative Model

Life goes along as usual, then suddenly you hit the bottom of the boomerang handle there. This is a problem that needs resolving. You travel up the handle, with more incidents and tension and conflict created as you go. Then you reach the climax at the

elbow there at the highest point, but the story doesn't end there. Then it comes down, as we see what life will be like after that, how life continues with the problems resolved. But it's too late to go back to how things were before – we're at a higher place, and life is different now. This gap here shows that we have learnt something – *there*, not all gaps are bad – not all gaps indicate a deficiency! So this is why sharing stories is a powerful way of learning for all people – you don't have to go through all the pain and struggle that the characters did, but you still get to learn the lessons they learned. It takes you up. *It takes you up.*

That phrase makes me think of whirlwind story, from Ngul Mungk. *It takes you up*. Is this thinking going off-track? That's alright, remember, we're not going straight, we're on a winding path learning here. And this is good, because I'm reminded to tell about how story doesn't just float around in a void. Story has place. Some people tell stories with no place. In the Aboriginal world, stories are in the land – stories *are* places. Story places are sacred places. All places have story, but stories have place in them too – they are like maps of the land. You can make story maps visually for any story with students – it makes things like Hamlet a lot easier to swallow. It lets you see the whole shape of the story, and the place of the story, so you know *where* you are.

This shows how land and place are connected to all learning. Often schools and curricula forget this, and teach from a void without ground. But this placeless paradigm eliminates a very powerful way of learning – learning through land. Here is a text for this way of knowing:

Figure 17: Land Knowledge Text

We're working with a bark dish here, to show that all knowledge is carried on the land, sits in the land. Knowledge always comes from a *place in the land* that needs to be acknowledged so that learners can situate new knowledge in their *mental landscape*. Students also need to see the way the things they are learning impact on their environment. Maths is used to build dams and toxic chemicals and bombs. *But* it is also used in projects designed to protect and preserve the land. Can we work with this knowledge embedded in the curriculum? How might that help our students and their communities? All learners, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, need to see the way learning is situated in the physical world around them. This increases the relevance and connectedness of the learning to the community. And that is another way of learning that increases relevance – drawing out local community links to knowledge. Here is a text that deals with this way of learning:

Figure 18: Community Knowledge Text

This bundi (Figure 18) has a spiral design on it that I was shown by Brad Steadman at Brewarrina. The symbol represents the way we have always gone out into the world for new knowledge – you *don't* go straight and forget where you're coming from, losing your identity in knowledge from outside. No. You relate everything you learn back to who you are and weigh it against community criteria of local usefulness and ethical concerns. You maintain your identity as your centre, your standpoint. In the classroom, students and teachers, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, need to be constantly asking the question, "What does this new knowledge mean for me and my community, and how can I use it for local benefit?" Wherever possible, this learning should be returned to the community for local benefit. Class projects can be designed to act upon local problems and needs in a real-life context. Or at least, work can be taken back to the community by the students in the form of presentations, performances, broadcasts or displays. In the course of the research in developing these ways of learning, this one has been found to be the most effective form of behaviour management. If a student knows that Aunty is going to be scrutinising their work the following week, they only need to be reminded of this to re-engage.

So you'll notice I haven't spoken about this object simply in terms of traditional use. There is no need to, unless that knowledge is relevant to the work at hand and is contributing to the deep knowledge of the work. In this context, for example, I might talk about this weapon as it is used in punishment for people who go their own way and ignore community obligations. This brings the weight of law to the message about community links, and makes school learning serious and important business. But not everybody can talk about those things – it is problematic for outsiders to work with some knowledge in the wrong contexts. Schools and departments don't tend to have protocols established for this, and it is an aspect of Aboriginal perspectives that makes many teachers justifiably nervous.

This is the reason for researching Aboriginal knowledge and pedagogy in this project – to find out *how* teachers can use Aboriginal perspectives in culturally safe ways, embedded in everyday teaching practice. It has been important to find shared knowledge that teachers are also familiar with from their own cultural perspectives, no matter where they are from. This is why the theory of the Cultural Interface is at the centre of this work. At that overlap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal

knowledge systems, we've found eight ways of learning that can be used by teachers of any background.

So far in this yarn, we have been back-tracking through the context, the framework and the implications for classrooms. Use of the eight ways has been modelled in the *way* I have presented this knowledge, then broken into sections and deconstructed. Now we are at the centre where we can take on board the basic elements, the building blocks of pedagogy found at the interface of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal learning systems.

The first way is Story Sharing. This is about teaching and learning through narrative.

Figure 19: Story Sharing Way

The second way is Learning Maps. This is about making learning pathways and processes explicit visually.

Figure 20: Learning Map Way

The third way is Non-verbal Learning. This is about hands-on learning, critical reflection and least-intrusive management strategies. Ancestral/spiritual knowledge also comes through this way of learning.

Figure 21: Non-verbal Way

The fourth way is Symbols and Images. This is about exploring content through imagery and using visual cues and signals.

Figure 22: Symbolic/Imaginal Way

The fifth way is Land Links. This is about place-based pedagogy, linking content to local land and environment.

Figure 23: Land Link Way

The sixth way is Non-linear Concepts. This is about indirect management strategies, lateral thinking, comparing and sythesising diverse cultural viewpoints, innovating, adapting, working with cycles and working with holistic knowledge.

Figure 24: Non-linear Way

The seventh way is Deconstruct/Reconstruct. This is about modelling and scaffolding, balancing teacher instruction with independent learning and working from wholes to parts.

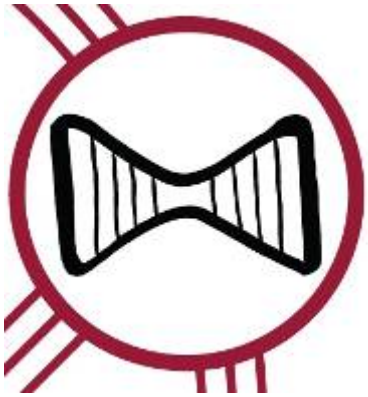

Figure 25: Deconstruct/Reconstruct Way

The eighth way is Community Links. This is about grounding learning content and values in community knowledge, working on community projects and using or displaying knowledge products publicly for local benefit.

Figure 26: Community Way

Closing the Yarn

We're closing this written yarn now. Now that we have a big picture of the pedagogy developed for the project, we need to backtrack and examine the theoretical tools that enabled this work, before exploring the results of the research Business. The picture of two bark dishes below shows the progress of this text so far in overlapping Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge systems. Note that the shape created by the overlap of two dishes is the same as that of the shield shared earlier. The task of the next chapter is to increase the space where the two dishes overlap, and then the purpose of Chapter 3 is to increase proportionately the size of the bark dish on the right. The remainder of the thesis aims to create new knowledge through an equal balance and productive synthesis between two systems.

Figure 27: Dishes showing interface progress

Chapter Two

Bringing the Tools

The white owl woman had pale skin and golden hair, and was very beautiful. In time she became gubbiwarlga – a clever woman for the tribe, and the people grew to love her. Her knowledge gave her a central role in the community as a teacher and healer. They named her Ngamadja – mother. (Excerpt from Ngamadja story, from Clancy McKellar).

Figure 28: Second view of Ngamadja

This chapter reflects that part of the carving process when the tools, knowledge, place and materials are prepared and positioned for the work to begin. The theoretical tools for the research are introduced here, with two literature reviews. The first places the Aboriginal pedagogy framework developed for the study into the context of the literature. The second explores the corpus of knowledge about the Cultural Interface, drawing parallels with Aboriginal concepts of balance and synergy. Both of the literature reviews establish the Cultural Interface as a guiding principle to inform the research.

Placing the Pedagogy Framework in the Context of the Aboriginal Pedagogy Literature

Core Assumption and Core Problem

Research has shown a strong link between culture and how people think and learn (Cole and Means, 1981; More, 1990; Evans, 2009) although it should be stressed that these orientations are cultural, not biological or genetic (Swisher and Deyhle, 1989). Under this assumption, it would seem there is a clear need to adopt pedagogies that are culturally appropriate in order to address Aboriginal disadvantage in education. However, most Australian teachers to date have been unwilling or unable to use teaching processes which harness the learning strengths of Aboriginal children (Hughes and More, 1997). This becomes understandable upon reviewing the literature specifically dealing with Aboriginal pedagogy, which reveals a corpus of theory that could be construed by educators as difficult to access or implement, impractical and at times divisive or antagonistic.

To address this problem, here I briefly examine the Australian and American research on Aboriginal pedagogies, then align common principles from the literature with the eight Aboriginal pedagogies developed for this project – pedagogies that are accessible, practical and reconciling in nature.

Australia's First Attempts at Aboriginal Pedagogy Revival

Harrison (2005) described the way early research into Aboriginal pedagogy sought to find methods for Aboriginal students to learn western knowledge using Indigenous ways of learning, a theory that was later contradicted, giving rise to bi-cultural approaches that segregated Aboriginal and western knowledge in education. Cross-cultural theorists then pursued explicit pedagogy, while critical theorists sought to

help students negotiate their own Indigenous voices in literate expression (ibid). The cross-cultural theories "were alerting us to the possibility of a learning that is produced *in-between* the student and the teacher" (873, original emphasis). Harrison proposed that there was an informal discourse of negotiation at work in classrooms, producing understandings about learning and identity that are seldom made explicit. He cited Langton's (1993) observation that Aboriginality is not found but produced through the dialogue between people, with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people constantly defining and redefining each other (and therefore their learning processes) through an ongoing interface.

But prior to Harrison's proposition of an interface metalanguage, most of the work around Aboriginal pedagogy drew heavily upon the work begun in the 1970s on either "Two-way" schooling (focusing on cultural separation) or "Both-ways" schooling (focusing on cultural integration) (e.g. Harris, 1980).

Responding to these notions in the 1980s the National Aboriginal Education Committee asserted the need for schools to

> *develop an education theory and pedagogy that takes into account Aboriginal epistemology. Only when this occurs will education for our people be a process that builds on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identity"* (1985, 4).

So the National Curriculum Development Centre established the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Pedagogy Project in 1986, but this project was soon terminated along with the Centre, and the opportunity to research Aboriginal pedagogies nationally that decade was lost (Hughes and More, 1997). However, while interest in Aboriginal learning styles in Australia waned, in South Australia the research continued with the Aboriginal Ways of Learning (AbWoL) project, which investigated ways in which Aboriginal and western pedagogies might be integrated. (ibid.)

Aboriginal Ways of Learning Project

The AbWoL team proposed an overlap in learning styles between cultural groups, and sought to develop a theory of pedagogy that recognised recurring learning styles of Aboriginal people while still allowing space for individual variations. They developed a model grounded in multicultural and Native American education research, with successful results emerging from their trials in South Australian schools (Hughes and More, 1997).

The model of pedagogy was based on four sets of bipolar adjectives – Global-Analytic, Verbal-Imaginal, Concrete-Abstract, and Trial/Feedback-Reflective. But as interest in Aboriginal pedagogy all but disappeared nationally, the project was shelved and never formally reported as research. The ideas of the AbWoL model were not published until nearly two decades later. The self-published book *Aboriginal Ways of Learning* (Hughes, More and Williams, 2004), included an apology to participating teachers that their work had been shelved for so long, and a despondent statement that the text was intended as a record of the project as a political action, rather than a teaching tool. It also included a statement that there was no evidence available for the existence of Aboriginal pedagogies.

Dichotomies and Gaps in Australian Models

Similar frameworks still occasionally appeared elsewhere in the literature, with a similar dualistic structure and similar themes. For example, Robinson and Nichols (1998) defined Aboriginal pedagogy as being holistic, imaginal, kinaesthetic, cooperative, contextual and person-oriented, each point being contrasted with an opposite orientation from western pedagogy. Much of this work acknowledged the contributions of Christie (1984) and particularly Harris (1984), who defined the features of Aboriginal learning as observation, imitation, trial and error, real-life performance, learning wholes rather than parts, problem solving and repetition. These were explicitly framed as being antithetical to western paradigms of schooling.

Most of the frameworks developed in and from the Australian work of the 1980s construct Aboriginal pedagogy in this binary fashion, contrasting, for example, spontaneous versus structured, repetitive versus inquiring, uncritical versus critical, communal versus individual (Hughes, 1987). These dichotomies were problematic in that they sat alongside admissions that considerable overlap between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal systems existed - that approaches consistent with Aboriginal ways of learning existed across all cultures (Harris, 1984). From an Aboriginal perspective these analyses also contained gaps. They did not discuss the connection between land and pedagogy, and also lacked the narrative voice of Indigenous people. Stories were not shared of real-life community learning activities from which Aboriginal pedagogy might be drawn. But these gaps have been filled in many cases in the international literature, particularly that of American First Nations.

International Research on Aboriginal Pedagogy

There is much recent international literature promoting place-based Indigenous pedagogy (Shajahan, 2005). Marker (2006) even speaks of Aboriginal pedagogies being drawn from the sentient landscape. This eco-pedagogy work generally intersects with narratives – lived experiences of land-based learning in the Indigenous community, as in the work of Wheaton (2000). Wheaton recovered an Aboriginal pedagogy of Woodlands Cree by revisiting land-based learning experiences from her childhood. She described the pedagogy as being derived from an Aboriginal home rather than a school setting, using personal narratives of rabbit trapping activities to contemplate traditional teachings and drawing upon these to recover an Aboriginal pedagogical model. This model emerged as a dynamic cycle of observation, experience, introspection and inquiry. She insisted that this pedagogy works in a complementary way with western teaching methods and content, therefore not belonging to a false dichotomy between Aboriginal and western knowledge systems.

Battiste (2002) argues that animating the voices and experiences of Aboriginal people and integrating them into education creates a balanced centre from which to analyse Eurocentric pedagogies. Note that she speaks of integration rather than separation.

Rejecting the dichotomies that have dominated much of the thinking on Aboriginal pedagogy in the past, she insists that

> *Focusing on the similarities between the two systems of knowledge rather than on their differences may be a more useful place to start when considering how best to introduce educational reform* (11).

This reconciling ethic had emerged earlier in Australia with the concept of Cultural Interface from Indigenous academic Martin Nakata (e.g. 2007), a concept that has impacted significantly on global directions in reconciling diverse knowledge systems. (See further discussion of this in second half of this chapter.)

Battiste's (2002) model of Aboriginal pedagogy, drawn from a comprehensive review of the literature, proposes a generalised Indigenous preference for experiential learning, independent learning, observation, listening, minimal intervention or instruction, direct learning by seeing and doing, introspection, reflection, story-telling, modelling, individualised instruction, connectedness to local values, authentic experiences and learning how to apply knowledge to changing circumstances. Battiste concludes that

> *all true education is transformative and Nature centred… Education for wholeness, which strives for a level of harmony between individuals and their world, is an ancient foundation for the educational processes of all heritages* (30).

Battiste's inspirational work in this area provides strong foundational knowledge to draw upon in the creation of practical and reconciling frameworks for the application of Indigenous knowledge in education.

The Eight-way Aboriginal Pedagogy Framework

The various propositions and models of Aboriginal pedagogy in the literature can be reorganised into the eight part framework developed during my research to assist

teachers in coming to Aboriginal knowledge and using it in the classroom. These can represent the pedagogical common ground between many cultures, intercultural ways of learning that any teacher and learner might approach together as familiar territory from their own cultural standpoints. More information about how they were developed will be provided later in the thesis. The eight key concepts are:

- Story Sharing
- Learning Maps
- Non-verbal
- Symbols and Images
- Land Links
- Non-linear
- Deconstruct/Reconstruct
- Community Links

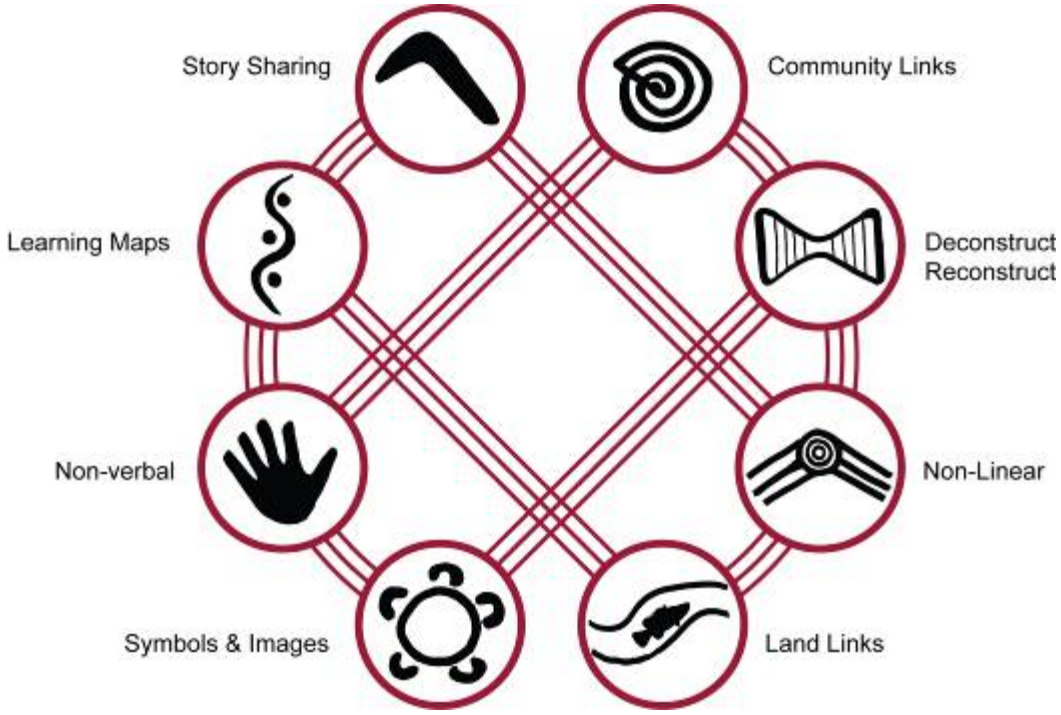

Figure 29: 8ways Framework.

In its focus on general orientations rather than dichotomies, this model is similar to those few rare cultural mapping frameworks that have actually been produced by Aboriginal educators acting from a place of local integrity (e.g. Keeffe, 1977). The difference is that those excellent models (usually not published as research), such as the Indigenous Holistic Knowledge Framework (Grant, 2002), are generally organisers for content and activities rather than pedagogy.

It should be noted that the '8ways' framework is not a collection of arbitrary learning styles to be assigned to students like astrology signs. The diagram above (figure 29) is based on a kinship system, to emphasize the interrelatedness of the pedagogies. For example, Story Sharing is the husband of Non-linear, the son of Learning Maps and Land Links, the in-law of Deconstruct/Reconstruct, and the maternal grandfather of Community Links. The elements to the left and right in the diagram are female, while those at top and bottom are male. The outer lines show mother-child pairs, while the internal diagonals show husband-wife pairs. The synergies within these pairs give the pedagogies power and life – so when the connections between them are explored, a person can find deep Aboriginal knowledge that can only be accessed through reflective or practical processes rather than the exchange of verbal information. For example, making a *learning map* of a Dreaming story helps a person to understand the cultural significance of *land links* in the act of *story sharing*.

The eight Aboriginal pedagogies are outlined below and aligned with the international literature and research.

Deconstruct/ Reconstruct

This way of learning organises notions of holistic, global, scaffolded and independent learning orientations in Aboriginal students. This is about successive approximation to the efficient end product – learning wholes rather than parts (Harris, 1984). Aboriginal students master activities and texts beginning with the whole structure, rather than a series of sequenced steps (Hughes, 1987; Stairs, 1994). There is a broad consensus in the literature that the Aboriginal learner "concentrates on understanding

the overall concept or task before getting down to the details." (Hughes and More, 1997)

Learning Maps

This way of learning is about making those overall shapes of structures in texts, activities and courses explicit in a visual way for Aboriginal learners. Teachers use diagrams or visualisations to map out processes for students to follow. In optimal Aboriginal pedagogy, the teacher and learner create "a concrete, holistic image of the tasks to be performed. That image serves as an anchor or reference point for the learner." (Hughes and More, 1997)

Community Links

This way of learning draws together the research describing Aboriginal pedagogy as group-oriented, localised and connected to real-life purposes and contexts (e.g. Christie, 1986). In Aboriginal pedagogy, the motivation for learning is inclusion in the community, while teaching refers to community life and values (Stairs, 1994).

Symbols and Images

This way of learning enfolds the recurring concept in Aboriginal pedagogy research of our students being primarily visual-spatial learners (Hughes, 1992). But it goes beyond the problematic notion of 'learning styles', reframing visual learning as symbolic learning – a strategy rather than an orientation. In the Aboriginal way a teacher would utilise all the senses to build symbolic meaning in support of learning new concepts, as a specifically Indigenous pedagogy involving the use of both concrete and abstract imagery (Bindarriy et al, 1991). It is different from the pedagogy of Learning Maps, in that it focuses on symbols at the micro level of content rather than the macro level of processes.

Non-verbal

Kinaesthetic, hands-on learning is a characteristic element of this Aboriginal way of learning (Robinson and Nichol, 1998). Another dimension of this is the role of body language in Indigenous pedagogy (Craven, 1999) and the use of silence as a feature of Aboriginal learning and language use (Harris and Malin, 1994). But this element is more than just the idea of language being reduced in Aboriginal instruction due to a predominance of imitation and practical action as pedagogy (Gibson, 1993). Wheaton (2000) gives an idea of the scope of this pedagogy, when she talks about the way Aboriginal learners test knowledge non-verbally through experience, introspection and practice, thereby becoming critical thinkers who can judge the validity of new knowledge independently.

Land-links

This pedagogy is about relating learning to land and place. The strong Aboriginal connection between land and knowledge/learning is widely documented (Battiste, 2002; Shajahan, 2005). Aboriginal pedagogies are intensely ecological and place-based, being drawn from the living landscape within a framework of profound ancestral and personal relationships with place (Marker, 2006). Indigenous land-based pedagogy is affirmed by the work of place-based education researchers, with links between western place-responsive practice and the narrative pedagogies of Native Peoples clearly demonstrated (Cameron, 2003).

Story-sharing

This way of learning harnesses well-documented Indigenous teaching methods that make use of personal narratives in knowledge transmission and transformation (Stairs, 1994). It has long been observed that Elders teach using stories, drawing lessons from narratives to actively involve learners in introspection and analysis (Wheaton, 2000). This element is about grounding school learning in all subject areas in the exchange of personal and wider narratives. Narrative is a key pedagogy in education for students of all cultural backgrounds (Egan, 1998).

Non-linear

This way of learning encompasses all non-sequential Aboriginal pedagogy – a complex cycle of learning composed of multiple processes that occur continuously (Wheaton, 2000). Aboriginal students can have an indirect rather than direct orientation to learning, as can be seen in the avoidance of direct questioning (Hughes 1987) and in the avoidance of direct instruction and behaviour management (West in Harris and Malin, 1994). Additionally, Aboriginal people think and perceive in a way that is not constrained by the serial and sequential nature of verbal thinking (Gibson, 1993). That linear perspective in western pedagogy has been identified as a key factor in marginalising Aboriginal people and preventing us from constructing our own identities (Wheaton, 2000). However, this is the point at which western and Indigenous pedagogies are often incorrectly constructed as irreconcilable. To remedy this divisive tendency, this way of learning also encompasses non-linear Indigenous ideas of overlap and synergy, choosing to view the two worlds as complementary rather than oppositional (Linkson, 1999). After all, it is limiting to view all mainstream knowledge as linear when there are excellent western non-linear frameworks available like De Bono's (1996) Lateral Thinking. So this way of learning is not only about presenting learning in cyclic and indirect ways – it is also about avoiding dichotomies by finding common ground and creative potential between diverse viewpoints and knowledge domains.

Summary

The main contentions here have been that culture impacts on optimal pedagogy for all learners; that explicit Aboriginal pedagogy is needed to improve outcomes for Indigenous learners; that there is common ground between Aboriginal pedagogies and the optimal pedagogies for all learners; that the work in this field to date has been inaccessible and culturally divisive; that the eight ways of learning developed in my research are supported in the international literature; that such a practical framework is needed for teachers to be able to organise and access this knowledge in cultural safety; and finally that a reconciling interface approach is needed to harmonise the relationship between the two pedagogical systems.

The Cultural Interface: Synergy of Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Knowledge Systems

The theory of the Cultural Interface is a crucial tool in this project as it provides the theoretical base for reconciling dual knowledge systems. Here I define and position this theory in the context of international literature and research, but begin closer to home with examples of Indigenous knowledge that inform my own understanding of the theory. Some of these examples hold the status of Law for me. The purpose of beginning this way is to show respect, but also to propose that synergy between diverse systems has always been a cornerstone of Aboriginal thought. Applying Aboriginal meta-knowledge to an understanding of the Cultural Interface will ensure that the epistemological framework structuring the dialogical work of this thesis is informed by deep knowledge rather than token expressions of culture.

Messages of Balance and Interface

Here I acknowledge and geographically situate the sources of some messages and lessons that inform my understanding of the Cultural Interface as an Indigenous person, handed on by Elders and countrymen from various Aboriginal language groups, supported in some cases by non-Aboriginal researchers whose observations validate this knowledge in the academic world. This does not include my own subjective understandings gained from living day-to-day at the Cultural Interface between multiple realities, but rather the Word of people I respect as keepers of knowledge. In my way it is important to acknowledge these first.

Starting in the south of the continent in the Snowy Mountains, Kakkib Li Dthia Warrawee'a, songman of the *Kirridth Yordtharrngba* tradition of the Ya'itmidtung people, shared with me the concept of *dwongtjen* (a manifold perspective) that reflects the pluralistic capacity of Cultural Interface (personal correspondence, July 2003).

Then to the far north, traditions of *ganma* and *garma* from Yolngu people demonstrate the ideal of a dynamic cultural overlap, based on the complex balance and synergy between fresh and salt water and extending into human relationships and cross-cultural knowledge production (Yunupingu et. al., 1993). Then to the north east on Wik land, where that same brackish water is known as *ngak lokath*, there is the concept of *kangk nanam, nyiingk inam* that promotes synergy between "old way and new way" (Wal Wal Ngallametta, personal communication, October 2004). Moving south again, for Nungar people there is the concept of 'twoness' as a synergistic philosophy grounded in the story and geological body of *Yurebilla* the giant (Aunty Veronica Brodie, personal communication, March 2006). North-east of there, spirit beings within the Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay traditions often have opposite counterparts that reflect the necessity for common ground and balance between competing ideas and interests, such as *Wabuwi* and *Mala Mala* who balance North and South, night and day, and two halves of the colour spectrum in rainbows (Milson in Ash et al, 2003). Concepts of balance, symmetry and synergistic overlap can be seen in that same river country of western New South Wales in the structure of Aboriginal family relationships, as in Baakindji kinship pairs (Murray Butcher, personal communication, April 2008).

Many diverse Aboriginal worldviews and interests intersect at this point of balance. This balance and synergy of opposites has been observed all over the continent by non-Aboriginal anthropologists and linguists, for example in Martin's (1993) ethnography exploring the balance between opposite forces of autonomy and relatedness in Wik worldviews, and Sayers' (1976) monograph on Aboriginal sentence structure (e.g. negated antonyms used to create symmetrical utterances). Jones and Meehan (1997), Hoogenraad and Robertson (1997) and Rose (2005) reported dyads based on climactic opposites in Northern and Central Australia, such as hot/cold, wet/dry, that inform synergistic frameworks of ecological and social knowledge systems.

Nakata and the Cultural Interface

The balancing/reconciling principle that is so central to many Indigenous worldviews (Yarradamarra, 2007) is exemplified by the work of Martin Nakata, a Torres Strait Islander man who was the first to coin the phrase 'the Cultural Interface'. Nakata's (2007) book *Disciplining the Savages, Savaging the Disciplines* focuses more on the Interface as the lived reality of Islanders, rather than as a synergistic principle specifically. However, he does assert that a reconciling dynamic is a "crucial element in any future methodological position" in history and education, while also warning that it is "more easily said than done" as academics tend to "take sides" rather than explore the complex intersections of the Interface (164).

Nakata (2001) has described the application of the Cultural Interface in schooling as beginning in Indigenous lifeworlds and then extending learners in the overlap with non-local realities, maintaining continuity with the past while learning skills relevant to present and future. He asserts that an Interface approach is not simply a vehicle for Indigenous transition into the mainstream, but a source of innovation, critical thinking and problem-solving skills that are relevant for learners of any culture (ibid.). This neutralises deficit views of culture and eliminates tokenism, instead focusing on skilling all students to operate creatively in the wider world without losing their own cultural standpoint (1998).

Ideally, this practice would privilege local place-based knowledge in the curriculum and in the organisational culture of a school, thus viewing Indigenous knowledge as a sophisticated system rather than as a parochial limitation or obstacle (Cameron, 2004). Within the dynamic balance at the interface between complex local and non-local knowledge systems, common ground may then be found.

False Dichotomies and Placelessness as a Barrier to the Interface

This reconciling potential of the Cultural Interface is frustrated by tensions between place-based and placeless paradigms, local and non-local orientations to knowledge, as schools tend to promote ways of knowing that separate the students, administration

and the campus itself from recognition of interconnectedness with local landscape and knowledge (Marker, 2006). Not only the curriculum but the very architecture and institutional culture of schools convey subtle yet pervasive and persistent messages that locality is irrelevant (ibid). Schooling frames the environment as something separate from learners, promoting a position of placelessness and marginalisation of local knowledge. This arbitrary severing of place is where Indigenous and non-Indigenous worldviews can become artificially polarised, isolating school communities from the creative possibilities that exist at the Cultural Interface.

It is important to recognise that most Indigenous knowledge is still strongly place-based and grounded in long-term occupancy of land, indivisible from place (Shahjahan, 2005). In silencing this local knowledge of place and ignoring western land-based knowledge as well, schooling can eliminate enormous opportunities for school improvement, as land and place can be a source of innovative cross-cultural knowledge not just for content, but for pedagogy as well (Marker, 2006). Currently, local Indigenous knowledge is at best classified as ecological data and merely incorporated into western bodies of knowledge, rather than being recognised for what it is - a body of expertise that can inform the development of new cross-cultural systems and theoretical perspectives (Cruikshank, 2000).

Contradictions and Complexities in a Contested Space

In highlighting the centrality of local knowledge in this way, it is difficult as an Indigenous person not to also highlight the deficits of non-local knowledge systems, taking an anti-colonial standpoint (Rigney, 1999) that is antithetical to the reconciling principle of the Interface. Acknowledgement of this tension, in this case felt as a pressure to merely invert a hierarchy, reveals the complexity of the Interface, which could hardly be described as unified system of thought. Certainly it would be romanticising Aboriginal culture to claim we are unencumbered by oppositional logic at the Interface and that we are all informed by one universal truth. Nakata (2007) states that there can be no single authentic account or truth of Indigenous experience, as the Interface is a “site of struggle over the meaning of our existence” (p. 210), meaning that any Indigenous perspective will be individual, distinct and part of a

dynamic and contested space. The Interface is a complex and often contradictory domain, a space in which oppositional thinking must be acknowledged alongside calls for a non-oppositional paradigm. For example, the contributions of anti-colonial thinkers must be acknowledged here, even within the reconciling paradigm of this work.

The work of anti-colonial, critical, post-structural and post-colonial theories must be recognised as a starting point for Indigenous researchers involved in the project of decolonisation (Smith, 1999). However, these theories are also problematic for Indigenous people in light of the fact that they carry the same placeless subjectivities that are promoted in western schooling contexts (ibid). Indigenous methodologies tend to be anti-colonial, promoting resistance, political integrity and the privileging of Indigenous voices (Rigney, 1999). However, when working from the reconciling principle of the Cultural Interface, that element of resistance may be reframed to avoid oppositional logic, situating the subject beyond the confines of binary oppositions. Dichotomies damage relatedness – an action Nakata (2007) refers to as taking sides – a tension Martin (2008) refers to as a push-pull. It damages both oppressor and oppressed, because it ignores stories of relatedness and promotes only difference and separation.

Similarly, the liberal discourses of education in recent years, in asserting the dangers of cultural mismatch and the need for culturally appropriate content, represent an oppositional orientation to Indigenous education, a re-writing of earlier racial discourses into a divisive cultural discourse (Nakata, 2007). So liberal and post-colonial discourses seem to carry the same notions of difference that inform assimilatory, neo-colonial discourses. This can be seen in the education literature, where those writing about the Cultural Interface (no matter what their ideology is) tend to emphasise these tensions, cultural differences and inequities at the expense of recognising the enormous opportunities that exist for dialogical approaches (e.g. Minniecon et al, 2007). However, the literature also indicates that professionals in fields outside of education (particularly outside of Australia) are less likely to be constrained by these politics of difference.

The Interface in Dialogical Paradigms Internationally

International researchers, scientists and practitioners who adopt a dialogical approach frame cross-cultural relationships in a unifying way. For example, Ball (2004) asserts that from a common ground standpoint, Eurowestern self-assertive thinking and values need not exist in opposition to more integrative and communal values of Indigenous communities, but rather each can complement the other within creative dialogue. Another example is Rose (2005), who contends that Aboriginal knowledge contributes a philosophical ecology that works synergistically with western ecological science streams.

This reconciling ethic is also present in the work of Indigenous researchers who, working from non-oppositional perspectives, are using the interface between fields like science and Aboriginal knowledge as a source of inventiveness, identifying opportunities for synergy rather than conflict by harnessing the energy of two systems in order to create new knowledge (Durie, 2005). Conforming to Indigenous principles of balance and respect, this approach honours local place-based knowledges as well as the dominant globalising knowledge system. In the fields of education and research this is manifesting as a quest for productive balance between Indigenous methodologies and conventional academic methods (ibid.). International scientific organisations are now actively promoting this synergy (Bala and Joseph, 2007), as they begin to acknowledge the dialogical histories of bi-cultural innovations that formed the foundations of modern science and technology (Smith, 1999).

In linguistics, the Interface concept of Hybridity has emerged as an option for Indigenous language and culture revival, grounded in Congruence Theory, which proposes that elements common to both cultures are more likely to persist in the emergent recovering culture (Zuckerman, 2007). Hybridity is even claimed as a mode of resistance by some colonised peoples (Bhabha in Shahjahan, 2005). Arguably, the application of this Interface principle to education with a focus on balance, respect and sharing might open up a world of possibilities for social action, emancipation and community development.

The Interface in Education Internationally

Educators around the world working from the Cultural Interface in recent years have been finding

> *new ways to balance the ethical protocols of the academic world with the cultural protocols of First Nations communities* (Edosdi/Thompson, 2004, 62).

This can be seen, for example, in the Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative (Barnhardt and Kawagley, 2001), the Canadian Generative Curriculum (Ball, 2004) and the overlap of Matauranga Maori (native knowledge) and Western methodology in New Zealand curriculum development (Durie, 2005).

The Alaska Rural Systemic Initiative is described by Barnhardt and Kawagley (2001) as an innovation from the overlap of western and Aboriginal systems. This is approached with intellectual rigor rather than just token good will. The deep knowledge grounding the western side of the dialogue is the science of complexity and chaos theory, applied to the study of human social systems (specifically the management of formal schooling organizations) as complex, non-linear, adaptive entities. This is overlapped with the local holistic Indigenous knowledge system, finding at the nexus a rich body of complementary knowledge. For example, in both of these systems there is a focus on the whole rather than the parts. Systemic integration of worldviews within the Alaskan organisation of schooling involved combining Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge systems equally and synergistically. This synergy produced an innovative, comprehensive, holistic system that promotes cultural and intellectual integrity. Using standards-based curricula grounded in local knowledges as the main catalyst, Barnhardt and Kawagley (ibid) outline how the synergistic principle of the Interface was applied to change the organizational culture of the schools and districts. The first two years of the program saw a region-wide increase in student achievement scores, a decrease in the dropout rate, an increase in the number of rural students attending college, and an increase in the number of Native students choosing to pursue studies in fields of science, math

and engineering. There was also a marked increase in the interest and involvement of Native communities in education throughout Alaska (ibid.).

In Canada, a Generative Curriculum model has also been developed based on a Cultural Interface approach, enjoying success similar to that of the Alaskan project. In addition to increased retention rates for native students to the tertiary level, the Generative Curriculum model also increased community social cohesion and renewed intergenerational relationships (Ball, 2004).

In the New Zealand context, Mason Durie (2005), in his work at the overlap between Matauranga Maori (native knowledge) and western methodology, identified principles for Interface learning and research. These principles ensured recognition of the validity of both systems and guaranteed that the Indigenous communities retained rights to knowledge developments. The principles also included native cosmology/spirituality as part of the system to maintain cultural integrity while participants explored and innovated at the Interface.

In South Africa, Klos (2006) found that student results in science improved with the application of the Cultural Interface, working from the theory that

> *…universal scientific concepts are embedded in both the indigenous knowledge of their own culture and westernised knowledge* (364).

However, the nature of this work was problematic as it was grounded not only in assimilatory discourses of ‘universality’, but also in the ethnocentric claim that

> *…the scientific knowledge of an indigenous culture is less demanding cognitively than westernised science* (364).

This last example is a cautionary one, highlighting the tendency of colonial discourses to make dialogical processes asymmetrical. This indicates a need for practical guidelines or protocols showing Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people how to come

to the Cultural Interface in genuinely equal partnerships. This issue is explored further and resolved in Chapter Five.

Barriers to Seeking the 'How' of the Interface

Despite several international successes in reclaiming common-ground space for Indigenous knowledge in curricula, there is still a need to explore the practical *how* of the Cultural Interface in the classroom. The literature talks about the *what* and the *why*, but there is nothing in the corpus that explicitly details *how* a teacher might go about applying this knowledge (Williamson and Dalal, 2007). The literature is replete with assertions that teachers must examine their colonial baggage or subjectivities at the Cultural Interface (e.g. Gair et al, 2005) but seldom explains how one might go about this. There is a kind of despair present in some of the literature, as expressed in Harrison's (2007) statement that Aboriginal education research is at a dead end. In his argument can be seen a polarisation of views, the central dichotomies of Aboriginal education politics that are preventing meaningful work in determining the *how* of the Cultural Interface.

Harrison (2007) states that the research is at a dead end because current methodology provides a forced choice between apportioning blame to either teachers or Aboriginal students and communities. Aboriginal outcomes are measured against the mainstream standard, supported by government rhetoric around "closing the gap", resulting in a deficit practice focusing on "a pathology of Indigenous education" (1). He uses specific examples of this from the Western New South Wales region of Australia (which is also the territory of my study). He observes that while it is widely recognised that there is no future in positioning teachers or students within an oppositional deficit paradigm, it still remains the dominant paradigm, one in which the focus is on identifying factors for success or reasons for failure then taking the side of either teachers/government or students/community.

Harrison states that the focus of Indigenous education should shift from producing material outcomes to producing cross-cultural relations. However, he offers no concrete suggestions as to how this reconciling practice might be enacted. The

recommended cross-cultural principle is then contradicted by his post-structuralist, Foucault-based assertion that Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal worldviews are irreconcilable and that the two are incompatible in education.

Guiding Principles, Shallow Knowledge and Mystery

As Harrison does, Nakata (2007) frames Indigenous and non-Indigenous knowledge systems as irreconcilable, although he proposes the Cultural Interface as a way to work with these opposite systems in a non-oppositional way, neutralising the factor of their incompatibility. However, Shiva (1997) goes a step further and proposes that the dichotomy of western and Indigenous knowledge is a false one, as exemplified in the field of science. She describes science as a pluralistic exercise, asserting that new accounts of science leave us with no valid criteria for distinguishing between western and Indigenous scientific claims.

Shiva's contention, supported by Ball (2001) and Bala and Joseph (2004), highlights a phenomenon that seems to emerge in the literature when higher order knowledge from Indigenous systems is brought alongside the equivalent from western systems (e.g. Barnhardt and Kawagley, 2007). This trend might be expressed as a guiding principle in the following way:

The deeper the knowledge, the more common ground is found across cultures.

Or conversely:

The shallower the knowledge, the more difference is found between cultures.

This is supported in Nakata's (2007) work when he states that the "irreconcilable" nature of the two knowledge systems occurs through misunderstandings at the *"surface levels of aspects of Indigenous knowledge"* (my emphasis, 8).

But still, there is little in the education research that actually explains *how* a person might work with deep knowledge at the Cultural Interface. Unfortunately, many offer

bogus solutions by reframing the spiritual aspects of our deep knowledge as ‘natural’ or ‘intuitive’, engaging in these without the same rigour as is used for western methods, and further, without the rigour of our ancestors’ practice (Martin, 2007). For example, when Green and Oppliger (2007) write about the symbiotic convergence of western and Indigenous knowledge systems at their school, they talk of non-Indigenous students incorporating simplified notions of Aboriginal spiritual practice in their study habits.

> *These students were listening to the land. They were expecting the land and animals on it to speak to them* (84).

Aboriginal problem-solving strategies, logic patterns, time management and so forth are not explored, but rather an intuitive position is put forward as representing the Indigenous knowledge. However, the very complex knowledges and reasoning that are needed for genuinely listening to land and animals (Martin, 2007), not to mention the specific Aboriginal pedagogies needed for teaching these skills, are not explained to the reader, nor probably to the students either. Instead students and readers are expected to trust in the mystery, with Indigenous knowledge framed as natural, softer, simplistic, unaccountable.

True, there are areas of our knowledge that must remain a mystery to the uninitiated. These must be trusted and should not be challenged by dissident people or accessed by any other than the rightful keepers of that knowledge (Brodie, 2002). There are also levels of knowledge that cannot be understood until a person has acquired the prerequisite knowledge, but there is still much of our deep knowledge that can be shared in the public domain (Martin, 2007). The everyday patterns of logic, thinking strategies, pedagogies and intellectual traditions carried within this deeper knowledge could not be construed as secret or sacred, although it is uniformly omitted in the literature as if it were.

West’s (2000) thesis promoting The *Japanangka Teaching and Research Paradigm – an Australian Aboriginal Model* seems to promise insight into such deeper knowledge in its title. However, although the model provides an excellent framework for exploring worldviews, at no stage are any clues provided as to how this might be

utilised in the classroom. There is only one reference in the thesis to the model being used with participants, and this was used as an illustration of how irreconcilable non-Aboriginal learners are to Aboriginal worldviews.

The rigour of our deepest knowledge is constantly ignored, simplified or shrouded and enshrined in mystery. The effect is always the same – to separate our deep knowledge from intellectual activity, frame it within a discursive dichotomy and relegate it to mythology and cultural exotica. In this way, if the guiding principles suggested previously are correct, the Interface between the two systems decreases as the knowledge becomes shallower. Thus teachers and researchers are able to continue promoting difference, sidestepping the Cultural Interface and avoiding Aboriginal intellectual rigour altogether.

The Gap in the Research

There is a gap, a silence in the literature around both intellectually rigorous and practical applications of Aboriginal knowledge at the Cultural Interface. The paucity of research in these areas is acknowledged in Williamson and Dalal (2007), in their examination of pedagogy at the Cultural Interface.

> *"[T]here are few resources that provide details of how the complexities at the cultural interface can be translated into meaningful curriculum outcomes." (52)*

Williamson and Dalal do not provide these details either. Indigenous knowledges are not given equal status in this dialogue, but instead are dismissed as "levels of engagement beyond the intellectual" (ibid.), or strategies for "unsettling" western authority. Once again, we are expected to trust in the mystery of the Aboriginal knowledge, which is framed as non-intellectual and not explained further. The pedagogy addressed by Williamson and Dalal is not based on Indigenous knowledge, but based on post-colonial/post-structuralist/critical theory. In the end, there are no pedagogies outlined that hold any integrity in terms of Indigenous meta-knowledge.

The integrity of Aboriginal meta-knowledge may be measured against the standard of Karen Martin's (2008) work, *Please Knock Before You Enter: Aboriginal Regulation of Outsiders and the Implications for Researchers*. This work actually brings Aboriginal deep knowledge (including spiritual knowledge) alongside western deep knowledge in a true interface. At the common ground between the two knowledge systems, Martin develops a detailed research methodology grounded in complex knowledge from Aboriginal cosmology. This is explained and visually illustrated in detail. Nowhere in the corpus can there be found an equivalent work that deals with the utilisation of Aboriginal knowledge at the interface with western pedagogy and curriculum.

Conclusion

There is little research significant to Indigenous education that might indicate how the Cultural Interface may actually be used in the classroom. There is a lack of research showing examples of Indigenous higher order thinking being used within the structures and pedagogies of learning institutions – learning *through* culture rather than *about* culture. But the literature does show that beyond the surface levels of knowledge there is significant overlap across systems previously seen as dichotomous. Differences and deficits are therefore engineered through the promotion of shallow 'cultural' knowledge. This manifests as tokenistic additions of material Aboriginal 'culture' to the curriculum, used merely as exotic bookends for mainstream content, diminishing any common ground and resulting only in the further marginalisation of Aboriginal perspectives. This review of the literature has indicated a need to apply the Cultural Interface principle with genuine academic rigour to bring Aboriginal knowledge into the pedagogy and organisational structure of schools.

What the literature lacks are the details of how this might be done and how teachers might be brought to an understanding that would allow them to utilise (or even step into) the Cultural Interface.

Chapter Three

Rough Cutting

One day an old man from South Australia sneaked into Wangkumarra territory. When he saw Ngamadja with her pale skin and golden hair he fell in love with her. He waited until she was gathering food away from the rest of the women, then he grabbed her and stole her away. (Excerpt from Ngamadja story, from Clancy McKellar).

Figure 30: Third view of Ngamadja

This chapter reflects the most difficult stage of the carving process, when you must chip away at the wood with an axe to create the basic form of the carving. Although this is a rough and messy process, it is also very precise, as one wrong cut will destroy the wood.

The purpose of this chapter is to share some of the stories that came from my field notes in the first half of my research project, showing in detail how my Indigenous standpoint methodology was developed. This will be communicated using Messy Text, a reporting genre validated for Indigenous researchers in Karen Martin's (2008)

book, *Knock Before You Enter – Aboriginal Regulation of Outsiders and the Implications for Researchers*. The protocols for my particular adaptation of Messy Text are as follows:

Quotations from field notes open with “true-god” (as I might say when I’m sharing Word or Story) and end with “That’s it” where I imagine my big sister agreeing with or endorsing my point, followed by the date it was written, in brackets. This ensures my honesty, filtered through my obligations to personal integrity, then familial accountability. I can’t write something false or flippant with these words at either end. There is a lot of business I can’t include for cultural reasons, or words that are not relevant, or names and places that can’t be said for ethical reasons. Where these are deleted there are three dots. Some words are capitalised when the meaning in that context has Law status for me. (See this has already begun.) Where words are added outside of the original text, square brackets are used. The structure has layers that spiral and zig-zag, often using repetition with gradual elaboration as an induction to concepts in stages. Sometimes the elaboration comes first, and is flagged or defined at a later point in the narrative. The tense changes, sometimes within one sentence, as I inject my words or the words of others from the non-present moment into the story. This is the grammar of Story as I know it. The language of the text is itself an innovation from the Cultural Interface, moving between the academic, literary and colloquial phraseologies that constitute my voice as an Indigenous researcher – my voice as I might speak when yarning at length to an Indigenous academic peer.

This text form is similar to the genre of Performance Text in Indigenous auto ethnography, in which “history becomes a montage, moments quoted out of context” (Denzin, 2005, 10). This reveals hidden features of past and present (ibid), answering the questions Aboriginal people will have about myself and my work here, thus meeting my obligations as an Indigenous researcher. As many Elders and mentors have instructed me to leave a path for others to follow, this Messy Text has been given considerable space in this work, to honour that obligation. This narrative is also given so much space because it not only illuminates my methodology and research tools, but begins to address the research questions as well.

Auto Ethnography Process in the Production of an Indigenous Standpoint Methodology – Messy Text.

First now I'm talking about becoming part of the field, the protocols and permissions, the ethics, local knowledge, community input and insider/outsider issues that made my role and shaped my obligations as a fulla here in this research, as a fulla off-Country. This process had to begin two years before the official project began, to be proper. It began with the smallest sphere of influence and then grew me up in this place.

One key community supporter of the research, *true god* my first permissions from him were very limited, so I couldn't even go out on country at all for the first six months in that community. …nearly two years to win his trust and respect completely. This meeting (two years on)… took the form of a welcome and a blessing. He asked me … "What is your gift? What is your area of duty to your people in this life?" … and then when I was talking about our ways of knowing he would cheer and jump out of his seat to shake my hand ... He picked up my boomerang and said, "Now tell me story about this, about the shape. But not traditional; I want you to tell me contemporary story." I talked about …alternative ways of approaching these problems from the side, going around, in that non-linear ways. I also talked about David Unaipon's helicopter design and rotating shears invention. After that he gave me the most unlimited permissions I've ever had – I can cut anything, anywhere locally. But he directed me to work more with gidjiirr now, to learn to understand that tree – when I make that relationship with it, it won't crack any more like on the bundi I showed him. He also wants me to change my bundi design while I'm working here – a more southern shape with a curved handle. Also, he outlined my obligations in relation to my "gift" – said I needed to follow that spirit-way and that I'd know what the land and ancestors here wanted me to do if I stayed on that path and paid attention to them.

But I couldn't stray from that, or punishment would follow. He blessed my current and future work in this area for the region. *That's it*. (26 May, 2008)

Figure 31: Bundis I made from gidjiirr wood (middle one is mulga wood)

Becoming invited into the field this way, first sitting outside and waiting for invitation, then being tested, continued for a long time all over the West in many communities. One Elder I know, *true god* she's all about spirit. She challenged me a lot, and watched me like a hawk for a couple of hours. She was really strong culturally … was really digging deep with me to uncover all of my intent, identity and motivations. She said she had been hearing about me for a couple of years and was upset I hadn't come to her sooner. She said she had seen me at a distance and thought I was an American Indian at first (laughed a lot at that). In the end she … asked me to kneel in front of her. She gave me a big hug and kiss and welcomed me, gave me blessing to work there with language and culture. The whole meeting was structured by her to feel like ceremony. *That's it*. (6 March, 2008)

Always role being given, like one Uncle *true god* he gave me a role/position in the community for my time down here – "one of our young warriors" he called it, giving a framework for how I should do my work here. *That's it*. (1 July, 2008)

Even when you're invited, you still seek permissions. Like one community I was invited to, *true god* I spent the first day visiting all the members of the Land Council for permissions and protocol. They all gave their blessings with enthusiasm – particularly the chairman, who also gave me an oral message to tell others in the community endorsing my activities from him. *That's it.* (29 May, 2008)

People watched even for endorsement from ancestors, like me and Old Unc one day after being out on Country, *true god* when we came back to the car after lunch, a big tumbleweed had stopped up against my door, and he said, see, you're not getting away now, you've got work to do here. The old fullas have plans, work to do. *That's it.* (26 August, 2008)

Community ethics defined not only how I was allowed to operate, but gave the criteria for judging my worth and intent. I had to have a good heart people said, like this one Aunty *true god* she said I had lovely eyes and she could tell from my eyes that my heart was good. That made me think of Linda Tuhawali Smith's same criteria for a researcher… *That's it.* (3 March, 2008)

My ancestral Aboriginality was also tested and confirmed. The chair of a regional Aboriginal organisation contacted her relatives down south to confirm my descent, checking the oral histories and discovering that we are actually related. For me, this element of my ancestry has little impact on my identity – my biological relationships have never carried the same high level of obligations and duties that my culture demands of me (only my non-biological kinship relationships have provided that). For me, my Aboriginality is defined more by that network of relationships and obligations than by blood. But I had to recognise that for many others this biological connection was the thing that defined me. Every Koori I met had different criteria by which they measured me, usually based on their own identity. I met nobody who claimed descent from one tribe – most people had multiple heritages from across the region and beyond, and all were of European descent as well. Many did not know where they came from in terms of descent, but identified instead with their adoptive communities. So in this messy site of conflicting Aboriginalities, my identity was tested again and again.

When my Aboriginality, worth and knowledge had been tested, then people offered me local knowledge to inform my way of working. This one old fulla *true god* he took me for a ride in his new car, and we talked a while about the way the Dreaming doesn't change, how we just keeping discovering more about it – the key is to understand [western] curriculum knowledge as undiscovered aspects of the Dreaming, and so own it. *That's it.* (6 February, 2008) This was common ground for me with my own standpoint and gave me a solid centre of core assumption to work from in this place. This was in my framework of knowledge, but then ways of working it were given too, like this other old fulla who gave me a basic law to work from, *true god* in a gesture he used, hands coming together at his waist and banging together repeatedly as they rose higher, until they laced together at the end over his head. This was illustrating the way lower knowledge (i.e. "cultural items") show only differences and deficits, while at the higher levels of knowledge there is more in common across different knowledge systems. *That's it.* (15 December, 2008)

But in our world knowledge has to ebb and flow both ways, so I had to make sure I was sharing ways of working and helping people rediscover 'sleeping' knowledge, leaving that knowledge there for community benefit. Understandings drawn from yarning and Business were shared locally and always came with a purpose and cultural application. Like when myself and two local fullas were preparing to teach some students at the local school, first *true god* we talked a lot about the roles of clevermen, and …about relationships with birds – notions of eagle as a daytime owl and owl as a night time eagle, crow as a cleverman with his medicine bag on his chest, spirit walking etc. Went through a lot of the stories that link us together. Talked about the way spirit world and natural world come together in places and in ceremonial activity, how they overlap. This talk allowed us to work together in shared Law with the students, and we were able to talk about what we were doing in that process with the students, to give them an idea of Law and protocols. *That's it.* (4 April, 2008)

Then working elsewhere with a local woman on her language, I shared back things that had been revealed to me there, like *true god* I went into the dictionary and showed her how all the words associated with learning had the word *bina* for "ear" in there somewhere, so made that connection with the importance of listening …as a

way of learning. Looked into stories to show that winding path of thinking, and steps and structures for learning. Her eyes got big and she said at the end that she's looking at it in a whole new way now. She said before with those disconnected lists it was a gubba approach she was using. *That's it.* (19 March, 2008)

I was guided by community through this exchange to know what to include, what to let lie, and what to share outside. Another old Aunty, Law Woman, *true god* she said that I need to share all this story, …to write it for people to read. I said, "Isn't it secret Business?" She said no, just how we work it specifically in ceremony is secret – the story itself needs to be told, it's what I'm supposed to do with it. She said the best place to hide these things is out in the open – only people with understanding will see the deeper knowledge of what is being told. But that the telling of it publically will bring about big changes and healing in the land. *That's it.* (30 September, 2008) So the things included in this messy text now are things that local keepers of knowledge have emphasised for inclusion.

So, yes there were people to speak for me, guide me, endorse me. Yes, keepers of knowledge and others recognised me as insider. But this place was not my place, and I was an outsider, particularly to people with limited interest in education, language or culture. Being a non-drinker who hates country music and football, doesn't watch TV and doesn't have a mobile phone – this put me on the outside socially with most people (Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike). My cultural lifestyle was a barrier. I was often described as 'traditional' or 'tribal', words that many Aboriginal people in the region utter with fear (e.g. "Careful up north – those tribal fullas will get you!")

My light skin tone created another outsider effect in some relationships. In a place where many people principally construct their Aboriginality from shared stories and experiences of prejudice based on their 'colour', I had to acknowledge the enormous privileges my light skin gave me. The burden of racism is not something a 'yullafulla' like me can ever understand. This positioned me as an outsider with at least half of the Aboriginal people in the field – those who were 'darker' than me.

I struggled to position myself in this strange place, at one time justifying my dislocated identity like *true god* I know there's this idea that homelands is the only

place that can be Country for you, but … I'm told if you come to it the right way, you can belong to it – you see that in a lot of stories that go across diverse language group territories. I learned that from working with Uncle … on Wangkumarra things here, a long way from Wangkumarra land. But this is their place here now too. … Lots of peoples have Dreaming here now, and I'm finding myself standing in that interface, that dynamic contested space ... *That's it.* (18 August, 2008)

This was problematic for me, but then people gave me Story to position me here and to position my work. Like one fulla *true god* started with a galah story... He went seamlessly along from that story into others … like walking country … then went into a very long one about two women, belonging to eaglehawk, that is a major songline, intersecting with all the others. He took me through that and followed it all the way to the region of my own ancestors where the women turn to stone, and so we made our connections that way. From there we were ready to explore how … identity is constructed, how that way of knowing works. He described it as ripples, with the self at the centre – the learner comes to know their body and emotions, then out to the next ripple with relationships to others and kin…, then from there to the cultural landscape, then finally to Dreaming and creation. He drew this as concentric circles. *That's it.* (7 May, 2008)

Sometimes aspects of my insider status were hard to live with, like when this one cleverwoman shared *true god* a lot of high levels of knowledge with me. She walked me over Country and showed me a lot of secret things. There were things she did before that - I could see her probing, testing my knowledge and my sight - and then let me know she could see what I knew. Some things of spirit … she showed me those things, and I felt more of those iron bands of obligation closing in again. I accepted them - but I can see I'll have a lot of work to do in this place in the future …It will be hard to balance this with responsibilities I have … for family, let alone the research project load. I'm locked here now… *That's it.* (14 April, 2008)

Sometimes it made others uncomfortable, aspects of my insider identity that were discontinued in some circles, like at a cultural event where *true god* I said I didn't want to dance this year …there's been some problems with ladies in the community

being shame from me because they saw me with my shirt off and painted up last year [See figure 32]. *That's it*. (17 March, 2008)

Figure 32: Discontinuity gives some cultural practice outsider status

Sometimes I was reprimanded when I fell short of what was expected from my insider status. Like some Elders *true god* had a language meeting …and apparently spent most of the time running me down for being slack and cheeky by not turning up. At the end of it they said they felt me coming on the breeze (twenty minutes before I arrived), but that I was too fuckin late. It wasn't a scheduled meeting – I hadn't been told about it. They just expected me to show up at the right time, when they needed me, as I usually do. …They think I'm getting out of tune with things, getting stuck up. *That's it.* (20 May, 2008)

But most conflict was within myself, reconciling my insider status with the formal academic side of the research work, which often felt to be putting me outside or above community. Particularly the 'doctor' status of the study bothered me, and not just from the teasing about getting too flash. Early on I wrote of the doctorate study *true god* this puts me in a hard position … I can't be putting myself up there beyond people who are senior to me in the community domain. That puts me on the outside, makes the work meaningless and disconnected. *That's it.* (26 February, 2008)

Family support and hard learnings that year that moved me on to another life stage came with my new name as a man, not a boy, and that was Kaawoppa. When that came I felt easier about doing the research, like I wouldn't be losing myself by progressing in the academic world – my lifeworld and my stories were finally moving along beside it, and nothing was going to get left behind.

Now I'm talking about how my standpoint came to be defined inside the project, by myself, through interactions with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and organisations, and through the research process itself. My standpoint grounded the methodology.

Above all else, every action and word must answer to my family framework. Guidelines for my behaviour in all my work are tied into my name and my social position as defined by my family. Even how and when I can speak, write and pass on knowledge. *True god* I had some story about that … and things about being 'manth thayan'. Only a few … are manth thayan, and they have that through position in the family - order of birth. I'm not manth thayan. So there I've got feet, hands, blood, hands. No voice. …just about making things, walking, going, tell stories, thinking, knowing. … It occurred to me that writing can be this way – having a voice but in this practical way. In Wik Mungkan, the word for make/do/cut is "umpan". But this is also the word that is used for writing. … when I speak to teachers … it's in my hands, my eyes, the pictures I paint in their minds. *That's it.* (15 July, 2008)

My culture informed my ethics too, like *true god* my work is just bringing together disparate pieces to innovate solutions, then leaving that root knowledge where I found it, not recording it (which would be killing it). Like when you find a stone axe, you put it back where you've found it after you pick it up and look. *That's it.* (18 August, 2008)

With this culturally appropriate way of working in mind, I began exploring the process of Indigenous research as Ceremony, then expanded this to research as Business. I reasoned that *true god* Ceremony is not so precise in its entire structure. There are long periods of waiting, false starts, repetition, place changes, role changes. Spirit has to come down, overlap with the space and participants. For me this doesn't

happen through precise, prescribed phases. It comes from working through the ceremony, making mistakes, backtracking and repetition, restarting, fetching things that have been overlooked, fetching missing people (which means running errands/performing duties for them that will enable them to come), waiting for people – sometimes for weeks. Preparing for Ceremony involves making things, practising actions, teaching the young, learning from the old, sharing stories, revisiting relationships, establishing kinship with people who have travelled for Ceremony, washing, dressing, cooking. That is not part of the ceremony, but it is still Business. *That's it*. (16 September, 2008)

Doing Business, working with Ceremony – these ideas weren't exotic bookends to the project. These were how I sat with crucial metaphors, stories of relatedness and the research questions. I recorded this practice, like one day I wrote *true god* from my working of this in sleeping and waking over the past week I've seen this: Magic is - *bringing meaning to space* - that's everyday magic. But on the other side, Dreaming, it's the other way around - you *build space around meaning*. That's creation. And when you bring that way across to this material world – pow! That's when your good work happens and change comes. That's what carving is – building space around meaning. … This is the Turnaround Business, finding the opposite domains, then finding the opposites within those domains, turning them around … It makes a friction, a spark that brings fire. …Those two owl eyes coming together, that was the vision of the interface that set me up in this work. *That's it.* (22 August, 2008)

Figure 33: Carving from Owl Business

Proper visions always come with a metallic taste and a pressure behind my nose – this was my criterion for choosing which dreams and visions would inform the direction of the research. This owl vision was a strong one. She froze mid air in front of me and I stared into her eyes for hours, standing completely still. Her eyes gradually came together and overlapped, and then slowly became one big eye. The owl was gone then, leaving a big black eye fringed with white down. I looked into that eye for many hours, taking up the Business of synergy as a creative Dreaming force. Since then, if I concentrate hard enough, I can frame my physical vision within that circle and see people and places more clearly, more deeply. I can bring out the integrity, strength and power in people and places, if I keep my heart and intent clear. Later I carved that owl and worked with it in ceremony, with smoke. There were a lot of inner journeys like these in the research, but this was the key vision of the Cultural Interface. The significance of the shield shape for me came from that overlap space of two circles. The shield teaches us that if you're strong in that synergistic Law, then you have the best protection there is.

The research had physical journeys too, because it covered such a massive geographical area. At least half of the project time was spent on the road. Every step of these journeys shaped my Indigenous standpoint methodology, with lessons

learned from the land and recorded in the field notes. Like once *true god* I saw a blue-tongue lizard with his tail bitten off. Saw that he wasn't making that winding path track because of it, but then reflected that he was still walking the same way. This is the same as people and culture – just because you can't see the 'traditional' cultural expression, doesn't mean people aren't still walking the same path as before. This reinforced for me the message I brought back from up north for this mob here. …There were sheep everywhere, kicking up great clouds of dirt that blew away. A little dark mound … is what's left of a ground oven from the old days. Those rocks were at the bottom of a hole to hold the heat. Now so much dirt has been ripped up by the sheep and wind erosion that those hard rocks from the bottom of the hole are now the top of a mound. *That's it.* (30 September, 2008) That ground oven showed me about cultural continuity and discontinuity – that so much can be stripped away, but that solid ancestral core remains and stands proud, deep knowledge rising up and informing our ways of working. The knowledge doesn't change, only the context around it and the ways we can use it.

Figure 34: Blue-tongue and ground oven story from river journey

Many might dismiss that as a pile of rocks, walk straight and miss the lesson. But that knowledge was in my filters, and so I saw the message of integrity there. I looked at people in this way too, beyond the politics and foibles, looking with one big eye rather than two small ones, and so found that same integrity. Their messages shaped my research tools too. Like Mum P there in this cultural workshop, when we first met *true god* we just saw each other straight away for what we were in that room, and made strong connections. She used the way our relationship developed there as a model to explain kinship to the group, not just blood way, but culture way. She went through with them all the non-verbal signals that passed between us, physical and also

that spirit connection, then all the codes like me calling her Aunty at a certain point and how she responded, then the way that built with the sharing of knowledge, how she measured my depth of knowledge, recognised it, how she repositioned me then by calling me son, and then that moment when I started calling her Mama ... With this story she began a learning circle where all contributed their knowledge of kinship, inter-tribal exchange, protocol, knowledge etc, while I scribed a mind-map under her direction. The dynamic knowledge that came from this was very deep, articulating values for our work... She used our developing relationship to demonstrate this, explaining the signals I had given her ... It's like a code whereby people can recognise each other and their relationship in this web of knowledge and obligation. This knowledge formed the content for fifty hours of programming, which we only then began to relate back to the syllabus. … that knowledge, somehow, as if by magic, fulfilled every syllabus outcome. *That's it.* (8 April, 2008)

Dialogue as an Indigenous methodology came with messages from people of integrity. First of all I was sceptical about the message *true god* from Sis in WA … the Nyoongar notion of Indigenous academic writing as "dialogue". I like the idea, but some examples I've seen … I think fall short of actual dialogue. Instead it seems to be an undisciplined monologue that excuses itself by invoking an Aboriginal genre that is framed as inaccessible to Western understanding. *That's it.* (17 September, 2008)

But then next day Aunty from the opposite side of the continent emails me out of the blue with a suggestion of using 'written yarns' as data. We had these yarns via email as I was 'working with' her book. *True god* back when I first skimmed it I could see there was a lot more in there than most texts you find, and that I'd be working with it rather than just reading it. In her way, it's a process of 'coming amongst' and 'coming alongside' the Stories of Relatedness. This takes time and can't be rushed, which is why it's taken me so long to 'do the reading'. This has occurred as a dialogue with her that has run parallel to the "reading". It's taken a long time to internalise the instructions she gave me by email at the start of the reading – mostly about (what she would refer to as) the Entity of Climate and Entity of Skies. *That's it.* (20 October, 2008)

These written yarns shaped my methodology. Like when I said to Sis, who was working on her own methodology at the time, *true god* I think you can feed them your own stories as well and check to see how it changes their filters… your research tools are going to look like nothing that ever went before. That's another interesting idea for an Indigenous methodology - making your tools, in a traditional sense. Mmmm. That could work for me, that metaphor, as a carver... *That's it.* (21 November, 2008)

Theories of Aboriginal knowledge and learning were explored from our own bodies of knowledge and languages, like this dialogue with Sis there in W.A. (me talking first, her reply after that) – *true god* in most of our languages there's no separate words for 'listen' and 'hear' as in English. Rather, our meanings around listening carry a whole different significance, a different meaning, so when we say 'listen' in English it means something different to what they understand. Ears are different too in our ways - they come into phrases, compound words and idioms dealing with respect, discipline, wisdom, responsibility.

[Then her reply]
Even when we use the word 'listen' Nyungar English carries different contexts. Listen means learn. Our word for learning and knowledge is one and the same. For knowing, you would always be learning and so, always listening una. *That's it.* (17 September, 2008)

These dialogues often intersected with others, like in this reflection on a dialogue with Aunty – *true god* more things she wrote about Entities of Waterways and Skies interacting for Rainbow came into my learnings about that. She has that Kapool there as Creator Being there at Quandamoopah country, back there behind that Ancestral Core. This also intersected with my dialogues and work shared in linocut project with [name removed] about Kabul from Jagara way, same one, that carpet snake. So thinking through that serpent way and then my own and then with Sis' was what helped me come alongside her Stories of relatedness for the Quampie methodology. [I carved my stories of that into gidjiirr wood (see figure 35 below)]. She says that is the first part for the Indigenous researcher, knowing, respecting and living your own Stories and bringing them alongside the Stories of the place where you are… That's the ways of *knowing*, ways of *being*, ways of *doing – epistemology, ontology,*

methodology – knowing stories of relatedness, *respecting* stories of relatedness, *living* stories of relatedness. *That's it.* (20 October, 2008)

Figure 35: Serpent carving for stories of relatedness

My dialogues were also often face to face, with these people and others. Like with Martin Nakata, after he saw my presentation on the Cultural Interface, *true god* he said that the only time I fell into that trap of the false dichotomies ('taking sides') was when I was talking about the non-linear ways of knowing. This is because I'd politicised it as a criticism of 'closing the gap'. He also said that now I need to step up and take a leadership role in this work. He said now I need to write the meta-narrative, which will show the intersections with wider knowledge. *That's it.* (7 November, 2008)

But not all messages from people were positive. Negative and uncomfortable messages shaped my standpoint too. Often these came from non-Aboriginal people and organisations, usually within dialogues seeking to place me in a framework of colonial understandings of Indigenousness. It was felt as a pressure.

So I struggled to reconcile what I still saw as opposing cosmologies in the research. This was done in reflective work and recorded in the field notes, like *true god* how do researchers do these timelines and stick to them when so much is so variable? Maybe this is why community people always get bulldozed over in 'consultation' – it's these

timelines. Who decided time was a line anyway? That second law of thermodynamics is to blame – that business about entropy and disorder in closed systems, giving them that idea of the arrow of time. Do researchers create a "closed system" when they research, imposing that framework on communities, so that their time can run straight and they can quantify better? Does a decolonising methodology work with complex, interconnected, infinite, self-organising systems instead of these constructs of 'closed systems'? *That's it.* (30 April, 2008)

I questioned too the way I was framed in the education organisations where I was working. This was a dangerous time for me, in which I was tempted to see the worlds of coloniser and colonised as irreconcilable. After spending a week in a school where I was seen as a performer rather than a consultant, I wrote *true god* if they want didgeridoo players they can go to Nimbin. I need to keep all the things that others see as exotic to myself. Otherwise they reframe them as a spectacle and strip them of meaning. From now on I work only with meta-knowledge... My experiences over this week have left me with an emotional reaction of wanting to clam up and stop sharing. But in my mind and spirit (what's left of it) I know I need to open more, share more. I need people to see that there is knowledge – not just 'culture'. There's more to this knowledge than dot paintings on tea towels, or 'real traditional dances with bare-breasted women!' *That's it.* (22 May, 2008)

I went to several conferences looking for answers, but *true god* too often, brief cultural items were presented as the core Indigenous knowledge. It was all bookends – the valued knowledge (western knowledge) in the body of the presentation and providing the structure and values, but a couple of nice cultural items at the start and finish. Book ends. *That's it.* (15 December, 2008)

I presented at these conferences, but found this situation too often – *true god* at first they repeated what I said, but soon they added new words to describe it and me – earthy, simple, beautiful, black. The more I spoke, the blacker I looked to these people. Later on the bus I sat in front of one of these people who was describing me and my work to a friend, describing me as a "beautiful black man". But he didn't recognise me there on the bus in front of him, eating a muesli bar. Suddenly I was just

a white face, losing tone somehow outside of the frame of authenticity. *That's it.* (August, 2008)

After many similar encounters, omissions were made in my work from the pressure of how outsiders might frame the things I shared. Like one day I reflected on *true god* a lot of knowledge lately that has been tied up with sex that I've neglected to include here out of a feeling that it's inappropriate… Like … in all that work with boomerangs – learning things tied to Dreaming stories about … [high level violence and sexual content]… Seems horrendous to say it here... Makes me question the authenticity of what I'm writing here, if I've been subconsciously omitting things that outsiders might find disgusting or misogynistic. It's a protective thing – I know information like that can be used to build a case against Aboriginal culture as inherently abusive ... Leads to more questions about what to share and what not to. *That's it.* (20 May, 2008)

As always, Story gave me the answers to my troubles, and I found that message of balance at the Interface, to help me decide what I should share, one day *true god* working with galah story to build numeracy and literacy learning around the protocols of sharing and counting carefully, and the consequences of sharing unequally and fighting over resources. So that story about sharing made me think harder about the idea of how to share this knowledge I'm working with, how to share it in a balanced way between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people where I'm not taking or giving more than I should. *That's it.* (7 May, 2008)

When I started working more systematically with this balance, embracing those tensions of the Interface as creative and productive, many deeper and more positive messages started coming through from non-Aboriginal people. Like one day after some bad business, a non-Indigenous person gave me some good learning to use for my methodology. *True god* he showed me … that poison can be medicine too. That's how we need to turn things around in this research. Research has been poison for us sure, but poison can be medicine too. Our own research projects now, with that Law and these new roles for us, those protocols and limits we have – this will be medicine to bring about a balance. *That's it.* (15 August, 2008)

So my standpoint began to emerge through interactions with people and texts, and my reflections on these. Guiding principles of balance, synergy and symmetry became solid in the middle of 2008, when I understood *true god* when a concept is right and true, you should be able to turn it around and see the same shape from both sides. When a concept is wrong and false, it's unbalanced, but you should be able to invert it and juxtapose that against the original to find the right way. Like Nakata's book *Disciplining the Savages, Savaging the Disciplines*. There is an emancipatory element to this work of inversion and creating symmetry where there was previously imbalance. This is what attracted me to David Rose's work back in 2003 – *learning to read* became *reading to learn*. This is an act of creation, turning things around. Just like in that Dreaming event of "the Turnaround" when the spirit world separated from the material world, creating this dual world, the two worlds facing each other – the skycamp and the earth. Turning things around in Indigenous education requires that same creative praxis. Kids won't come to school? Well, take school to the kids. Same is the way I'm working with knowledge in schools – instead of trying to cut up our knowledge and map it onto the curriculum, I'm going the other way and starting with the knowledge alone, then seeing where the syllabus can overlap with that.
Reading Nakata's book at this time of seasonal change has got me thinking about turning things around … [my research project] will be an Indigenous person studying non-Aboriginal people as they grapple with unfamiliar knowledge systems. This will be a turnaround …like what Nakata calls reverse anthropology. *That's it.* (2 June, 2008) This oppositional orientation from the concept of reverse anthropology later constituted a threat to validity that is discussed in Chapter 4.

These reflections led to a way of grounding the methodology in a spiritual practice without tokenism, new-age mystique or a loss of cultural integrity. This began with the decision to incorporate messages that I would normally keep to myself – like messages from animals and what new-agers refer to as 'synchronicity'. I came to refer to this as 'relationally responsive analysis'. I wrote *true god* I've decided to use this as a way to test hypotheses … incidences of spiritual congruence need to occur to validate directions, actions, plans and new ideas. If these don't occur, then it's the wrong path. I'm operating from the assumption that all this work I'm yet to do is already part of the Dreaming – is already designed. I have to simply uncover that Dreaming design, find it on this research journey. But I have to find it Business way,

like I need to follow those signs and go the right way in a ritualised movement in order to interact with this Dreaming knowledge and bring it across to this material world. *That's it.* (18 September, 2008)

This became standard practice for me as my methodology took shape. I recorded in the field notes *true god* …an interesting pattern in the coding – I noted that often meaningful occurrences with animals (particularly birds) heralded "revealed knowledge" arising in the research. *That's it.* (15 May, 2008) And one day I celebrated a *true god* …moment of congruence, that realisation that came with a Dream, and also the coinciding business from that ceremony … In our research dialogue I said to Sis that when these things come it's a proof, it's a way of testing the data. I said when they come in threes like this it's that triangulation of data that helps prove a theory. *That's it.* (20 October, 2008)

This was affirmed for me at a meeting of Indigenous colleagues, in which *true god* other members raised the issue of meaningful coincidences … Seems we've all been experiencing these in this work. The team leader said it was a good sign that what we are doing is right, that we're following the right path and being driven by something bigger than ourselves or the department. *That's it.* (10 April, 2008)

A strong affirmation for me of a place for spirit business in academia came one day at the university. During several presentations from fellow doctoral candidates *true god* "unexplainable" anomalies kept happening with the technology - there was obviously something happening extra-ordinary. I was watching that, quiet as usual, but then was so surprised and happy to see it brought out in the open by the Indigenous facilitator, addressed in a real way. The restless spirit was acknowledged – this blew me away, to see someone talking so openly about such things in front of gubbas in that rarefied academic context. It really gave me permission for my work in this way. *That's it.* (10 July, 2008)

I sought these affirmations in non-ordinary ways when conducting the research. Like when entering a new place one day *true god* the new season was bursting out everywhere, and I met the first snakes as they came up, groggy and sluggish enough to touch. Stopped at a place with strong underground water, called out to let the old

ones know who I was and what I was there for. Warm wind came up then, just lifted up my arms … Then I felt a tap on my hand that really startled me – it was a real physical touch from somebody's finger. Opened my eyes and there was nobody there, just maybe a faint shimmer. The touch was like "Ok, you can come in". *That's it.* (26 August, 2008)

I found warnings in this way, as well as affirmations. I knew when to back away. Like one day with this old fulla who was inspecting my work, *true god* he wasn't happy about the emu egg, saying they shouldn't be painted like that – it was lazy and I should carve it. He looked disgusted with me and walked away. Just then the egg rolled off the seat on its own and cracked down the middle. Dust storm hit in full force just after that, and the wind drove me back three steps it was so strong. *That's it.* (30 September, 2008) I changed my way of working with that egg after that, and with the non-verbal way of knowing that it represented. But too late – my relationship with that old fulla as a mentor was ruined and I never got it back.

Working with spirit so intensely, cleverpeople would find me suddenly and without warning, and just seemed to know what I was doing. This is where things became dangerous, as you never know who to trust with cleverpeople. I wrote about an encounter that made me feel unsafe, when a woman had approached me out of the blue and decided to test me. *True god* those secret things put me in a spooky mood. A lot of what she talked about was protection, the stones she carries for that, watching me all the time she said it, and nodded to see that I know ... she put me in the way of bad things deliberately out there on country to see how strong my protection was, to test my knowledge. Like at one stage she held out this firestone from a secret place and I wouldn't take it, so she dropped it, knowing I wouldn't let it hit the ground. It was humming there in my hand, and she watched me close to see how I'd handle it. *That's it.* (14 April, 2008)

I didn't allow those things to touch any of the work I did in schools – this was part of my research ethics. I had to work hard to protect myself and my work from the intrusions of clever people and things, while at the same time keeping it clear and transparent to them so it would be allowed to pass. Magic in that sense was not part of my work with research participants, as I was dealing more with the meta-knowledge

than the specific knowledge and practice of spiritual matters. Avoiding the magical, I instead used locally approved cultural activities to draw on spirit, for example, spear-making *true god* to introduce the idea of revealed knowledge – that ancestral knowledge you carry in your body. When they've never thrown a spear before but then see that style and skill emerge from out of themselves, from seemingly nowhere, then I can start talking about the other knowledge that's there inside waiting – the patterns of logic and gifts that can be used to our advantage in mainstream learning. *That's it.* (20 March, 2008)

Figure 36: Spear carving for learning about ancestral intellect

So that principle demanded that a familiar cultural activity become the guiding framework for my standpoint methodology in this research. My strongest area of practical knowledge in culture is the carving of weapons and instruments, and so this trans-national community of practice provided the appropriate framework for my methodology.

First, here is what I learned from an old carver during the study, some non-verbal knowledge that showed me how to protect my cultural integrity in this domain, to exist in the most turbulent areas of the Interface without being drawn too far into conflict and oppositional ideology. I need to pay respect to him here. *True god* he saw me, kept carving. I didn't look at him straight. From the corner of my eye I noticed that every time somebody approached to question, compliment, participate, photograph etc. he would stop, step back and just disappear into himself. Then he

became invisible to them, and they left. I learned the lesson from that, how to deal with those people trying to frame me. Long time I sat there. Later he made sign for me to approach. I started to rise, and immediately three gubba gatekeepers converged on him, surrounded him. One took his tools and started frantically hacking at the kinuw, staring daggers at me. The old fulla went away into himself, and I walked away to practise what he had shown me. *That's it.* (10 August, 2008)

My carving constantly gave me meta-knowledge to share with teachers and students during the project. Like at several schools *true god…* they had asked me to teach them to make boomerangs. I told them there is important knowledge in that, things you can only learn when you are ready for it. Lessons that you learn when you're ready to start on the road to being a man. (Behaviour was never an issue when the students were given that explicit task of proving their maturity and readiness to receive knowledge.) I gave the example of cutting horizontal notches first to stop the wood splitting on the vertical cut – this is about planning ahead and learning caution, not just in making boomerangs but in learning new knowledge and in the way you live your life. *That's it.* (12 June, 2008)

Figure 37: Carving for learning about planning and processes

Metaknowledge from the carving process informed my theoretical perspective in the research too. Like I reflected that *true god* for me, there is a lot of room for innovation in my carving, but at the same time there are rules to follow with how to cut. And

some things are off limits for change – like for example I must always paint didjeridoos the same way, with Apalech paint [see figure below]. But boomerangs are more flexible. Tension and balance between autonomy and relatedness. The interface happens at the micro level between competing ideas and forces within a system – not just at the macro level between competing systems. *That's it.* (20 October, 2008)

Figure 38: Didgeridoo with Apalech paint

The carving process was an integral part of how I reviewed the literature. For example, *true god* I spent the weekend going through Nakata's book. I'd read for a while, then carve for a while to reflect on what I'd read. Made a didgeridoo and an axe while I was reading that. Particularly wondered how what I was reading framed the cultural activity I was doing at the time. When I do this work I'm not creating artefacts of a static past constructed by anthropologists (a concern about Indigenised content that Nakata and I share), but for me it's connecting to the past, still situated in my present, while also looking forward. The tools I make aren't oddities and ornaments (certainly not pretty enough for that), but teaching and learning tools for knowledge that exists in the interface right now – problem solving strategies, planning strategies, ways to reframe and examine new info from your own standpoint, making meaning, etc. I learn things while I'm doing this activity, things that are situated at a nexus of past and present knowledge, intersecting with multiple cultural realities at the same time. For me these tools teach higher order knowledge (e.g. thinking strategies), rather than just "we used to use these to kill ducks". Nakata refers a lot to

Foucault's notions of continuity and discontinuity. I had trouble trying to situate my practice on some kind of continuum in this dichotomy. It doesn't work like that. The objects of culture may change but the framework is the same. *That's it.* (16 June, 2008)

The carved objects themselves were created as texts that I used in the induction and engagement of participating teachers. It worked in this way – *true god* …always holding something throughout the presentation. I had my thumb drive in the coolamon with all the other things, and said at the start that the other objects were the same as this, and carried just as much information. They came alive, those things, and a lot of what I shared came through them. *That's it.* (5 August, 2008)

Carving became my method for working through the complexities of reconciling two knowledge systems, for ensuring that my own cultural framework remained central to the process rather than becoming an ornament to add a sense of authenticity. You can see this process in the following reflection. *True god* … the work of my hands has changed with this Law. Same way the research. This is heavy work. The lizard weighs twice as much now as the original piece of wood. One day the paint all came off the bullroarer, and I could see it was wrong. The come-back boomerang has taken its place in the 8 things now. And I was finally shown how to carve an emu egg, so the hand sign has been made right now. *That's it.* (30 September, 2008)

Figure 39: The come-back boomerang – a symbol of the Cultural Interface

But at that stage it still wasn't explicitly a structured methodology for me. The realisation that this was how I was working came through research dialogues with Karen Martin and my Sis, forming around the idea of research as Business, an extension of the concept of research as Ceremony. It became clear in the language we were using when discussing my stages of research, words like smoothing, sanding, cutting. I first became aware of this in an email dialogue, in which I stated *true god*

You know, there's the learning and the background and your tradition and family way that you're carving from, then there's the seeking of permissions on different country – that whole process and the induction into new plants and styles, then there's the seeking and gathering part where you find the shapes that are there what the place is showing you and giving you in the woods you find, then there's chipping with the axe to shape it (spirit is in all these steps, using that belly-magic to guide you with that push-pull), then there's the grinding to make that final shape, then the smoothing, then the oiling, then the placement of the carved object for appropriate community use and benefit. *That's it.* (23 January, 2008) Following this dialogue, work began on drawing the process of research as Business from my personal metaphor of carving.

Anman kan – that's it – that's the end of this story and of the Messy Text. The rough cutting process of this chapter (see figure 40 below) is finished, so now we begin to refine the shape of the research. But first, a cautionary note.

Figure 40: Rough cutting stages in the carving process

A Cautionary Note on the Use of Metaphor in Research as Business

The broad framework of research as Business does not specifically mention the practice of carving – my personal metaphor for the methodology. This is so that other researchers may adapt it to their own culturally specific ways of doing Business, using their own appropriate metaphors. These could be anything from Zulu beer-making to Latvian quilting.

Working with metaphors is a point of common ground between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge systems. We have a long tradition in Aboriginal society of ritual training in the use of metaphor during initiation into higher stages of knowledge (Evans, 2009). This is because metaphor is the way Law, Business, ritual, ceremony and magic is worked. Powerful metaphors create the frameworks for powerful transformation processes, but only if they have integrity. A metaphor that lacks integrity only damages relatedness.

For example, during this project I visited an Aboriginal community school in the Northern Territory that was using the metaphor of Aboriginal fishing nets as an education framework. This may have worked as an idea of school and community weaving their different threads together to make the nets, then the students using the nets to catch fish, with the fish representing knowledge and social/cultural capital. But this was not the case. The fish in the net represented the children themselves and the river represented the community, promoting a very problematic image of the school as an entity that captures children and takes them away to be consumed.

The message here is that the use of metaphors for doing Business or creating frameworks for education should be taken very seriously and approached with cultural and intellectual integrity. If token symbols of culture are applied as metaphors without intellectual rigour, then they may do more harm than good. In my project cultural knowledge was used at a deep level of reflection and analysis to create not

only a metaphor for the methodology, but for Aboriginal pedagogies as well (see figure 41).

Figure 41: Eight Ways of learning expressed as carved texts

The carvings and symbols as metaphors for those pedagogies played an important role in inducting teachers into Aboriginal knowledge systems. They provided a model for teachers to negotiate their own metaphors at the Cultural Interface, to lead the Business of transformation in their classrooms.

Chapter Four

Carving the Shape

Ngamadja sang up a big dust storm and while the old man was blinded from the flying sand she ran away back towards her people. When the dust cleared the old man looked around and could not see her. He immediately set off after her, chasing her all the way back to her home. (Excerpt from Ngamadja story, from Clancy McKellar).

Figure 42: Fourth view of Ngamadja, with Uncle Clancy

This chapter reflects the more detailed work of the carving process following rough cutting, where the shape of the object is refined. For example, these are the cuts that are made to determine whether a boomerang flies straight or comes back. So this chapter gives detail of the pilot project that informed early development of the Aboriginal pedagogies developed for this study. It also outlines the contributing non-Aboriginal pedagogy systems, then explains the process used to bring these alongside the Aboriginal ways of learning. The chapter concludes with a preamble to the analysis. This is designed to cut away data emerging in the study that might damage relatedness if left in the body of the analysis. This data involves the prejudices, fears and other barriers that prevent effective work at the Cultural Interface.

The Trial Project

The following is a summary of the pilot project for this research, a separate study that provided the initial local concepts of Aboriginal pedagogy that would later be brought together with the western pedagogies to create the Aboriginal pedagogy framework used in the main research project. It is important to include this here, as it shows the origins of the Aboriginal pedagogy work and pays respects to the community and land it came from. It outlines the techniques used for drawing pedagogies from local language, landscape and Dreaming Stories, as well as my early work in finding ways to engage teachers with this Aboriginal knowledge.

The Scope of the Pilot

A pilot research project was run in 2007, when I was invited to work for six months at a school in the western New South Wales Region to strengthen Aboriginal perspectives in the curriculum. My work with a design and technology class in the middle years of schooling was conducted as an action research project. The aims were to identify meta-knowledge in local language and culture, find the overlap between this and the mainstream curriculum, develop and implement a unit of work based on this interface knowledge, then find enablers and barriers to engaging non-Aboriginal teachers in this knowledge in a way that would improve student results (Yunkaporta and McGinty, 2009).

For this work the project drew heavily on local knowledge of land and place, with the nearby river junction becoming a central metaphor for working synergistically in the overlap between multiple social realities and ways of knowing.

Local Knowledge in Theory and Method

Much of the theory for this project was informed by Indigenous knowledges drawn from local language and culture, from concepts of balance central to Gamilaraay cosmology. Particular attention was paid to the way spiritual beings representing

Law/Lore are framed as having equal and opposite counterparts, each controlling different aspects of existence and maintaining tension and balance between competing social interests. The action research methodology itself was adapted and designed visually around these land and cultural metaphors (Yunkaporta and McGinty, 2009).

Local Aboriginal language was regarded for the purpose of the study as the key to unlocking customary logic patterns and learning orientations (Evans, 2009). A detailed review of local language revealed that in Gamilaraay/Yuwaalaraay, learning pathways are not direct and the outcomes and the journey are one and the same. For example, the word for search and find is the same – *ngaawa-y*, and the word *manila-y* means hunt, search and find simultaneously (Ash et al, 2003). This indicates that the process is as important as the outcome, or rather that the outcomes are integral to the process. This orientation informed our approach to the study. So the analysis of the findings of the study did not focus on final outcomes such as improved attendance and scores, but rather on the lessons, conflicts and stories that were created along the way. Land forms and place-based knowledge also shaped the structure of the research. For example, the coding of the data for analysis utilised a local river junction as a dialogical model, with the three streams being teacher conflict, student/community conflict and curriculum/organisation conflict. At the junction of the three lay the outcomes that came from these struggles, coded as pedagogy and processes, Interface content and attitude shifts. Local knowledge also contributed to the action part of the study, which was to develop a culturally responsive unit of work to engage students and teachers in a design and technology class. The theme of the unit was innovative product design.

Local Knowledge in the Unit of Work

From the local “Wamba Star” story came the notion that local Aboriginal ways of thinking and innovating took a winding path rather than a straight line, a concept that had considerable overlap with lateral thinking techniques. Both ways of thinking were explored and used by students not only in the content of the product design unit, but also in classroom design. The students applied the non-linear thinking techniques initially to customising the classroom environment, procedures, activities and content

to suit their needs. In this way they became active participants in the study rather than passive objects of the research (Yunkaporta and McGinty, 2009).

Another story that was used was about an Aboriginal man from the region who designed and mass-produced a new kind of shield three centuries earlier. Students backward mapped through the story to establish a general procedure for developing and manufacturing their own original products. This procedural text was also grounded in the traditional local genre called *"manday"*, which referred to steps cut in a tree but also a procedural text or list of items. *Manday* also referred to a singing of places in order from north to south on Country (Ash et al, 2003). Thus knowledge was constructed as something that came not just from teachers and media, but also from land and ancestors.

This allowed the inclusion of spirit in the learning process. Knowledge was seen as a spiritual force, with knowledge production as a sacred or ceremonial duty to be performed (Yunkaporta and McGinty, 2009).

Teacher Attitudes and Change

In order to embrace this Interface knowledge, it was found that teachers first had to deal with their inner conflict – their negative perceptions of students and their problematic relationship to the community. In the struggle to unpack their own subjectivities many entrenched beliefs came out. One concept that emerged regularly was a perceived intellectual deficit in the Aboriginal community. Phrases like "no logic," and "their lack of logic" communicated a strong deficit view of local culture and knowledge. The cultural discomfort extended beyond relationships, impacting on content. Aboriginal perspectives were avoided because they made teachers "feel uncomfortable". One teacher said she was "made to feel that you don't have a right as a non-Indigenous person to explore Aboriginal culture." There was a "fear of overstepping". Cultural knowledge was also seen as difficult to "track down" and the community was seen as having "lost its culture" (ibid, 63).

These statements of cultural discomfort and perceived deficits were used not only to justify avoidance of Aboriginal perspectives, but also to lower expectations and curriculum standards. For the first half of the project there were repeated requests from the teachers involved to abandon the unit and "do some fun cooking activities instead." (ibid, 64)

Change came from practice and reflection. Variables for success that emerged were persistence with the Indigenised content/pedagogy, and belief in the Cultural Interface ideal. This allowed teachers to trust in the project, facilitating a shift in attitudes as they realised that the Interface provided a safe, dynamic space for exploring Indigenous knowledge and improving student engagement. Towards the end of the project, the teachers had revised their notion of "students as the problem" and there was a shift to "an emphasis on changing the classroom and our practice rather than trying to directly change the students". Reliance on stimulus-response methods of reward and punishment was replaced with a commitment to pursuing Indigenous values of communal knowledge/support and learner autonomy. Teacher reflection and analysis revealed that promoting Indigenous values neutralised the need for reactive behaviour management, as well as reducing the tendency to blame failures on cultural deficit and community shortcomings (ibid, 65).

Effective Interface Content and Pedagogy

Figure 43: Bundi design, manufacture and marketing process – Aboriginal intellectual rigour

The students identified the Indigenised/Interface content (a dynamic blend of local and non-local knowledge – see figure 43) as a major factor in their improved behaviour and engagement. Whenever the Indigenised content lacked community relevance or intellectual rigour, student conflict increased. Lessons were unsuccessful when based on practical activities that were soft or unstructured, but successful when they incorporated an intellectual component grounded in Indigenised learning protocols. An example of this protocol was the class' communal approach to knowledge ownership and production, which was developed with the students through an examination of Aboriginal and western symbols. An analysis was made of a Gamilaraay group meeting symbol formed by a circle surrounded with "C" shapes facing the centre. This was compared with a copyright symbol, which was reframed by the students as a greedy person sitting alone, keeping knowledge for himself. The communal protocol arising from this discussion was often referred to in resolving disputes over resources and information and in establishing a community of practice in hands-on activities (ibid).

Successful learning and behaviour outcomes occurred with cooperative work in Indigenous learning circles, but also when students were supported to work autonomously and creatively. Successful learning was also linked to the use of Indigenous cultural knowledges informed by the Cultural Interface theory. Additionally, it was found that redirection of chronically misbehaving students was only possible by reiterating aspects of the content that were in some way connected to the land or Aboriginal community life. Threats and bribes failed. Story telling and sharing were also found to be the cornerstone of successful lessons (ibid.).

The students as research participants were encouraged to design their learning around Indigenous learning styles. In negotiating their classroom environment, they jointly constructed their own definition of the local Aboriginal "way of learning", which was "To watch first and join in for small parts, then take on larger parts of the process as our skills grow." They clearly identified social support and scaffolding as the key pedagogies, balanced with a gradual shift to self-direction (ibid, 65). This indicated that there was common ground between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of learning, as this orientation coincided with aspects of the mainstream pedagogies promoted in the region.

Contributing Non-Aboriginal Pedagogies

The results of the trial project showed a strong link between Aboriginal and mainstream pedagogies. This informed development of the practical eight-way pedagogy framework for the main project, bringing together the best available non-Aboriginal pedagogies in the region with the Aboriginal ways of learning identified in the trial project and the auto ethnography process. The best available non-Aboriginal pedagogies in the region were drawn from the Quality Teaching Framework (DET NSW, 2003) and Reading to Learn program (Koop and Rose, 2008).

Reading to Learn was developed by David Rose and involves scaffolded interaction cycles in literacy learning, beginning with intensive modelling and learning engagement provided by teachers, with the focus gradually shifting to student self-directed learning (ibid.). Overlap was found between this and Aboriginal ways of learning involving a balance of social support and autonomy. The Reading to Learn focus on social support, metalanguage, self-direction and explicit criteria also represented a huge area of common ground with the Quality Teaching Framework (DET NSW, 2003).

The Quality Teaching framework was developed primarily through the work of James Ladwig (Luke, et al., 2001) in several permutations, including Authentic Pedagogy in the U.S., Productive Pedagogies in Queensland, and finally Quality Teaching in New South Wales (ibid.). In its final form, elements of Active Citizenship, Problem-based Learning and Group Identities were excluded, leaving eighteen pedagogies under the broad categories of Significance, Environment and Intellectual Quality (DET NSW, 2003). These were designed to give teachers a common language to discuss, evaluate and share their best practice through lesson coding and planning from lists and tables of pedagogies. However Quality Teaching was generally perceived as an intrusion and implicit criticism by teachers, therefore becoming something that was avoided and resented (Harrison, 2007). So part of my intent for my own project was to create an interface between this system and Aboriginal learning systems in a way that might heal some of that resentment.

The development of a pedagogical interface for my project involved consultants and mentors specialising in Aboriginal education, Reading to Learn and Quality Teaching collaborating to find the common ground between their three areas. For example, the diagram below represents a metaphor that was created when four specialists used the Torres Strait Islander drum symbol to represent holistic, supported and autonomous Indigenous learning styles, as well as representing the Reading to Learn scaffolding process. It incorporates all of the elements of Quality Teaching, mapped onto the Reading to Learn scaffolding process.

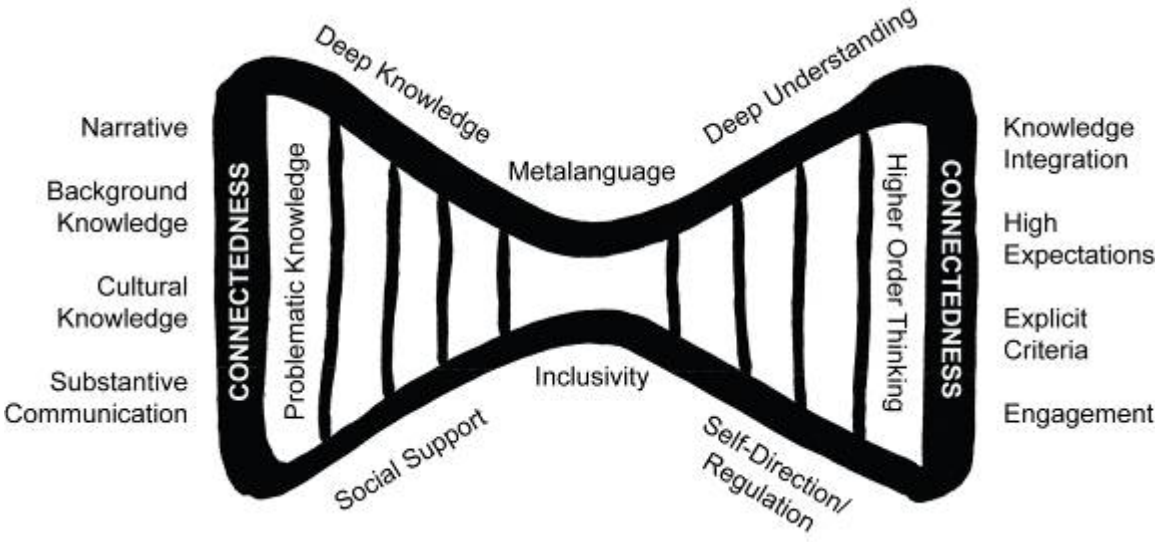

Figure 44: Interface of Quality Teaching and Reading to Learn

It was proposed by the team that this process (from left to right in the diagram) would emerge with learning planned around the following steps:

- Tell your stories about the topic or related topics.
- Get students to tell theirs and discuss that knowledge in depth.
- Show a model of the work students will produce for this topic.
- Ask: How can this help/relate to local community?
- Pull the model apart, question the meaning.
- Map out the structures, explain the patterns and codes.
- Work with these visually and kinaesthetically.
- Support students to recreate their own versions individually.
- Ensure these are returned to community for local benefit.

By sharing stories at the start, teachers are using the Quality Teaching (QT) pedagogies of *Narrative, Background Knowledge, Cultural Knowledge* and *Substantive Communication*. In showing a model text and linking it to a useful purpose in the local community, they are using the QT pedagogy of *Connectedness*. *Problematic Knowledge* emerges in early readings of the text that question the writer's intent and cultural orientation. As the text is broken down further, students are gaining *Deep Knowledge* of the topic and being provided with *Social Support* to enjoy successful learning before being asked to produce independent work. Explicit instruction then of the basic elements and *Metalanguage* of the topic or task ensures *Inclusivity* for all learners, regardless of socio-economic status. Then, as they are supported to reconstruct their own texts independently, they are using *Self-direction* and are demonstrating *Deep Understanding*. Their work is then returned to the community, ensuring *Connectedness*. Transparency in their work in the community helps to generate *High Expectations* from family, not just teachers. They have anticipated this throughout their work, with *Explicit Criteria* explained from the start, with additional criteria provided by the community, who now judge the work. Such real-life, community-oriented tasks usually require an overlap of subject areas and knowledge domains, which ensures *Knowledge Integration*. The expectation that this work will be visible in, or impacting on the real world, provides a focus for *Engagement* throughout the task.

This way of reconceptualising the non-Aboriginal pedagogies assisted in the integration of these with the Aboriginal pedagogies that had been identified in the pilot study. There was a clear overlap here with notions of Aboriginal pedagogy as narrative-driven, place-based, visual, kinaesthetic, non-linear, holistic and community oriented. From this work the three systems were integrated and the new eight-way pedagogy model developed.

Pedagogy Interface

Figure 45: Bark dish map of the project's originating communities

This coolamon shows the story of the integration of pedagogy systems. On the right can be seen the place where the pilot project gave us the initial ideas of Aboriginal pedagogy to bring to the river junction between the other two sites (centre and left). There we brought two western pedagogy systems together with the Aboriginal way to create the basic framework. This research then continued down the river (left) and throughout the region to develop the framework further. In terms of the Dreaming notion of the Darling River representing a tree, that junction is the beginning of the root system that extends throughout the north of the region. Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay and Ngiyeempaa/Ngemba knowledge from that system would be carried south along the trunk of the tree to connect with Baakindji communities (and later Wiradjuri and others).

To give an idea of how this work was taken down the river, a photo essay is included below of one of the journeys undertaken to carry the research project to the south of the region. This journey involved travelling along a song line for codfish Dreaming story that was linked to South Australia. The process included interacting with knowledge not only from the schools and communities along the river, but also interacting with land and seeking confirmation of findings from spirit ancestors (for

example, the blue-tongue lizard business mentioned in previous chapters occurred during this journey). The photo essay below acknowledges some of the places, occurrences and entities that contributed key understandings to the research during that journey.

Figure 46: Photo essay of a Lower Darling research journey

The experiences of land, yarns with locals, interactions with school staff/students, observations of school and community learning practices, incidences of ancestral confirmation identified by elders and knowledge keepers, and personal reflections were all recorded in field notes. The entries were then analysed and discussed with Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal mentors. From the notes of this particular journey, the business of 'visually mapping processes' was flagged for closer examination and further reading in the international literature on Aboriginal pedagogy. This way of learning had already been articulated previously at the river junction work and linked to traditional practices involving *'dhumbaay'* or drawing sticks (Ash et al, 2003) as well as to the focus on explicit pedagogy in both Quality Teaching (DET, 2003) and Reading to Learn (Koop and Rose, 2008).

These links can be seen in a mind map created in that river junction work by a local Ngemba woman, the Reading to Learn Consultant, the Quality Teaching Consultant

and me. The mind map shows that the pedagogy inspired by the ‘winding path’ stories and experiences was originally referred to as ‘story maps’ and ‘learning journey maps’, and linked to Explicit Criteria in Quality Teaching as well as the inverted curriculum orientation of Reading to Learn.

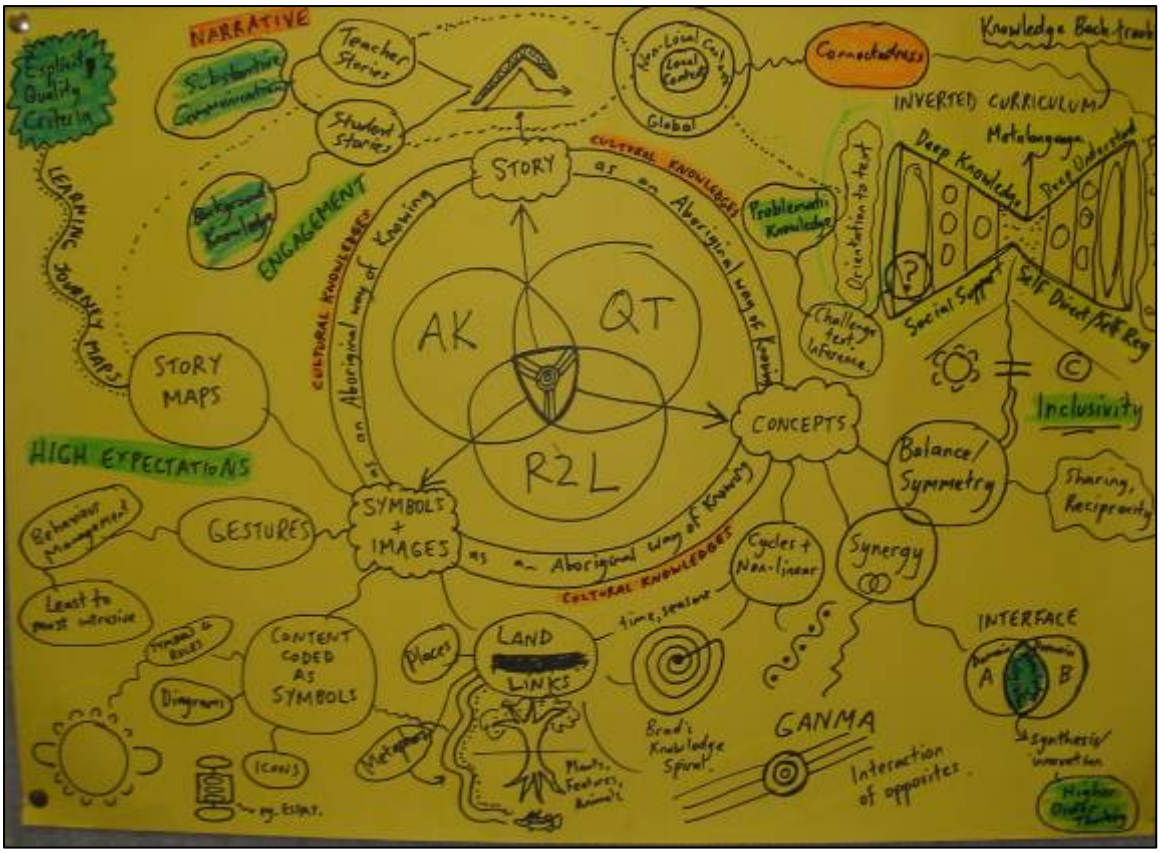

Figure 47: Early mind map showing the interface of pedagogy systems

The recounting of this particular journey has backtracked through the development of one of the eight Aboriginal pedagogies designed in this project, right back to the roots at the base of the Darling. At that junction can be seen the ‘Pedagogy Interface’ event, recorded in the mind map above, that gave rise to the eight pedagogies.

Preamble to Analysis: Clearing the Issues and Barriers, Naming the Baggage, Dumping It

I collected a lot of data that does not answer the research questions directly, in that it does not suggest *how* to do things, but rather suggests *why* they have not yet been done. I am dealing with this first. This is because it became clear in the course of the research that before people can come to Aboriginal knowledge, their issues and anxieties have to be "settled" first (Field Notes, 04/02/09), so I must address these issues now. I don't want them coming through in my discourse later as barbed comments that may compromise the reconciling goal of this work. To that end, this data will be shared here not with anger and accusation, but with the same firm-gentleness that you might use when supportively letting a relative know their drinking has become a problem. An Aboriginal participant in the study stated that non-Aboriginal people "have this wall" and that "they have to get past that" (Interview, 20/05/09), so this section is about identifying that wall then moving beyond it. It must also be acknowledged that Aboriginal people are not without similar walls that bar our paths to knowledge. Aboriginal researchers in particular come with baggage that must be named.

The first issue that needs to be acknowledged is teacher anxiety about working with Aboriginal knowledge. The data revealed fears of:

- mainstream backlash (e.g. Field Notes, 12/03/08)
- loss of credibility/centrality/privilege/expert status (e.g. Field Notes, 24/08/08)
- the unfamiliar or other (e.g. Interview, 04/06/09)
- giving offense or violating Aboriginal protocol (e.g. Wiki, 01/06/09)
- failure to meet education/workload requirements (e.g. Wiki, 17/06/09)

These concerns were related to me daily and vociferously, but seldom by the research participants. Many teachers aired these issues in asserting their intent to avoid Aboriginal perspectives, but these were not the people likely to volunteer as research participants. So it was rare to see anybody going on the record about these things, although revealing comments occasionally emerged in the data anyway, even in the most positive reports. One participant stated openly that, "We're threatened by Aboriginal content because we don't know the rules" (Interview, 04/06/09). More issues and fears emerged in statements about "fear of offending people or saying something that's not right" (Wiki, 01/06/09); a "sense of urgency… with catching up [to mainstream literacy standards]" (Interview, 20/05/09); "[fear] of Anglo parent reaction" (Field Notes, 12/03/08); "fear of offending, but also about looking like a try-hard" (Field Notes, 04/02/09). These fears were found to be a root cause of the trivialisation of Aboriginal knowledge, this link emerging in statements such as, "Teachers are very wary – it's safe to do dot paintings" (Interview, 04/06/09).

Aside from fear, another issue that emerged as a factor in the trivialisation of Aboriginal perspectives was a systemic undervaluing of local knowledge and Aboriginal culture, a deeply ingrained unwillingness to 'see' more sophisticated Aboriginal knowledge and processes. The following story of an Elder trying to contribute her ways of knowing to the curriculum illustrates the way this problem is manifested.

> *She was asking the teachers about what the class was doing, so she could bring her knowledge to bear on their learning, but they wouldn't share that with her. They set her up as a storyteller, with the kids sitting on the floor. She stalled for a long time …and eventually told them a story. It was an old story from at least 10,000 years ago about a giant goanna. There was rich knowledge …about the behaviour and markings of extinct megafauna, but also a lot of sophisticated knowledge about how children learn, community values, pedagogy, law. … That was all ignored, and the students were instructed by the teacher at the end of the story to go back to their desks and draw a picture of a goanna. [The teacher] had photocopied sheets with picture frames around them for the*

> *drawings – frames with generic dots and cross-hatching.* (Field Notes, 29/08/09)

Although this trivialisation of culture might be explained in terms of fear, there seemed to be something else at work that was causing a systemic undervaluing of local knowledge. When confronted with this issue, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants invariably responded with assertions that locals had somehow 'lost' their culture. This seemed to be a politically-correct rewriting of earlier colonial 'dying race' mythologies, clear and present in less guarded statements like, "They are gone, killed off" (Interview, 04/06/09). This belief existed side-by-side with a view of the Aboriginal community and Aboriginal culture as inherently abusive, dysfunctional and divided. There was such a uniformity in the way these ideas were expressed and justified that a distinct process or genre was observed for the opening of any discussion on Aboriginal perspectives and programs, with the following structure noted in multiple exchanges at different sites (Field Notes, 30/09/08):

1. *Affirmation* of school's commitment to Aboriginal activities, with the annual Naidoc Week celebration cited as the main vehicle for these.
2. *Celebration* of several Koori students who are doing well because of their willingness to "fit in".
3. *Lament* of poor outcomes and behaviour issues for the majority of Koori students.
4. *Justification* of schooling failure, naming Aboriginal community dysfunction as the main contributing factor.
5. *Narration* of horror stories of Aboriginal community dysfunction.
6. *Accusation* that Aboriginal politics and social fragmentation make consultation and community involvement in education impossible/difficult.
7. *Judgement* that the Aboriginal community has lost its culture and has little meaningful knowledge left to contribute to the teaching of Aboriginal perspectives in schools.

This appeared to me as a ritualised 'singing' of Aboriginal educational failure. From steps four through seven of this ritual, it can be surmised that the

undervaluing/underutilisation of local Aboriginal knowledge in the region may be rooted in the contradictory yet coexisting core beliefs that:

- Aboriginal culture is extinct.
- Aboriginal culture is causing community dysfunction and education failure.

One non-Indigenous participant perceived that these beliefs were motivating many of her colleagues and postulated that it was a symptom of some kind of cognitive injury, particular to educators, caused by industrial hazards of habitual lower order thinking and intellectual torpor (Field Notes, 05/09/08). This judgement was triggered by a particularly frustrating episode in which she was sharing her culturally responsive classroom work and programming (based on the '8ways' Aboriginal pedagogy framework) with her colleagues (ibid). When she showed them the visual map of the unit she was following with her class, her colleagues reportedly said they were unable to understand it, claiming it was too 'complex'. But at the same time they also said it was 'simplistic' because it was a visual text. Additionally, they judged that the work she was doing with her class was too complex to teach (not to learn, but to teach). That same day a visiting member of the executive challenged the relevance of the students' writing about the theme of duality in diverse cultures. The officer apparently complained that she had never heard of the word 'duality', so if she didn't know of it then how could these children be expected to learn about it? Thus the problematic hypothesis of diminished mental capacity in education professionals was born out of frustration and anger, then passed to me verbally and by email (05/09/08).

A relationally responsive analysis of the email data and notes from informal interviews with the teacher suggested signs of internal politics and oppositional relations, particularly in the long listing of grievances or perceived slights building to a case against a non-specific, change-resistant group known as 'they'. That such political tension between conservative and liberal educators was present during the work of the project was evident elsewhere in data from other participants, expressed as a "polarisation" around Indigenous issues (Wiki, 01/06/09).

But the teacher's cognitive deficit theory was nevertheless treated with respect and explored. It was linked in analysis to another set of data from the field notes, suggesting that difficulty in 'seeing' Aboriginal perspectives could be caused by a mismatch in logic systems. This idea emerged at a point in the research where I began asking people what they 'saw' in their heads when they accessed knowledge. It became clear that in education contexts some people felt they had to see knowledge as a sequence or list of bullet points, while they might think differently in their own community contexts (Field Notes, 20/05/08). I began asking this question when I was challenged by an assertion that non-Aboriginal people are slow-learners (Email, 06/02/09), which caused me to consider how I feel when I hear the same thing said of my own people. So I reframed the teacher's hypothesis in terms of a mismatch between competing logic systems (school logic and home logic), resulting in an inability to 'see' Aboriginal perspectives in schooling contexts, and possibly even an inability to cope with complex or non-linear logic.

This may be due to the serial and sequential logic required of teachers in much of their day-to-day reproduction of verbal information (Gibson, 1993), a logic system that also marginalises Aboriginal intellectual processes (Wheaton, 2000). However, as the analysis in the following chapter will show, when teachers bring their own personal, customary ways of knowing alongside Aboriginal knowledge there is a common ground across diverse logic systems that allows them to 'see' and come to the Aboriginal knowledge with less difficulty. This should put to rest any divisive mythologies of teacher or 'Anglo' cognitive deficit.

There is one last issue/barrier that I will touch on briefly here. This is the presence of blatantly expressed assimilationist agendas and unabashed antipathy towards Aboriginal culture. I don't want to give any power to this by dwelling on it – I just want to acknowledge it, name it and move on. I will give only one mild example, from a story about a meeting comprising educators as observers and community members as speakers, a meeting in which the teachers were supposed to be silently listening to a circle of Indigenous people defining local identity and values.

> *[The teachers] were shouting about how shame was the biggest barrier to Aboriginal success in education. My bunji tried to explain*

> *again about [shame as a mechanism for] balance and groundedness and protocol, but they shouted her down. I came in then, and said we only had five minutes left, and still needed to finish the business of identity and values ... But the gubbas just kept barking, demanding to have an explanation of shame, demanding that we justify it. .... This woman barked at me, "Well, I don't understand it, and I need an explanation"* (Field Notes, 24/08/08).

My relationally responsive analysis of this data identified cultural antipathy not as a separate issue in itself, but simply an emotive expression of the fear issues mentioned previously. For example, it could be argued that the conflict mentioned above was triggered more by fears of a loss of privilege/centrality/status than anything else. There is nothing in the data to suggest that cultural antipathy is purely a manifestation of that popular bogeyman 'racism', or that this abstract concept in itself can somehow become a tangible phenomenon preventing access to Aboriginal knowledge. Rather, cultural antipathy seems to be a by-product of the complex web of aforementioned issues, and doubtlessly numerous other issues not perceived in this analysis. (But then, this analysis is coming from a light-skinned person who has never been refused service at the fish and chip shop, so I acknowledge that others will have a justifiably different view of this issue.) The example above is an important one, because it shows how seductive ideological battles and dichotomous relationships can be. You can see that cultural antipathy emerging there in my own language, when I refer to the 'gubbas' as having the vocal characteristics of dogs.

It is important to acknowledge the powerful pull that oppositional thinking has on our emotions, the ease with which issues can be over-simplified as we retreat to the comfortable spaces of familiar and shallow knowledge. Now, before I move into an analysis grounded in the reconciling protocol of this research project, I acknowledge the baggage that I bring to this work, name it and attempt to leave it at the door.

When I began the two-month period of gathering data from teachers to find the 'how' of coming to Aboriginal knowledge and using it in education, I stumbled immediately on a massive discursive flaw in my plans. I had been taken with the concept of 'reverse anthropology' in Indigenous research (Nakata, 2008), the idea of researching

back at the colonists. Despite my rhetoric of a reconciling interface ethic, deep down I still carried the subliminal idea that non-Aboriginal teachers were the problem and they needed to be 'fixed'. I discovered this immediately when an Aboriginal teacher volunteered to be part of the study and I responded that I hoped to focus on non-Aboriginal participants. I said this without thinking and a few sharp questions from her showed me that this was indeed how I had pictured it, deep down.

She objected strenuously, arguing that Aboriginal teachers have just as much trouble with coming to Indigenous knowledge and using it in the classroom. Further, she said that all teachers could learn a lot from her own processes of acquiring and using Aboriginal knowledge. I realised that

> *I had divided the study, with Aboriginal knowledge informing the design of the "tool" but not included in the data itself. …This Aboriginal teacher exposed that immediately, and insisted that I change the flawed design to include Indigenous knowledge as data, by working with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers. … She said there's no reason they can't use the same thinking process as her to learn new Aboriginal knowledge and ways of doing things* (Reflection after interview, 20/05/09).

I was further challenged by another Aboriginal participant who saw my presentations, writing and research as "big-noting" and who was upset about my desire to seek pathways to Aboriginal knowledge from non-Indigenous participants.

> *She chastised me for not seeing that I must use the same Aboriginal pedagogies I'm talking about to actually teach them to the teachers, that I was devaluing those pedagogies every time I stood up and talked about them from a power point presentation. She says … [t]o bring teachers to Aboriginal knowledge we have to use our Aboriginal ways of bringing people to knowledge* (Interview notes, 11/06/09).

So I took that growling and learned from it, isolating and naming my prejudices and consciously setting them aside, then continued with reflexive practice to monitor

myself and prevent any backsliding. In the data analysis I had to do the same thing again, and in writing up my findings I have set aside and problematised the divisive issues in this section here – dealing with the baggage, naming it and leaving it at the door.

Chapter Five

Grinding

When Ngamadja came home, all the Wangkumarra people were out looking for her. They were waving to her joyfully from the other side of the creek. That's when the old man caught up with her. He knew it was too late now to steal her back, so he said, "If I can't have her, then nobody will." He took his pakarandji, his special left-handed boomerang, and he threw it at Ngamadja. (Excerpt from Ngamadja story, from Clancy McKellar).

Figure 48: Fifth view of Ngamadja

In this chapter the grinding stage of the carving process is used as a metaphor for research analysis. The analysis follows its own identified protocols from the outset, one of which is 'coming to Aboriginal knowledge in stages'. An example of this is the fact that this protocol itself cannot be summarised here, as knowledge of it must be offered at the 'proper' time as the text unfolds. These proper times were identified through 'relationally responsive analysis' involving the carving of objects and observations of land-based phenomena during the reporting business of the research.

For this and other reasons, the logic of this text does not always follow usual patterns of analysis. Often ideas are fore-grounded without supporting data initially, with evidence provided at later stages. Sometimes that is the other way around, with data provided as background knowledge and elucidated further along. Often the metalanguage is variable, using synonyms to highlight different nuances of the same concept. Conclusions are not always made immediately and occasionally findings are hidden or ambiguous, requiring active engagement by the reader to find them through reflection or multiple re-readings. The knowledge is layered and cyclic in this way, despite the linear structure I have imposed on it for the purposes of print. The 'sections' are arbitrary – this is not how I organise the knowledge in my head (impossible to transfer to written text), and so often the lines between topics are necessarily blurred, with aspects of one topic appearing in another. Analysis and findings are both contained in this structure (seeking and finding being synonymous in my worldview).

The structure divides the analysis into two sections addressing the questions of how teachers can come to Aboriginal knowledge, and how they can use it. The second question, 'How they used the knowledge', is addressed in Chapter six. The first question, 'How They Came to the Aboriginal Knowledge', is addressed here in Chapter five in two parts – Processes and Modes. 'Mode' for the purpose of this analysis refers to methods for transferring and receiving Aboriginal knowledge, while 'Process' refers to the protocols, values and systems participants used to come to the Aboriginal knowledge.

How Teachers Came to the Aboriginal Knowledge

Here are identified protocols for navigating Aboriginal knowledge at the Cultural Interface, elements of productive processes created by teachers seeking intercultural knowledge, and a discussion of the merits and pitfalls of individual, communal, active and passive modes of coming to Aboriginal knowledge in education contexts.

Processes Used in Coming to the Knowledge

Protocols

The need for explicit protocols in coming to Aboriginal knowledge is highlighted by the previously mentioned teacher comment that, “We’re threatened by Aboriginal content because we don’t know the rules” (Interview, 04/06/09). So I extracted from the data all the statements or demonstrations of participants’ adoptive/adaptive (and sometimes customary) ethics and protocols. I sought the values that were linked directly to examples of engagement in culturally safe, rigorous, connected, dialogical and respectful practice – basically any practice that facilitated a productive synthesis of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge systems. From the recurrent items emerged a set of protocols for people working with Aboriginal knowledge at the Cultural Interface. These protocols are listed below. It is customary to attend to protocol in the early stages in this way; during the course of this study I have found this to be a custom that both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal cultures share.

Cultural Interface Protocols

1. Use Aboriginal ways of learning to come to Aboriginal knowledge.
2. Approach Aboriginal knowledge in gradual stages, not all at once.
3. Be grounded in your own cultural identity (not ‘colour’) with integrity.
4. Bring your highest self to the knowledge and settle your fears and issues.

5. Share your own stories of relatedness and deepest knowledge.
6. See the shape of the knowledge and express it with images and objects.
7. Build your knowledge around real relationships with Aboriginal people.
8. Use this knowledge for the benefit of the Aboriginal community.
9. Bring your familiar understandings, but be willing to grow beyond these.
10. Respect the aspects of spirit and place that the knowledge is grounded in.

The validity of these protocols is confirmed by Mason Durie's (2005) Cultural Interface principles derived from the overlap between Matauranga Maori (Native knowledge) and western methodology. Points in common between these protocols and Durie's principles include equal recognition of both systems, commitment to community benefit and including Native cosmology/spirituality as part of the system.

Most participants demonstrated either intuitive or conscious practice of at least half of these protocols in the processes they used to come to the knowledge. (Some of this practice may have originated from the Aboriginal pedagogy framework, which also appears to reflect several of the protocols.) Accounts of the processes encountered in the data were scanned for key verb phrases with a view to determining participants' *manday* or 'steps' in coming to Aboriginal knowledge. Only eight of the processes used by participants were reported in their entirety. These diverse approaches are recorded in the table below, with protocol concurrence tracked at the bottom of each row. (Approximately 40 processes in total were partially recorded, but most teacher reports of these were fragmentary. This is a limitation of the flexible, participant-driven data collection method I used.)

Process a	Process b	Process c	Process d	Process e	Process f	Process g	Process h
Personal "Aha" - link to own way	Plan approach	"See" the logic	Get "out of head" with Aboriginal mentor	Co-create images in a group	Critically analyse topic	Internalise visual framework (pedagogy)	Explore own culture
Participate in practical experience	Do Professional reading	Solve a problem	Use hands	Plan ideas in a group	List meta language of topic	Situate in own culture	Explore own prior knowledge
Observe local people	Have Professional conversations	Find evidence	Identify goal	Connect/ merge ideas	Share knowledge of topic	Use to solve a problem	Hear about Aboriginal knowledge
Yarn with locals	Trial	Suspend beliefs	Backward map	Shift viewpoints	Ask/answer questions (with local)	Yarn	Find inter-sections
Do professional reading	Implement	Hear (locals) and read	Prepare	Observe Aboriginal modelling	Make diagram or map	Write and draw	Plan new knowledge application
Observation of process	-	Reflect (mind)	Implement in context - community	Experience process as a group	Talk about spirit (with Ab mentor)	Build relationships	Eyes become opened
Practice	-	Talk to others (locals)	Reflect and renew	Shift thinking processes	Relate spirit to topic	Affirm new knowledge	Implement
-	-	Reflect (spirit)	-	Find common ground	Create knowledge product	Give it a local purpose	-
-	-	Trial and question	-	Transcend previous constraints	Use it for community benefit	-	-
50% protocol concurrence 1,2,3,5,9	0% protocol concurrence	70% protocol concurrence 1,4,6-10	50% protocol concurrence 1,2,6,8,9	80% protocol concurrence Not 7+8	80% protocol concurrence 3-10	80% protocol concurrence 1-8	50% protocol concurrence 2,3,4,5,9

Figure 49: Table – Processes utilised by teachers in coming to Aboriginal knowledge

Impact of the processes was determined by the amount of independent follow-up and genuine intercultural knowledge production that occurred after the teachers came to the knowledge. The three highest impact processes were E, F and G, which also scored the highest on the protocol quotient (see bottom row), with 80% concurrence. This confirms the validity of the protocols as a vehicle for teacher-initiated intercultural innovation. The process with the highest impact was Process E, which saw a wide range of activities implemented in a dozen classrooms and ongoing collegial dialogue (Field notes, 30/09/08). Points in common between this and the other higher impact processes were *seeking common ground* (Cultural Interface) and *engaging in dialogue*. The process with the lowest impact was Process B, the sole product of which lasted for only part of one lesson. That teacher had asserted that there should be no more difficulty in working with Aboriginal pedagogy than with any other pedagogy, and that she approaches Aboriginal knowledge the same way she approaches any other new knowledge (Interview, 04/06/09).

So it might be surmised from those results that coming to Aboriginal knowledge may involve dynamic personal interaction and knowledge synthesis beyond that of usual mainstream learning experiences. It also involves adherence to protocols that until now have remained implicit. Arguably, the application of these to mainstream learning also produces positive results, as will be shown in Chapter 6.

Key Elements in Successfully Coming to Aboriginal Knowledge

A relationally responsive analysis of the processes revealed key recurring behaviours in successfully coming to Aboriginal knowledge, several of which mirrored the Cultural Interface protocols. These behaviours were grouped under the categories of:

- Observing/Listening before seeking to understand or act
- Learning in stages
- Bringing your own familiar identity, knowledge and stories
- Representing knowledge visually
- Seeking knowledge through relationships and community
- Shifting viewpoints

Observing/Listening before Seeking to Understand or Act

An Aboriginal participant asserted that the only way to bring teachers (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) to an understanding of Aboriginal knowledge was through instructional methods utilising Aboriginal pedagogies. For her the key pedagogy was the observation of processes from wholes to parts, followed by emulation (deconstruct-reconstruct). She insisted that modelling knowledge in action was the only way for teachers to come to it (Interview, 11/6). Her belief was supported in a data set that included accounts of teachers learning to use the wiki (e.g. Interview, 29/05/09). This activity contained the dual unfamiliarities of Aboriginal knowledge and information technology and so most of the participants were initially avoiding it. The data showed that the only participants likely to both use and contribute to the wiki were the ones for whom I had physically modelled the procedure of signing up, logging on and posting. These events and feedback indicate that *observing and listening first* is a key element in coming to Aboriginal knowledge.

This element is explored in greater depth later, in the 'Modes' section of the analysis that deals with modelling. However, the practice of 'learning in stages' is now examined as a closely related element that plays a crucial part in the process of coming to Aboriginal knowledge at the Cultural Interface.

Learning in Stages

During the study there were often requests for Aboriginal knowledge to be presented in a brief and immediate way, in a twenty-words-or-less fashion to provide non-Indigenous novices with instant gratification and understanding. An Aboriginal participant, supported by community members and Aboriginal teaching professionals, challenged one such request and explained that

> *Aboriginal knowledge doesn't work like that… we see the whole concept at the beginning but don't have to understand it at that point, just as long as we can see the shape of it. … [I]n the mainstream people have that need to see and understand immediately, a greedy,*

> *quick and shallow approach to knowledge… [T]his means everything is dumbed down in education. …[W]ith Aboriginal knowledge it has to come in stages, bringing in the focus gradually at points where a person is ready to understand and make connections. …[Y]ou need to see the whole initially to get the shape of it, but you don't need to understand it completely until you are ready to put it together for yourself, using your own skills and knowledge* (Interview, 11/06/09).

Non-Aboriginal participants who successfully engaged in Aboriginal knowledge at the interface concurred with this. For example, an Anglo-Australian participant stated on the wiki (01/06/09) that understanding Aboriginal knowledge "…doesn't happen all at once – there's been little moments when I've added more to my understanding." During my early work with this participant and her colleague, I noted their observation that

> *…every time I go through it I use different stories and ideas, and that they're getting deeper into that Indigenous knowledge every time. They related this to some things I was saying about the layers in the emu egg shell, how they're going deeper every time they hear new stories, and finding new meanings in stories I repeat.* (Field notes, 28/07/08).

However, it should be stressed that these and other participants did not come to the knowledge by totally subsuming their identities to Aboriginal ways of knowing, but by bringing their own identities, metaphors and knowledge to the table in an equal dialogue.

Bringing Your Own Familiar Identity, Knowledge and Stories

In learning to incorporate Aboriginal ways of learning in their teaching practice, the success of the participants depended upon first finding common points of intersection between the Indigenous ways and their own personal identity (Interview, 25/05/09). For example, one participant only fully grasped and applied Aboriginal knowledge of land after a revisiting of her own Indigenous Welsh heritage (Email, 11/06/09). Another teacher made metaphoric links to Aboriginal knowledge by connecting a set

of symbols to the work of Alan Goldsworthy, an English artist he was familiar with (Presentation feedback, 27/05/09). A non-local Aboriginal teacher at another school used her own Gumbayngirr (coastal NSW) perspective in connecting to the concept of 'the winding path of learning', a metaphor she then worked into a template for all her planning documents (Field notes, 27/08/09). One culturally diverse group of first year teachers came to an understanding of Indigenous balance and synergy metaphors when they

> *…found congruence with this in their own cosmologies (eg. Buddhism's middle path, ying yang, symmetry, balanced lifestyles, debits and credits, equations etc), so found that interface gave them a safe place to begin exploring. It also was empowering that it allowed them to bring their own cosmologies into their teaching, transcending the placeless, valueless curriculum they previously felt constrained by* (Field notes, 01/04/08).

A questionnaire on identity was developed to help facilitate this process, based on Karen Martin's (2008) work on ways of being, doing, knowing and valuing. However, no teachers within the Western Region utilised this tool during the study, while several schools outside of the region accessed it from the wiki and worked with it to facilitate engagement with the Cultural Interface. One school in Sydney posted the following experience on the wiki:

> *We have had some very interesting discussions at executive level - principal, deputies and head teachers - about 'identity' and the results of the 'identity survey' we all completed. It is so fascinating to see the 'symbols' that people have created for their personal ways to knowledge and learning… It is amazing that people you work with … can be both what you thought and also so incredibly different in their ways of knowing, being, valuing etc. It has been good to spend time at this activity as there is so much that 'matches' with 'indigenous' ways of learning. We can see that there is an interface that can be negotiated and understood between the cultural ways.* (Wiki, 07/07/09).

It remains uncertain as to why local teachers did not wish to access this tool, although one piece of data suggested that it may have been due to a sense of systemic constraint, that perhaps teachers did not feel they had the autonomy within the regional system to explore Aboriginal perspectives under their own initiative (Wiki, 11/05/09). This situation may be linked to those other factors that were 'left at the door' of this analysis (but now seem to be banging on that door and calling out for a smoke), issues around the systemic undervaluing of local knowledge. This is indicated by the fact that most of the requests for training in the Aboriginal pedagogies came from schools outside the region of origin. Schools outside the region and therefore outside the field of study received no presentations or training in the knowledge, but worked with it independently from the information on the wiki. Although the work of these non-local people represents the only whole-school application of the Aboriginal pedagogy framework during the research project, it will not be a focus of this analysis as it sits outside of the approved field of study.

However, while the local teachers' work with 'bringing your own identity to the knowledge' did not utilise the locally developed tools for this process, it still seemed to emerge organically in any genuinely dialogical process. In many cases I facilitated the process myself, when teachers seemed to be having difficulty finding the motivation to be self-reflective. In one case I did this with French and Italian teachers who were involved in an Aboriginal LOTE project. I used my own basic knowledge of those languages to deconstruct simple French and Italian texts, demonstrating print literacy applications of the 'wholes to parts' aspect of Aboriginal pedagogy. This was complex knowledge that they had trouble understanding until I made that linguistic connection to their own familiar European cultural backgrounds. With another teacher,

> *I spent the morning finding out all about her individual cultural expression and community and family and prior knowledge and life experiences and land connections and spirituality etc. and showed her the common points of intersection between her individual "Anglo" worldview and Aboriginal ways of knowing. Because I was*

> *teaching her, I naturally did the same things I would do with any student – I was culturally responsive* (Field notes, 05/09/08).

Of course I was unable to perform this service for every participant in the study let alone every teacher in the region, so if this process were to be made generalisable, it would require the same independent, self-reflexive practice that was demonstrated by the non-local teachers. However, the 'bringing of self' to the knowledge also occurred spontaneously on many occasions as tiny 'aha' moments experienced by local participants. Such small-scale but serendipitous discoveries of common ground were usually triggered by metaphors, symbols or images; for example the boomerang was familiar to all as a common symbol from the interface of Australian and Aboriginal cultures, often providing a comfortable point of entry to Indigenous concepts (Field notes, 30/09/08).

Representing Knowledge Visually

It took over six months of feedback and reflection to conclude that, in workshops and presentations that elicited 'ahas', I had "been creating a series of images in the minds of these teachers, and that's why they've had those 'aha' moments…" which led me to "…start thinking about those images and working with them more explicitly" (06/05/08). In response to a keynote address the following year in which I had worked strongly with these images, one teacher posted on the wiki:

> *The boomerang that demonstrates the 'gap/difference' hit home when described as a gap of understanding not necessarily ability. I need as a non-Aboriginal person to ensure that I can close that gap in my own understanding* (Wiki, 28/05/09).

Other participants volunteering written feedback on 'how they came to the knowledge' during that same keynote address mentioned the visuals more than any other factor (Keynote feedback, Reading to Learn Conference, 27/05/09). These comments included the following:

- *Visual was great.*
- *…symbolism is fantastic for communicating visually the ideas.*
- *…visual representation of the 8ways just made so much sense.*
- *I must be a visual learner because your drum analogy brought all scaffolding learning from an aboriginal perspective into focus.*
- *Boomerang analogy… meaningful and powerful.*
- *Visual imaging helped me to understand what was being spoken about.*
- *As [I am] the TSI in ATSI the analogy of the drum resonated – a perfect image. Had not thought of this as a way into culture.*

However, it was also observed that 'ahas' and excitement about presentations and speeches did not always lead to action or outcomes. (This will be explored further in the Modes section of the analysis.) Action and outcomes came from physically working with symbols and images, rather than simply looking at them and becoming inspired. For example, the most productive process encountered in the study (see process E in processes table) began in the following way:

> *We worked symbolically for most of the time, a long strip of butcher's paper across the table, with me moving up and down like a bee from teacher to teacher plotting out planning ideas involving their individual teaching areas. Soon all these areas overlapped and merged in a dynamic sort of mind map. Chaotic at first, with order emerging gradually. Lots of specific Aboriginal cultural knowledges came out there, from cosmology (tension with western scientific concept of "dead matter") to an Indigenous viewpoint of humpty dumpty. …They asserted by the end that these were the best ways for all people to learn. The images and stories they said were very powerful and helped the shift in thinking and understanding* (Field notes, 01/04/08).

The most prolifically productive symbol used was the returning boomerang as a metaphor for the Cultural Interface. Often I would talk about the Interface to a room

full of blank faces, ask for a show of hands to indicate understanding (a few might raise), then show the boomerang diagram and ask again (all hands raised now, faces lit up). Then I would say, "Hey, but I thought it was blackfullas supposed to be visual learners! Maybe we have more cultural overlap here than we think." This symbol gave participants access to the concept of Cultural Interface, a point of entry to the most important element in the process of engaging with Aboriginal knowledge – seeking knowledge through relationships and community.

Seeking Knowledge through Relationships and Community

Although many may see 'tolerance' as a value 'we' aspire to (e.g. Australian Government, *National Framework for Values Education*, 2005), in this project it was found to be the lowest step on the ladder of intercultural relationships. The other steps on the ladder were represented to participants by movies that are well-known in the local community – 'Rush Hour' 1, 2 and 3 (Wiki, August 09), films in which African American and Chinese characters gradually build understandings of each other's culture to their mutual benefit, creating from this cultural fusion innovative new policing strategies. At the top of the Rush Hour ladder was 'intercultural mastery', exemplified in this research project by the work of one non-Aboriginal teacher who

> *Reported coming to the knowledge confidently, ...because she had grown up with Aboriginal people, learning Wiradjuri language and culture at school, and that she had specific Aboriginal education training at university. She understood protocols and was confident about knowing what was right and wrong to do* (Interview, 03/06/09).

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Her Aboriginal knowledge base was grounded in authentic intercultural relationships with Aboriginal people, with any new knowledge passing through the filter of a protocol framework instilled in her by the Aboriginal community. As a result, her class' production of innovative, intercultural knowledge was very high (Wiki, June 2009). Conversely, teachers espousing the value of 'tolerance' tended to explore very little meaningful Aboriginal content, and contributed very little of their own culture as well. Their innovative knowledge production was nil (Interview, 04/06/09).

Community and interpersonal relationships are essential factors in coming to Aboriginal knowledge, which demands qualities far beyond the simple politics of 'tolerance'. This relational imperative was declared in a statement by a group of Aboriginal teachers and community members and passed to me in an email, for acknowledgement and inclusion in this study. They stated that:

> *When you are an Aboriginal community member you are somehow obligated to the community and would use any resource to benefit the community in some respect first and foremost. It is our responsibility. We are comfortable with this. … We grasp and hold onto empathetic teachers ... Worldviews are reciprocated and appreciated... Their empathy assists locals to advocate why there is such a need for the knowledge of local history and culture. [One non-Aboriginal teacher states] 'I go to the local teachers for local knowledge, this consultation helps me with my teaching and understanding the home life of my students, I feel at ease and happier with my teaching of local content when I take these necessary steps'* (Email, 25/06/09).

However, what may seem a necessary step to one person may seem very alien to another person. The data indicated that often a shift in viewpoints was needed before a person could be motivated to take these necessary steps in forging intercultural relationships. But facilitating such a massive shift requires more than it takes to trigger a small 'aha'.

Shifting Viewpoints

One non-Aboriginal teacher experienced a profound shift in her personal view of relationships and family, opening for her a pathway to engaging with Aboriginal community knowledge. An older Aboriginal community member unwittingly facilitated this transition for her while talking through her students' genealogies. The teacher reported a shift in her worldview, in which

> *It became a lot clearer how tied in with family spirituality is. Not just through the cultural heritage that previous generations bring but also a bit like an invisible web spreading out through the population of the world. …I could almost feel an invisible string trailing back to link me with my parents and sister and spreading out to where my cousins and aunts and uncles are. I also became very aware of my grandparents who have passed…* (Email, 26/08/08).

This need for a shift in viewpoints was indicated elsewhere in the data, in statements like, "…everyday our worldview changes – we grow in a professional capacity as we get to know our students more" (Wiki, 02/06/09). An Aboriginal teacher suggested that the paradigm shift that is required in approaching Aboriginal knowledge was not unlike "code-switching" between different dialects. She suggested that "[Non-Aboriginal] teachers can also 'make the jump'" (Wiki, 07/06/09).

The processes involved in making this shift, this 'jump' into the Cultural Interface, seem to be as individual and varied as the identities that people bring to the dialogue. But when these processes operate at a level of optimum engagement and knowledge production, they all have in common elements of the implicit protocols and qualities identified in the analysis so far. Now the focus of the analysis turns to the various modes that may be utilised in coming to the knowledge. These are grouped under two main classifications – communal and individual.

Modes Used in Coming to the Knowledge

Communal Modes

Communal modes are ways of coming to knowledge that involve the sharing of knowledge between people. Here I argue that in western education contexts, communal modes are inherently passive and largely ineffective ways of coming to Aboriginal knowledge. (I must acknowledge that in my cultural worldview communal

modes are not passive, which is why I am careful to name ‘western education contexts’ as the site of the modes studied here).

Information Technology

As previously mentioned in Chapter 3, emails proved to be a successful mode of knowledge production during the ‘written yarns’ of the auto ethnography stage. I engaged in this approach to the knowledge with fellow Aboriginal researchers, thinkers and warriors, experiencing this communal mode as a highly active one in Indigenous contexts. However, it was not the same in mainstream education contexts. During the two-month data-gathering phase to determine the ‘how’ (of coming to Aboriginal knowledge and then using it), email correspondence from teachers was a rare occurrence. The few emails I did receive were one-way transactions passing on information, rather than invitations to dialogue. I perceived that in mainstream education contexts this communal mode positioned the addressee as a passive recipient rather than active participant. When my return emails in this phase failed to elicit meaningful responses, the wiki became my only remaining digital link to participants, a minority of whom participated actively. Most preferred to interact face-to-face.

The project ended in the final week of June, at which time there were fifty members of the wiki including myself. 18 members had already joined in the month before the data-collection phase, and 21 more joined in the first month. In the second and final month ten more joined the wiki. Of the fifty members, only 14 began their own discussion threads, and only three (including myself) actually posted material on the wiki pages. Ten others passed me data to include in the pages, but lacked the technical ability or confidence to post it themselves. By the final week of the phase, there were 26 relevant discussion posts that could be used as data for the study.

However, hundreds were estimated to have printed materials from the wiki to use in their schools and classrooms (this must be estimated due to many reports I received of teachers I had never met accessing the material). Hundreds more read the wiki but did not join, and I received a barrage of emails from teachers and executives outside of the region seeking to use the Aboriginal pedagogy framework in their schools. There

was even one of these from Nigeria. Below is the page view graph from the wiki as at June 22, 2009.

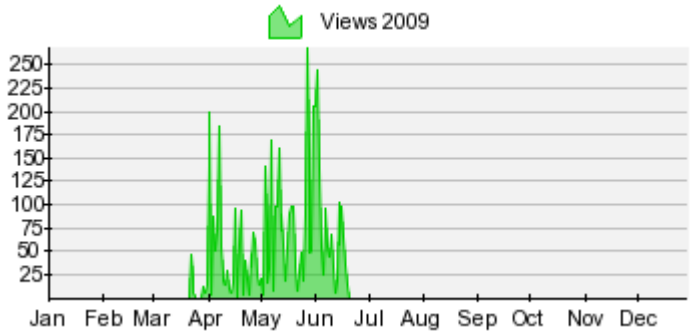

Figure 50: Page view stats from 8ways wiki

Up to forty people a day were reading the wiki, with the average visitor viewing several pages, the best day drawing a total of over 250 page views. Although it is possible some of those views were random visitors or robots, it was a new wiki and not yet searchable by Google, and so it wasn't exactly a 'web presence'. Therefore it may be assumed that the majority of visitors were the many teachers to whom I had passed on the address in the course of my work. Most visitors were lurkers rather than active participants. A good indicator that people were lurking more than posting is the statistic that for only 33 discussion post replies, there were 395 discussion post views (Wiki statistics, 22/06/09). This would indicate that with web-based modes, teachers are more likely to engage with passive learning behaviours than active ones in coming to Aboriginal knowledge. Although this communal mode is designed to be dynamic and interactive, on the whole this was not the way the participants approached it.

As mentioned in the process analysis, many teachers were reluctant to engage with the unfamiliar technology unless I physically modelled the process of signing up, logging on and posting. I did this as part of a presentation to one school staff, as a demonstration of Indigenous 'watch first' pedagogy, and that staff showed a far higher rate of participation in the wiki than other groups that missed this modelling (Interview notes, 03/06/09). One participant identified this reluctance as a "nervousness" with the unfamiliar (Interview notes, 29/05/09). Fear of the unfamiliar seemed to be a barrier to engagement that both Indigenous and technological fields share. Further, in both knowledge fields these anxieties seem to result in a passive

orientation to learning, manifesting as a preference for communal, face-to-face learning led by outside experts. Although the wiki was designed as an active, communal mode of knowledge transmission, most of the participants approached it as a passive mode. This was a recurring pattern for the communal modes used in the study, including workshops, in which teachers participated as audience members rather than colleagues.

Presentation-based Modes

The term 'workshop' suggests active collaboration, but in reality I found that these are usually set up in schools and conferences with participants positioned as an audience, rather than as a working group. For most of the project I conformed to this generic expectation, so workshops are included here in this section as a presentation-based rather than collaborative mode. Although I challenged this format where possible and in those instances noticed a partial shift in orientation from passive to active learning, for the majority of the project the workshops were in presentation mode and largely ineffective. I will examine events at two schools here to illustrate this. At the first school, during their initial workshop it became clear that for staff there was a lot of baggage attached to this mode of delivery.

> *Most were resistant and aggressive to begin, and some had even harassed my co-facilitator … over the weekend, promising to heckle her and disrupt the workshop. … Before we began there were some scathing questions and comments like, "It says on the program that this method will save time for us, but aren't you wasting our time already by doing this workshop?" …[T]hese negative statements were linked to organisational politics rather than the [workshop] – one [teacher] referred to time constraints and a fear of being forced to rewrite her programming, and the other said it was "just another case of being taught to suck eggs"* (Field notes, 28/07/09).

Ten percent of the staff, in written feedback from the workshop (27/07/08), requested that bowls of sweets be placed on the tables next time. This highlighted for me the infantilism that such passive approaches promote. Also, some written feedback made

me aware of the limited value that 'presented' knowledge can hold for teachers, with several responses referring to the workshop content as "just another fad" (ibid). A vocal and powerful conservative minority within the staff objected to Aboriginal knowledge in general on the grounds that it was irrelevant in a "multicultural" (i.e. assimilatory) curriculum, and asked, "Where is the push for inclusivity coming from?" (ibid). However, the majority of comments were positive, such as, "I've been a teacher for 45 years and this is the first staff development day that has been of any value to me" (ibid). But even this positive comment implied that presentations generally are not of use to teachers.

In response to that majority of positive comments and multiple invitations to return, this school received more training and development in Aboriginal pedagogy and the Cultural Interface than any other school in the region, but also demonstrated the lowest uptake of knowledge and practice. Only one teacher on the whole staff actually applied the knowledge to a unit of work, and this was the product of one-on-one dialogue and collaboration rather than the presentations. Arguably, this indicates that passive presentation-based modes of learning are ineffective in bringing people to Aboriginal knowledge.

At the same school again, a second workshop broke the traditional pattern and produced an enthusiastic response but little follow up. In that workshop I focused on

> *…shifting the staff's cultural filters into the interface, then facilitating dialogue with the Aboriginal staff for the second hour, with everybody standing in that common ground. … Started with the space – the library, and reframed all the things around us according to that framework, viewing things like the Olympic rings on a poster from different cultural perspectives. Challenged staff strongly on the marginalisation of Aboriginal staff and knowledge in the school. Worked with the new 8 objects and they proved very powerful. In the dialogue that followed, people were picking up the objects spontaneously as they spoke.*…(Field notes, 04/02/09).

Although this workshop elicited the most positive comment, enthusiastic expressions of inspiration and pledges of paradigm shifts, by the end of the project there was still only one teacher in the school who had actually applied the Aboriginal knowledge in her classroom or taken the opportunity to work with me individually. However, it should be acknowledge that in the three months following the research project, several teachers at that school reported extensive and successful use of the Aboriginal pedagogies. This may indicate that the knowledge is better approached individually than communally, a point I explore in Chapter 6.

The only workshop group in the whole project that actually came to the Aboriginal knowledge through this mode was a group of all-Indigenous participants at a different school, who innovated and produced new ideas and systems using the Aboriginal knowledge presented. During the workshop they were

> *…standing up out of seats, laughing, debating, asserting, while I wrote and drew their contributions along that winding line. The few staff I hadn't met before, initially reserved and even hostile, became engaged and friendly, one nodding and saying repeatedly, "He knows, he knows." At the end of the activity it was asserted that "this is exactly how we think", and "I always knew that, but never could explain it, but that's it, that's how it works", and, "We need you to tell the teachers about this – they all need to work like this."* (Field notes, 20/05/09)

The same workshop presented to the non-Aboriginal staff at the same school had the opposite outcome, with the participants delivering withering criticism rather than producing innovative ideas for the school. These comments included statements of disbelief about the existence of Aboriginal pedagogy, like, "I'm sorry, but I don't believe that!" and "Is this just your little theory, or do you actually have some proof?" (ibid).

A relationally responsive analysis of this experience, incorporating the previously defined framework of Cultural Interface protocols and knowledge process elements, reveals that cultural background or skin tone differences had little to do with the

disparity in outcomes between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups. The only differences were that the Indigenous participants were

(a) further advanced in the protocols because of their local community obligations, and
(b) further advanced in the Cultural Interface process because of their prior work in examining and bringing their diverse individual identities to the table at the school.

Considering this in relation to data from other Aboriginal participants who had difficulty in coming to the knowledge (Wiki, June 2009), and of non-Aboriginal participants who came to the knowledge with ease (e.g. Interview, 03/06/09), the conclusion must be that Aboriginality in itself does not provide some kind of magic ticket for coming to Aboriginal knowledge at the Cultural Interface. Any person, regardless of their background, must have a sophisticated awareness of their own identity and must be engaging in local knowledge protocols in order to come to Aboriginal knowledge with integrity. And that person almost certainly has to do more than sit in on presentations that are masquerading as workshops.

Most of the presentations during the project were not disguised as workshops, but were simply power point presentations delivered in hour-long slots at staff meetings. These unashamedly passive experiences were well-received, being non-threatening and laying well within habitual modes of information transmission (and comfort zones as well). I made the presentations exciting, stimulating, visual, colourful and funny, to avoid boredom. Teachers reported being "grabbed" by concepts like, "It's not about content, but pedagogy" (Interview, 04/06/09). But most of the participants in the project admitted that they understood very little the first time they saw the power point (e.g. Interviews 03/06/09, 11/06/09).

So while a lot of excitement and 'aha' moments were generated, this did not necessarily facilitate a 'coming to the knowledge' (Field notes, 20/06/09). Almost none of the data showed demonstrations of understanding coming directly from the presentations, although they did often spark shifts in perception that led some teachers to find pathways to Aboriginal knowledge independently (Interview, 02/06/09). (The activities of these teachers are reported in the Individual Modes section.)

There was one exception to the rule, in which participants actually came to the knowledge from the power point, utilising it that same day. But in this case the audience was made up of people who were presenting after me and who were able to incorporate the Aboriginal ways of knowing I had shown them into the structures of their own subsequent presentations (Field notes, 05/08/08). The fact that they were also physically involved in the activity of 'presenting a power point' themselves cancelled out the element of passivity inherent in the 'audience' role. This indicates that it is probably the passive nature of some communal modes that makes them incompatible with engagement in Aboriginal knowledge processes. Therefore, it could be concluded that coming to Aboriginal knowledge requires an active orientation to learning.

Addresses and speeches were other passive modes that were problematic for me because of the cultural limitations of my family role that prevent me from orating. In attempting to creatively reconcile my work and family obligations in this regard, I occasionally came up with innovative narrative/instructive/visual genres that engaged audiences as actively reflective participants. Some of the aspects reported by participants as having the most impact in these presentations were (Conference feedback, 27/05/09): "analogies [that were] meaningful and powerful"; "concepts of commonality and synergistic principles"; "no placeless paradigms"; "using symbols and images of circular learning and knowledge"; "higher order thinking embracing all cultures"; and "story telling with reference to community." One participant said, "You were related to me – I didn't feel separate to you," and "I creatively solved problems myself by going off the beaten track …"

The language in these comments suggests an interactive relationship with the presenter and place, active listening and thinking processes, and deep intellectual engagement. Maybe these are the elements that can transform passive modes into active ones and facilitate the journey to Indigenous knowledge. The speeches and keynotes perhaps did not bring anybody to the knowledge, but they certainly indicated the direction and set some people on that path. One participant articulated this sense of a beginning, saying she came away with a

> *… sense of true beginning understanding of Indigenous learning. I can finally start to conceptualise as a non-Aboriginal person (and did I say begin) not necessarily the what (yes often very tokenistic) but the HOW! I really came away …with an enthusiasm to finally begin to "meet in the middle" and enjoy the journey along the way!* (Wiki, May 28 2009).

I perceived a phenomenon in these presentations of spirit descending, worlds overlapping, and I believe this to be a central factor in shifting listeners out of their customary passive roles. The phenomenon was confirmed for me on a number of occasions as being more than just my imagination, when elders approached me and reported hearing and seeing the 'old ones' behind me during the presentations. This element of spiritual engagement was also prone to emerge occasionally in one-on-one modes of practice.

One-on-one Modes

One-on-one modes proved to be more effective than technology and presentation modes, although in some one-on-one modes such as 'team-teaching', habitual passivity was still an issue that prevented deep intellectual or spiritual engagement. 'Team-teaching' is a little like 'workshopping', in that it sounds like a collaborative process, but is in reality practiced as one teacher passively observing as another instructs a class, with the two switching roles occasionally. Perhaps it should be called tag-team teaching. Team-teaching mostly failed in the study as a means of bringing people to Aboriginal knowledge, because my teaching 'partners' would invariably frame me as an Aboriginal guest speaker or performer, then step back into the role of passive audience member.

The teachers' diminished status in these situations demonstrated to me that their fears of loss of centrality were well-founded but also self-fulfilling. The more powerless the teachers saw themselves in the field of Aboriginal knowledge, the more they withdrew – and the wilder the children grew. As the teachers' passivity and distance from the Aboriginal 'team member' increased, so did student misbehaviour and disharmony (Lesson notes, 15/06/09). There was one exception to this during the

study, in which the teacher stepped out of her passive role and spirit descended, due to the intervention of a particular object.

That team-teaching session began as others had done before, with the teacher withdrawing to a passive role and placing me at the centre. The theme of the lesson was space (Lesson notes, 05/06/09). That day I happened to be carrying a fallen star given to me by my sister for protection, and when I recalled that I had this I brought it out to show the class. The teacher approached me to see the stone then and suddenly shifted her orientation from passive to active. She spoke about Aboriginal ways of learning with the class and identified non-linear thinking as the optimum pedagogy to use in an improvised team-teaching session on the topic of space.

> *I told stories about the stars … while the teacher googled related astronomy knowledge and Dreaming stories on the smart board. Watched Dust Echoes animated Dreaming stories associated with stars and night sky. Lesson was unplanned, "discovery learning", explicitly following the non-linear way and modelling it for students. Students shared stories and we googled their ideas. Students often directed the learning, asking for particular stories and topics, and asking questions. Teacher continually reinforced that the structure of the morning's learning was following an Aboriginal non-linear way of learning. Class reflected on this and agreed that it was not a softer way. Talked about the coincidences that came up in the lesson – the way all the different knowledge from previous lessons linked up together with the new learning we found today. We talked about how learning can be magic, how knowledge is sacred and special. Also looked at the rules in the stories – how people who broke rules had bad things happen to them – applied this idea to the class rules – that if learning is sacred then if you do the wrong thing bad things might happen* (Lesson notes, 05/06/09).

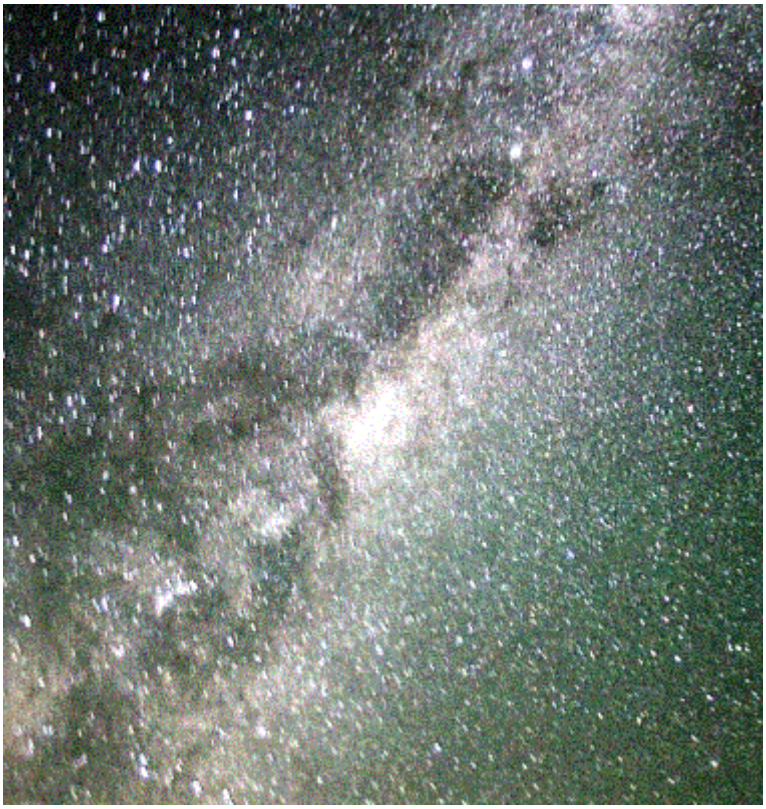

Figure 51: Emu in the Milky Way – one of the sky Dreaming stories used

The ensuing sense of empowerment and total engagement for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal class members is difficult to do justice with words. This story illustrates the tenth Cultural Interface protocol (involving spiritual knowledge), one that has not been a focus of this analysis so far. The reason for this omission is the element of 'learning in stages' – the aspect of spirit in Aboriginal knowledge is something to approach gradually.

My relationally responsive analysis work indicates this is the right part of the analysis for a reader to come to this knowledge. This is confirmed for me by a crow who is now outside sitting on a carving I have been doing to help me shape the analysis, with that messenger descending periodically to dance around that carving. In light of this occurrence, in relation to the teacher's story recounted above, I propose that one-on-one modes of Aboriginal knowledge transmission must transcend mainstream habits of learner passivity and engage with spirit at some level in order to be effective.

Further incidences of this kind of transcendence were more frequently encountered in collaborative planning modes. The data from these experiences indicated that coming

to Aboriginal knowledge is not about surrendering passively to Aboriginal expertise and leadership, but involves active engagement in a true collaboration and dialogue at the Cultural Interface. Spirit emerges in this common ground space during truly collaborative planning events, sparked by a synthesis of diverse knowledge systems and producing innovative planning processes and dynamic new learning management structures.

In one example, staff engagement in collaborative planning using the Aboriginal pedagogy framework resulted in several teachers initiating genuine community consultation to produce units of work (Email, 25/06/09). Additionally, the ensuing formation of productive intercultural relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff allowed teachers to come to Aboriginal knowledge and engage equally at the level of spirit (Interview, 02/06/09).

I engaged in this kind of collaborative process with several participants and groups during the study. With one teacher,

> *We backwards mapped through her entire unit of work… beginning with the culminating activity … mapped this out visually, using images more than words. She said that she finally saw the unit as a whole, how each activity and learning sequence linked to the final goal. She said she would now be able to communicate this purpose to students in every activity, to situate the learning in a real context* (Notes, 19/05/09).

(This teacher's process for coming to Aboriginal knowledge at the cultural interface can be seen in 'Process D' on page 116.)

Figure 52: Plan for unit of work, backwards-mapped from the right

In truly collaborative processes like these, teachers were far more likely to leave behind habitual passive learning behaviours, possibly because these experiences were private and safe from the scrutiny and judgement of others. These same circumstances were also replicated in 'yarning' modes, which were less structured but equally engaging and productive.

The same teacher mentioned in the example above engaged in an analysis of her practice during one of these conversations, a yarn in which she was encountering the concept of Aboriginal pedagogy for the first time. This followed a session in which I had observed her with her class. We yarned through the eight pedagogies,

> *linking them to her own [Netherlands] cultural background and understandings. We analysed her lesson through the framework and she decided to focus on finding a balance between teacher instruction and student self-direction, using non-verbals for behaviour management, using story to introduce new content, working from wholes to parts by modelling activities first, and using images for both content and processes.* (Interview notes, 19/05/09)**.**

These ideas came as a revelation to her and the results seemed magical from her point of view, as she reported a complete turnaround in her previously dysfunctional

relationship with the students and a vast improvement in their behaviour and engagement. She reported experiencing a level of connection with her class that went beyond physical and verbal interaction (Interview, 20/05/09).

Most of the Indigenous participants came to the Aboriginal knowledge through this same yarning mode, engaging at that extra-ordinary level beyond the oral and physical exchange. In one such interaction (Field notes, 15/08/09), the Aboriginal participant drew shapes and symbols in his journal as we spoke, making intuitive connections on paper between concepts that we were sharing both verbally and non-verbally. The power encountered at the non-ordinary levels of this exchange provoked us to begin cheering, shouting and dancing, and he took those ideas back to his community as messages for his old people.

This kind of spiritual convergence was less apparent in the more practical modes of one-on-one knowledge transmission, namely those concerning the previously mentioned element of 'observing/listening before seeking to understand or act'. In school development contexts this takes the form of 'modelling' – demonstrating processes or methods while the teacher observes. Once again, this was only effective when framed as an active rather than passive endeavour for the observer.

At the beginning of this analysis I recorded the opinion of an Aboriginal teacher who stressed that this was the only way to come to Aboriginal knowledge. Here is some more of that story:

> *It all changed for her when I actually modelled [the Aboriginal pedagogies] for her in her class – she says it changed her whole view of teaching and inspired her to find new directions and purpose in her work. After I modelled the process of working from wholes to parts with an Aboriginal language text, she repeated the lesson with several classes that same week. She said it changed her whole approach not just to pedagogy, but to cultural knowledge as well* (Interview, 11/06/09).

In summary, I propose that communal modes of coming to Aboriginal knowledge are problematic in non-Aboriginal contexts because of a mainstream tendency towards passive learning orientations in these modes. One-on-one forms of communal interaction seem to be more conducive to active learning orientations, but are still prone to perversion by habitual patterns of passivity. In the following section I argue that, in western contexts, individual as opposed to communal modes are less intrinsically passive and therefore represent a more effective means of coming to Aboriginal knowledge, although these individual modes are generally avoided and therefore rare in teacher professional development.

Individual Modes

This section is brief, as there were far fewer participants engaging in individual modes than communal ones, so there was very little data collected for this. However, there is enough data to suggest that this autonomous way of coming to Aboriginal knowledge requires more energy and commitment, and is impossible to attempt with a passive orientation to learning. It was rare to find participants in the region who were motivated enough to undertake such rigorous processes. The few who did attempt it only did so for brief periods, but experienced valuable insights and realisations that led to the development of high-impact knowledge products and paradigm shifts. Engagement with these individual modes without exception resulted in participants coming to Aboriginal knowledge in profound ways.

Reflection

The mode of personal reflection proved to be essential in meeting the following three of the Cultural Interface protocols:

- Be grounded in your own true identity (not ‘colour’) with integrity.
- Bring your highest self to the knowledge and settle your fears and issues.
- Share your own stories of relatedness and deepest knowledge.

One non-Aboriginal teacher encountered all three of these in a learning sequence that included deep personal reflections following a trial of the Aboriginal pedagogies (in which she had shared her own personal identity and cultural knowledge with the class). The experience

> *…led her to reflect on the intellectual abilities of her Aboriginal students, the strengths they bring to learning… [resolving] her questions about the identity of light-skinned Aboriginal students, about whom she had previously wondered what exactly was the difference between them and the Anglo students. She hypothesised that her Aboriginal students carry visualised landscapes in which they organise their knowledge, with learning being attached to places and images* (Interview, 03/06/09).

For some teachers, realisations came in reflection – deeply internalised and personal understandings of concepts encountered during the communal modes of knowledge transaction. Deliberate personal reflection on these ideas often produced 'breakthroughs', for example one participant reported after reflection that

> *The breakthough for me was the idea that we need to teach Aboriginal perspectives in a culturally responsive way - not by trying to teach culture, which is totally problematic and dangerous for non-Indigenous teachers - through culture not about culture* (Wiki, 01/06/09).

Another participant engaging in deep reflection had a personal realisation about foregrounding the significance of land in Aboriginal perspectives on language, and then explored this in dialogue with community members to develop a community workshop combining local place-based knowledge with her own linguistic expertise. Her reflection included an emotional revisiting of her own European cultural heritage and the land contexts of her country of origin, recalled from her childhood. All the place-based knowledge she carried of her own country connected to her ancestral stories, language and relationships – these connections were her key to fully understanding the implications of 'land links' as an Aboriginal pedagogy (11/06/09).

Without that personal reflection she would have been unable to bring her own true identity to the process and therefore would have never made those deeper connections with the Aboriginal knowledge.

One Aboriginal teacher used a relationally responsive process of reflection drawn from her own customary habits of coming to new knowledge by manipulating objects and seeking the connections between them (Interview, 20/05/09). She laid out a series of printed words and images from the wiki on her kitchen table and arranged them in a way that was pleasing to her, then allowed her eye and hand to be drawn to items she deemed significant in relation to her reality of work, home and country. She said the killer boomerang "jumped out" at her first. In its shape she saw a way to describe the purpose of education to her students and also to help them understand the structure of narrative genres. She described it as "like a mountain climbing", and built into this shape her process of coming to Aboriginal knowledge as a teacher, which involved "making personal connections to the knowledge from your own life experience and knowledge, then to connect those understanding to what you know about your students" (ibid). She identified her home culture as the source of her ability to engage in this reflective mode so competently. She also stated that as a teacher she has always engaged in active daily reflection of her practice, which she regards as crucial to working with Aboriginal knowledge and education in general. Her hands-on technique for reflection combined both internal/cognitive and practical approaches to the individual modes of coming to knowledge.

Reflection represents the internal/cognitive side of individual modes, addressing the three protocols dealing with personal identity. The practical side of individual modes can be described as 'personal trial and error', which addresses the remaining seven protocols.

Personal Trial and Error

The protocols addressed by this mode are:

- Use Aboriginal ways of learning to come to Aboriginal knowledge.
- Approach Aboriginal knowledge in gradual stages, not all at once.
- See the shape of the knowledge and express it with images and objects.
- Build the knowledge around real relationships with Aboriginal people.
- Use this knowledge for the benefit of the Aboriginal community.
- Bring your familiar understandings, but be willing to grow beyond these.
- Respect the aspect of spirit that grounds much Indigenous knowledge.

The most effective results were achieved when teachers engaged in personal trial and error as part of their process of coming to the knowledge. Participants who explored the knowledge in practical ways with their students invariably enjoyed successful learning experiences and increased engagement. Some began by introducing the entire framework to the class, while others began cautiously with one pedagogy they felt connected to.

Those who began with one pedagogy in isolation soon found that these were inevitably linked to the others, with applications across several pedagogies emerging from the initial trial (Interview, 29/05/09). Those who began by introducing the entire framework to the class explicitly often reported a confident and innovative uptake of the strategies by students and teachers alike (Interview, 03/06/09). This process was gradual and ongoing, with the ‘discovery’ aspect of trial and error ensuring adherence to the protocol of approaching knowledge in stages. As the Aboriginal pedagogy framework was the topic for learning, this ensured adherence to the protocol of using Aboriginal ways of learning.

Profound realisations similar to those experienced in the reflective mode were reported in the use of trial and error. One teacher made an intense personal connection to the idea of mapping processes visually when she shared a visual representation of her life story with her class (Interview, 03/06/09). Another reported first noticing the significance of the connecting lines on the pedagogy diagram when she was working with her class on the framework (Interview, 20/05/09). These experiences with the trial and error process illustrate the protocol dealing with ‘the shape of knowledge’ and visual representations.

At one school, the teachers came to the knowledge through the practical process of designing a unit of work based on a local significant site (Wiki, June 2009), in partnership with the local Aboriginal community. They gained such a deep understanding of Aboriginal pedagogy through this process of trial and error that they developed their own workshop about this and delivered it at a state conference, drawing on the knowledge and talent of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers (Interview, 02/06/09). This demonstrates the emergence through trial and error of the protocols dealing with relationships and community benefit. It also exemplifies the protocol 'Bring your familiar understandings, but be willing to grow beyond these.' The teachers' acceptance of Dreaming knowledge in this process, not just as a 'belief' but as a tangible reality, demonstrated best practice around the final protocol that deals with the element of respect for spiritual knowledge.

Figure 53: Students begin project based on significant local site

These experiences indicate that trial and error is the most effective method for teachers coming to Aboriginal knowledge, as this individual mode does not allow for passive learning behaviours. However, there are other individual modes that may

seem less active, such as reading and study. While 'book-learning' may be considered a problematic approach to Aboriginal knowledge, it did appear in the data and so will be represented here as well. I propose that while this is not an optimal pathway to Aboriginal knowledge on its own, it is possible that reading and study can deeply enrich the process when combined with other modes.

Study/Reading

Only one participant reported coming to Aboriginal knowledge through professional reading and study, and this was in conjunction with reflection and personal trial and error. While many teachers read the extensive information on the wiki, none reported any specific understanding or action coming from that mode (except for those in schools beyond the region and therefore outside the official scope of the study).

The single participant in the study who reported coming to an understanding through study and reading stated that she had learned about Aboriginal ways of learning from reading the literature and undertaking university studies, citing "Riley-Mundine, Hughes, Harrison, Malin and Christie" (Wiki, 01/06/09). However, she reported that she did not really grasp that knowledge because of her belief that "best practice for all students was naturally the best practice for Aboriginal students" (ibid). It was only through reflection and personal trial and error that she later realised "…in fact the reverse is true – best practice for Aboriginal students is then best practice for all students" (ibid).

Arguably this nuanced understanding could not have occurred without that specific combination of individual reading, reflection and trial modes. Due to the paucity of data in this study of individual modes generally and reading/study modes specifically, I am unable to triangulate this finding with other data. However, I can submit this thesis itself as an example of reading and study augmenting the path to Aboriginal knowledge. Arguably I could not have arrived at a lot of knowledge that informed this analysis without the background reading represented in the literature review. So I believe it can be cautiously posited that a combination of reading/study with other more practical, individual modes can bring a person to rich and nuanced understandings of Aboriginal knowledge.

Further, it could be said that the combined outputs from all of the modes mentioned in this analysis has brought about the framework of Aboriginal knowledge that informs that very analysis. In working with the participants through a mix of diverse modes, I have walked the interface between individual and communal modes, active and passive orientations, internal/cognitive and external/practical approaches. My understanding is that it is the diversity and dynamic interplay between such opposite forces and systems that has produced the innovative new knowledge created in this project, providing an answer to the question of "How can teachers come to Aboriginal knowledge?"

The answer is that teachers can successfully come to Aboriginal knowledge through a series of Indigenised protocols and processes at the Cultural Interface. These include elements of:

- exploration and inclusion of personal identity
- visual representations of knowledge
- community benefit goals
- equal relationships and intercultural dialogue
- Aboriginal ways of learning
- spiritual and place-based knowledge

In summary, the modes by which teachers can come to Aboriginal knowledge can be communal or individual. The communal modes include I.T., presentation and one-on-one. These tend to be passive in western education contexts, and are less effective than the individual modes, which are more active. Those include reflection, personal trial and error, and study/reading. The communal modes can be effective if they are modified to promote active rather than passive learning, and arguably a dynamic combination of all these diverse modes provides the most productive path to Aboriginal knowledge.

Chapter Six

Smoothing

The Wangkumarra people cried out in despair as the left-handed boomerang cut off Ngamadja's head. As they watched, her body turned into a large crystal rock and her head turned into gleaming gold. They buried her head at a secret place in a creek bed. Today the crystal rock still has special powers, so the sick still visit that rock and place their hands on Ngamadja's body to be healed. (Excerpt from Ngamadja story, from Clancy McKellar).

Figure 54: Sixth view of Ngamadja

This chapter reflects the final stage of the carving process prior to placement of the product in the community. In the smoothing process, features and flaws in the wood become apparent and the value of the product is decided. This chapter concludes the analysis by addressing the second research question, 'How can teachers use Aboriginal knowledge'. Then a summary of the research findings is presented and the implications for Indigenous research and Aboriginal education research are discussed. The chapter and the thesis are then concluded with a report of the closing ceremony for the research.

How Teachers Used the Aboriginal Knowledge

This analysis seeks to answer the second research question, “How can teachers use Aboriginal knowledge in their classrooms?” My contention is that working with meta-knowledge, specifically Aboriginal pedagogy, is an effective way for teachers of any background to embed Aboriginal perspectives in any lesson or topic. Further, working with Aboriginal pedagogies embeds Aboriginal perspectives even when specific cultural knowledge is absent. Also, Indigenous content is more likely to have cultural integrity within an Aboriginal pedagogical framework, resolving the problem of tokenism and trivialisation of Aboriginal knowledge in the curriculum.

Initial Trial Activities Using Aboriginal Knowledge

In the table below, forty distinct learning activities or units are listed that incorporate Aboriginal pedagogies in their design. The list represents the initial trial activities of those participants who worked to address the second question. These particular events are the focus of the analysis because they show the most effective points of entry for teachers in working with the knowledge, highlighting the pedagogies that were most likely to be approached and most likely to have an impact on learning.

The ‘Key Pedagogy’ column identifies which Aboriginal pedagogy was the main explicit focus of each activity. These were the pedagogies that ‘grabbed’ people initially, that they felt most comfortable working with. Where these pedagogies were utilised and presented to students in sophisticated, intellectually rigorous ways and with deep understanding, the whole row is italicised. The level of student engagement/learning, outcomes and educational benefit are indicated in the ‘Impact Pos/neg’ column. The ‘Ab/non-Ab Participant’ column shows whether the activity was designed and implemented by Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal teachers, or both. This dimension is included to address the question of whether Aboriginality is a requisite quality for working effectively with Aboriginal knowledge, to establish if

non-Aboriginal teachers can claim a legitimate place in this work, and to determine the potential benefit of dialogical partnerships. The 'Ab Cult Content' column shows the extent to which Aboriginal cultural knowledge appeared at the level of content (as distinct from the level of pedagogy), and the 'Cont/one-off' column indicates whether or not the teachers continued using the Aboriginal pedagogies in their work after the initial trial activity was finished.

Activity	**Impact Pos/neg**	**Ab/non-Ab Participant**	**Key Pedagogy**	**Ab Cult Content**	**Cont/ one-off**
Life mapping	positive	non-Aboriginal	Learn maps	Nil	cont
Story/image about birds	positive	both	Story	Some	cont
Find links between math skills	positive	Aboriginal	Non-linear	Nil	cont
Find links between social skills	positive	Aboriginal	Non-linear	Some	cont
Non-linear phonics approach	positive	Aboriginal	Non-linear	Nil	cont
Non-verbal cues in spelling	positive	Aboriginal	Non-verbal	nil	cont
Image for class rule	positive	non-Aboriginal	Image	Nil	cont
Land and language presentation	positive	non-Aboriginal	Land links	extensive	cont
Local sacred site unit	*positive*	*both*	*Land links*	*extensive*	*cont*
Deconstruct Ab language text	*positive*	*Aboriginal*	*Story*	*extensive*	*cont*
Pedgogy poster daily reference	positive	non-Aboriginal	All	nil	cont
Story map for novel	positive	non-Aboriginal	Learn maps	nil	cont
Diagram character analysis	positive	non-Aboriginal	Non-linear	Nil	cont
Gender role analysis	positive	non-Aboriginal	Non-linear	Nil	cont
Deconstruct poetry	positive	non-Aboriginal	Deco-reco	Nil	cont
Family story sharing	positive	Aboriginal	Story	Some	cont
Deconstruct medical text	positive	non-Aboriginal	Deco-reco	Nil	cont
Story to explain word meaning	positive	non-Aboriginal	Story	Nil	cont
Diagram Chinese/Ab medicine	*positive*	*Both*	*Non-linear*	*extensive*	*cont*
Symbols diverse cultures	positive	non-Aboriginal	Image	Some	cont
Identify 3d shapes in nature	neutral	non-Aboriginal	Land links	Nil	cont
Make symbols for school rules	positive	both	Image	Some	cont
Exploring sky and space	*positive*	*Both*	*Story*	*extensive*	*cont*
Scaffold writing about Codfish	positive	Both	Land links	Some	One-off

Visual plan for unit on Symbols	positive	non-Aboriginal	Learn maps	Some	cont
Willow pattern story maps	positive	non-Aboriginal	Learn maps	Nil	cont
Story map Rabbit Proof Fence	positive	non-Aboriginal	Learn maps	some	cont
Compare timelines 4 cultures	*positive*	*non-Aboriginal*	*Image*	*extensive*	*cont*
Info report on duality	positive	non-Aboriginal	Non-linear	Some	cont
Flag design – symbol/story	positive	Aboriginal	Image	Some	cont
Discuss community stories	positive	Aboriginal	Com Links	Some	cont
Discuss learning ways/values	positive	non-Aboriginal	All	Nil	cont
Symbol summary of chapters	positive	non-Aboriginal	Image	Nil	cont
Write your own Dreaming Story	negative	non-Aboriginal	Story?	some	One-off
Story map "Pigs and Honey"	*positive*	*both*	*Learn map*	*extensive*	*cont*
Pyramid plan for Egypt unit	positive	non-Aboriginal	Learn maps	Nil	cont
Literacy transition program	*positive*	*Both*	*Non-verbal*	*extensive*	*cont*
Local problem solve project	neutral	Both	Com links	Nil	One-off
Archaeology unit	*positive*	*Both*	*Land links*	*extensive*	*One-off*
Family story mapping	positive	Aboriginal	Learn maps	Some	cont

Figure 55: Table – Initial trial activities using Aboriginal knowledge

This data indicates that culturally responsive lessons can indeed be built on Aboriginal pedagogy alone, without Aboriginal content. However, it also indicates that extensive cultural content is more likely to appear when Aboriginal pedagogy is approached with high levels of integrity, understanding and rigour (italicised rows). All activities that scored highly in terms of Aboriginal pedagogical integrity/rigour also contained extensive Aboriginal cultural knowledge. Most of those activities were developed through dialogical partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants, and all but one resulted in ongoing engagement with Aboriginal pedagogies by the teachers involved. All but one instances of extensive Aboriginal content occurred within activities scoring highly in terms of Aboriginal pedagogy.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the optimum way to use Aboriginal knowledge in education is to

1. Build learning around deep understandings of Aboriginal pedagogy.
2. Design learning through intercultural collaboration.
3. Allow quality cultural content to emerge through Aboriginal pedagogy and intercultural collaboration.

While the benefits of inter-cultural partnerships are clear, there remains the issue of whether or not teacher Aboriginality is a requisite factor in including Aboriginal knowledge in learning. In examining the high-scoring activities, it should be noted that most came from intercultural collaboration. The remainder were divided equally between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers. Of all the activities listed, fifty percent of those with a positive impact were designed and implemented solely by non-Aboriginal teachers, and a total of six non-Aboriginal teachers were able to include Indigenous content in their activities in addition to the Aboriginal pedagogy. This data indicates that teacher Aboriginality is not an essential criterion for the inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge in school learning.

Another issue to be addressed is whether the inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge carries any educational benefit, or whether it is promoting inclusivity at the expense of educational attainment. To answer this, the forty activities were evaluated in terms of student engagement, outcomes and educational benefit. This was based on student response, knowledge production and relevance to the core curriculum, and each activity was assigned a rating of positive, negative or neutral. (Evaluation was based on analysis of lesson observations, student work and teacher interviews.)

37 of the 40 activities were rated as positive, while two were neutral and one was negative. Of the two neutral activities, one was thus graded because the project was terminated due to a change in staff, and the other was judged to have had minimal impact on student learning, mostly due to environmental factors on that particular day, impacting on student engagement. The one activity with a negative impact deserves to be examined in a little more detail, as it sheds light on the importance of establishing an authentic framework of Aboriginal processes before approaching Aboriginal content.

This was the ‘write your own Dreaming story’ activity. In this activity the non-Aboriginal teacher presented his own anthropological knowledge as Indigenous content. This was about local ‘myths and legends’, so while he claimed to be utilising Aboriginal narrative pedagogy, he was in fact only dealing with narrative at the level of ‘what’ rather than ‘how’. The pedagogical framework and discourse of the lesson was intensely colonising and Anglo-centric, disregarding the sacred nature of the topic and reframing it from a western/rationalist viewpoint. Story was not used as a way of learning, but as an object to be removed from its context, examined, dissected and reconstructed as a simple, childish genre. The desired outcome was for the Aboriginal students to make up their own Dreaming story, a sacrilege that is akin to asking Catholic students to make up their own gospel. The students were disengaged throughout the lesson and no tangible outcomes were discernible.

So although Aboriginal content was included, there were no Aboriginal perspectives present in the lesson. This is an important distinction, as it shows the difference between Indigenised content and authentic Aboriginal perspectives. Aboriginal perspectives come from Aboriginal processes, rather than isolated artefacts of ‘culture’; therefore Aboriginal processes of learning can provide the only effective point of entry for the genuine inclusion of Aboriginal knowledge in curricula.

The ‘myths and legends’ activity was one of the four that did not lead to ongoing utilisation of Aboriginal pedagogies. Of the other three, one has already been mentioned (being terminated due to change of staff), and the remaining two showed signs of carrying the same colonising and Anglo-centric discourses as the ‘myths and legends’ activity. One included ‘Aboriginal myths’ as a sideline activity vaguely attached to the unit topic of rivers, while the other was grounded in the discourses of archaeology, with some Aboriginal content but limited Aboriginal perspectives. These examples do little to illuminate the question of ‘how teachers can use Aboriginal knowledge’, except to indicate the dangers of failing to embrace Aboriginal perspectives and processes. The act of examining Aboriginal cultural items through mainstream processes and perspectives is clearly problematic and instances of this did not produce any educational benefit during the course this project.

Stories of How the Aboriginal Knowledge Was Used

The following is a list of the ways teachers used the Aboriginal pedagogies, ranked according to intellectual rigour. Teachers used the pedagogies to:

1. Foster pride and confidence in Aboriginal intellectual capacity
2. Find common links between mainstream practice and Aboriginal ways
3. Help students understand aspects of mainstream content
4. Indigenise the learning environment
5. Indigenise/contextualise curriculum content
6. Inform behaviour management approaches
7. Change paradigms in and out of the classroom
8. Inform approaches to Aboriginal cultural content
9. Inform the structure of lessons, units and courses
10. Increase the intellectual rigor of learning activities
11. Inform understandings/innovations of systems and processes
12. Implicitly ground all teaching and learning in Aboriginal ways of knowing

This list also represents an ideal process by which teachers can embed Aboriginal perspectives into their practice. This is supported by the fact that the only teacher to reach that level 12 stage of competence first completed the other 11 steps, in order.

Teachers usually began implementing the pedagogy framework with step 1 – Fostering pride and confidence in Aboriginal intellectual capacity. This was done explicitly, often by putting up posters of the eight pedagogies and discussing them with students, then referring to them during learning activities to identify the learning habits of students and confirm them as valid and rigorous ways of learning. In one example of an introduction to the pedagogies in this way, the teacher

> *…told stories and drew pictures for the students about all that morning's content, then explained to them how using stories, lessons from land (animals and plants) and pictures in this way is how Aboriginal people here have learned for thousands of years,*

> *and that they can use this way too if they want to get smarter at school* (Lesson observation notes, 03/06/09).

Some teachers did not progress beyond this stage during the study, but in itself this was enough to enrich their programs and embed Aboriginal perspectives daily. Many progressed to the next level and began to make common ground links between usual classroom activities and Aboriginal ways of doing things, an exercise which brought new understandings of reconciliation to teachers and students alike.

The next step was using the Aboriginal pedagogies as strategies for helping students to understand mainstream content. A simple example of this was a teacher who used Story Sharing to help her class understand the abstract concept of 'tradition'. She told a story about her family's Christmas celebration the year before, then heard students' stories of family traditions, followed by identifying traditions in a story the students were all familiar with – the film 'Kung Fu Panda'. In many cases, this kind of work in applying Aboriginal pedagogy to mainstream content led to the next step of Indigenising the learning environment. This is because students produced work that was visibly intercultural, which was often placed on the walls of the classroom. For example, at one school students made family journey maps and designed posters based on local symbols and stories, which were used to decorate classroom walls (Wiki, 06/09/09). Other ideas included bringing in local plants, flowers and photos from community (Wiki, 01/06/09).

A more difficult step was Indigenising/contextualising curriculum content. This occurred often in the study, when teachers brought Aboriginal understandings and equivalent local knowledge alongside learning topics. Often this did not even require specific local knowledge, but simply involved reframing a concept using the pedagogy framework – for example, innovating a balanced diet diagram based on the symbol for non-linear learning (Wiki, 17/06/09). Symbols were also used in this way for the next step, which was about using the Aboriginal pedagogies to inform behaviour management approaches.

I provided training and resources to show teachers how to use the eight pedagogies specifically for behaviour management, for example using the non-linear way to

approach problem behaviours indirectly and with least-intrusive strategies. However, the only one that I actually saw put into practice was Symbols and Images. Several classes made symbols for their class rules, and one school even sat down with elders to innovate five intercultural symbols representing the school rules. These symbols included a bowerbird display to represent 'Quality Work', and a curved track with an adult footprint followed by a group of children's footprints, representing the rule 'Follow Instructions'. One teacher using this symbol with her class reported an immediate connection and turnaround in behaviour. She said the students had not really understood the significance of this rule before, and in fact neither had she. The big realisation and paradigm shift was that the students needed to be following the teacher's example, rather than the teacher chasing the students about their behaviour.

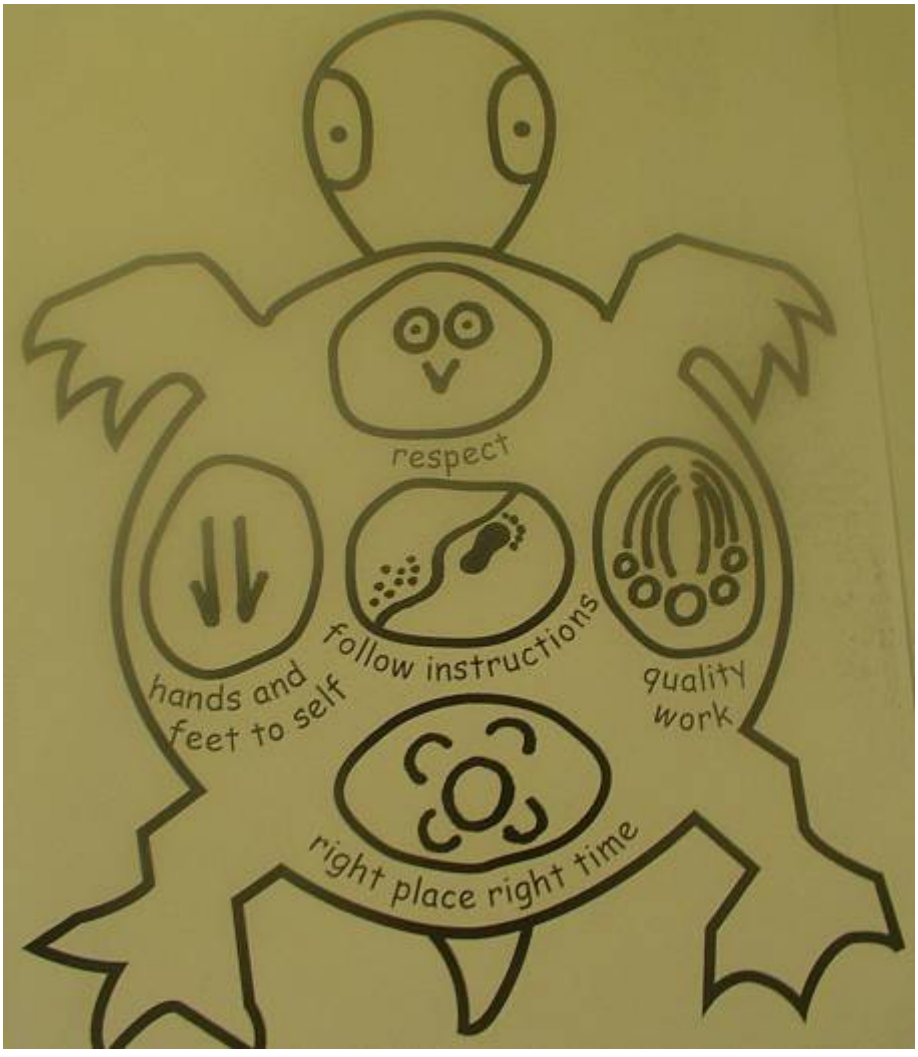

Figure 56: School rules as symbols

The symbol itself, coming from a local elder's sand painting, gave the teacher the understanding and the Law to be able to say, "I am the leader and you are following me on a learning journey" (Interview, 20/05/09). This event is also a good example of the seventh step, using the framework to facilitate paradigm shifts. This step is essential in coming to the eighth step, which is about approaching Aboriginal cultural content.

The previously-discussed 'myths and legends' lesson is a good example of the disasters that can occur when Aboriginal culture is examined from an unproblematised colonial perspective. So arguably it is essential to undergo some kind of paradigm shift to be able to challenge this perspective and enable Aboriginal viewpoints to emerge in the exploration of cultural content. Applying the Aboriginal pedagogies to these activities ensured that Aboriginal content was not approached simplistically or trivialised. For example, one lesson on local Aboriginal language did not involve the usual animal crossword or recital of 'heads shoulders knees and toes' in language, but instead examined a sophisticated and relevant Aboriginal language text at an age-appropriate level. The Aboriginal pedagogy that gave teachers and students access to this difficult task was Deconstruct/Reconstruct, with the class working as a team from wholes to parts with the text, observing adults working with the text and then trialling the same process independently. By the end of the lesson the students were able to sequence the unfamiliar language sentences and also summarise the text in language from memory.

From this point, the higher levels of competence in Aboriginal pedagogy are attained. From here, the pedagogies not only inform content and methods, but also the structure of activities, lessons, units and courses. Some teachers began this process by creating new planning templates based on the pedagogy framework (e.g. Scanned template on wiki, June 2009). One teacher planned out a history course for the entire year, based on the Aboriginal pedagogies. Instead of four discrete units on Imperial China, Mediaeval Europe, Ancient Egypt and Aboriginal Australia, she combined all these on a dynamic visual planning map that outlined multiple units designed to test the validity of various statements from the history text (from the four different cultural perspectives in each unit). The planning map was designed around serpent-beings from each of the four cultures – dragon, wyrm, ureus and rainbow, and this was

placed on the wall so students understood the scope of the course and the connectedness and purpose of each activity.

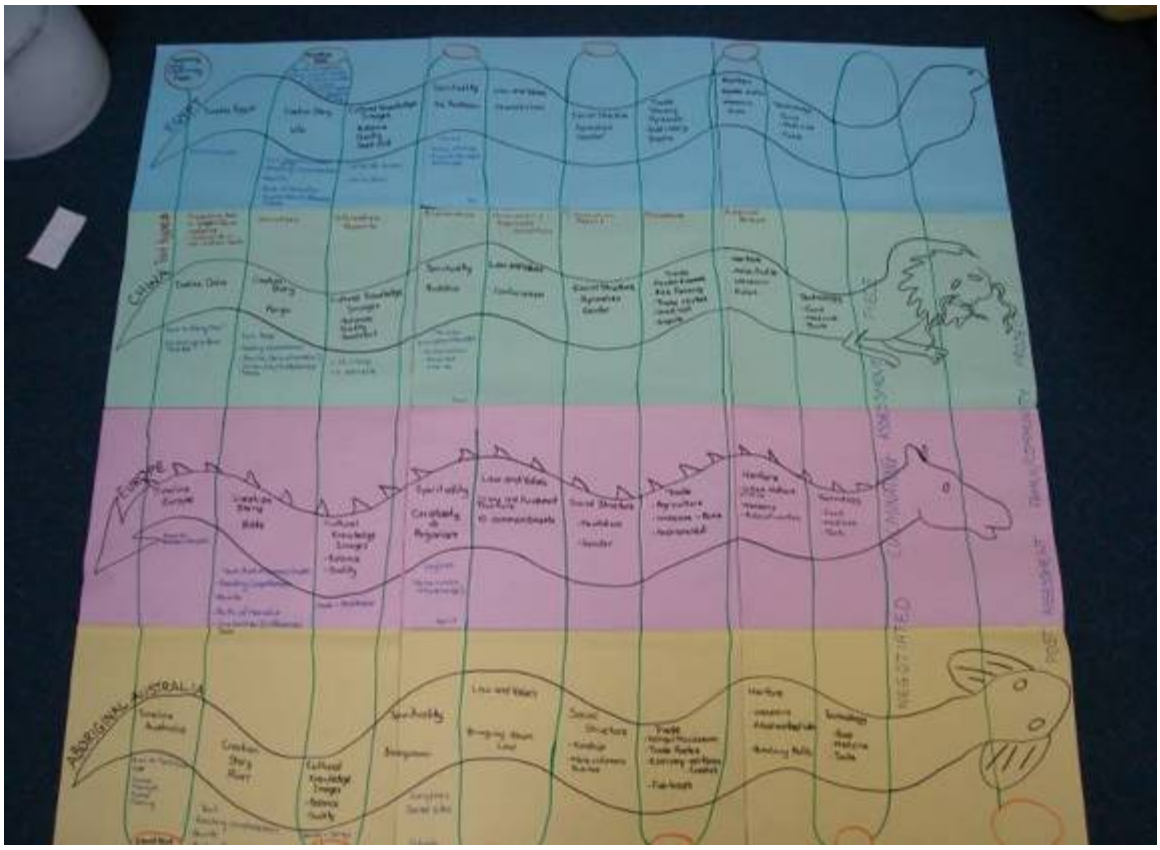

Figure 57: Visual map for a year of senior history

The first activity interrogated a statement from the set history text that identified China as the oldest surviving culture on the planet. To investigate this, the students had to research all four cultures and create comparative timelines (large visual/symbolic texts that took up the whole wall). The teacher reported that

> *When we looked at the timeline and talked about which civilisation goes furthest back and etc they were clear on it showing that it was Aboriginal Australia. when we looked at the statement again and i asked them if it was true it was amazing to watch their faces as they worked through the fact that the textbook was wrong in their heads* (Email, 25/06/08).

Clearly, when Aboriginal pedagogy is applied with integrity, it increases intellectual rigour in learning activities, and this is the next step – the tenth step. A good example of this comes from a teacher who was using the Deconstruct/Reconstruct and Non-linear pedagogies to structure poetry analyses with her class. The students used these Aboriginal concepts as a framework for their analysis of gender representations in poetry from different cultures.

The eleventh step is an advanced application, involving the use of the Aboriginal pedagogies to inform understandings/innovations of systems and processes. A good example of this is a new literacy approach that was innovated for a school program. The key pedagogy was the Non-verbal way, which was used to

> *…build on the students' cultural genius for observing people… body language etc. Then transfer those skills to semiotic analysis of the illustrations in their unifying text… then bridge from those skills to looking at subtext in the print. …building new vocab and structures to move from that [foreign] context to their local reality… For the second part… transfer those decoding skills to encoding, after the deconstruction of the first part they then work on reconstructing, using the "Secret English" codes to create their own inferences as writers, writing… from a local perspective* (Field notes, 10/03/08).

Apart from the Non-verbal pedagogy, that innovative literacy process also contains Symbols and Images, Community Links, and Deconstruct-Reconstruct. Using these Aboriginal pedagogies to inform processes and systems in this way was almost the highest level of competence achieved during the project. The only level beyond that was the implicit grounding of all teaching and learning in Aboriginal knowledge.

This mastery was only achieved by one participant. After she passed through the other stages listed above, she ceased to refer to the pedagogies explicitly, and they became an implicit part of her practice. For example, she used a kinship system diagram

> *… for maths, showing the connections and relationships between different maths skills, e.g. links between geometry, telling time, and fractions (quarter, half, etc). …maths as an holistic concept, … different skills and strands are interrelated in the same way as their family members are interrelated. … In social skills she also used the kinship-based pattern … to show cause and effect relationships between behaviours* (Interview, 20/05/09).

The primary pedagogies here were Non-linear and Symbols/Images. She worked with these implicitly (no longer identifying them explicitly for her class), for example with a boomerang symbol used in phonics lessons

> *… to make phonetic links between words that were thematically unrelated. The example she used had "father" and "mother" at the ends of the boomerang, and "feather" at the elbow of the boomerang, with the "th" underlined in each* (ibid).

In none of these activities did she specifically speak about Aboriginal culture or pedagogy – she simply used Aboriginal cultural knowledge to inform every aspect of her teaching practice and provide points of entry to mainstream content for her students. She did not deviate from her mainstream curriculum planning documents in any way, but still managed to embed Aboriginal perspectives in all learning activities.

Outcomes/Results of Using the Aboriginal Knowledge

I feel the pressure as a researcher and an educator to produce outcomes rather than outputs. Unfortunately, the outputs (knowledge products, relationships) of this research are not the outcomes (improved scores) sought in the system in which I am operating. The outcomes sought by government agencies are 'bankable' results and measurable improvements that can demonstrate distance travelled in 'closing the gap'. So the following is a brief report of some positive results reported by teachers during the study, which showed that the main area of improvement was in engagement.

One teacher reported “amazing” results in terms of engagement and higher order thinking, from both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students, in a unit based on Learning Maps. She reported that seeing the high levels of sophisticated knowledge her Aboriginal students displayed in this task led her to raise her own expectations of these students (Interview, 03/06/09).

In another class, students reportedly became “very focused” and “responded with excitement” to the Aboriginal pedagogies (Interview, 20/05/09). The teacher reported a significant positive shift in behaviour, attitude, relationships and quality of student work (ibid).

An Aboriginal teacher reported that her own use of cultural knowledge became much deeper, more relevant to the curriculum and more complex through use of the Aboriginal pedagogies, and that her class shifted from 75% to 100% engagement in learning (Interview, 11/06/09).

Wiki posts (e.g. 17, 29 June 2009) contained reports of an “awesome” level of student engagement and teacher motivation, linked to a new “sense of purpose and understanding of the interrelatedness of all that we are doing” (Wiki, 30/05/09). It was also reported that when the Aboriginal pedagogy framework was used for the induction of first-year teachers, the quality of their performance, confidence and job satisfaction was higher than the first-year cohorts of previous years (Field notes, 30/09/08).

Although the main area of improvement was in engagement, the above reports also indicate increases in relevance/connectedness, high expectations, cultural knowledge, higher order thinking and deep knowledge, all of which are elements that contribute to quality teaching and have been proven to increase the department’s desired outcomes for all students (DET NSW, 2003).

Summary of Key Findings

There is very little information available to teachers explaining how to teach using Aboriginal perspectives, as opposed to simply teaching Aboriginal content from a western perspective. Current practice is often tokenistic, involving extracurricular activities that only serve to marginalise and trivialise Aboriginal knowledge. The best way for teachers to engage with high quality, educationally relevant, productive Aboriginal knowledge is from the Cultural Interface.

This works as a dialogical approach, bringing together the highest knowledge of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal systems to find a productive common ground. This synergistic principle is deeply rooted in Aboriginal custom and philosophy, and as it also exists in many other cultures, it holds enormous reconciling potential for contemporary Australia. The reconciling ethic of the Cultural Interface represents the best hope for eliminating the oppositional discourses that currently divide mainstream educators and the Aboriginal community. Potential for resolution can be found in the basic laws of the Interface:

The shallower the knowledge, the more difference is found between cultures.
The deeper the knowledge, the more common ground is found between cultures.

The most productive form of deep common ground knowledge found at the Cultural Interface is meta-knowledge, particularly knowledge about ways of learning. From that synergy of diverse systems of learning, an Aboriginal pedagogy framework emerges that represents optimal ways of learning for students of all backgrounds. This intercultural pedagogy framework involves:

1. Approaching learning through narrative
2. Mapping processes explicitly with diagrams
3. Maximising non-verbal, intra-personal, kinaesthetic skills
4. Using images to support understanding of concepts and content

5. Using eco-pedagogy and place-based learning
6. Producing innovations by combining systems and thinking laterally
7. Scaffolding learning, modelling and working from wholes to parts
8. Centring local viewpoints, applying learning for community benefit

This framework provides a way for teachers to embed Aboriginal perspectives in how they teach, rather than what they teach, thus making all existing curriculum content culturally responsive while also increasing quality teaching practice.

Teachers can come to this intercultural knowledge in many ways. The barriers that currently prevent them from doing this include fears of mainstream backlash, loss of credibility/centrality/privilege/expert status, the unfamiliar or other, giving offense or violating Aboriginal protocol, and failure to meet education/workload requirements

These fears are a root cause of the trivialisation of Aboriginal knowledge in curriculum, which is justified by the contradictory yet coexisting core beliefs that Aboriginal culture is extinct, and that Aboriginal culture is causing community dysfunction and education failure.

Because of these confounding issues, teachers cannot enter the Cultural Interface without first engaging in intense personal reflection to centre themselves in their own personal metaphors and cultural worldviews, so they can bring their highest knowledge to the table and leave their fears, limiting beliefs and issues at the door. This is the only way for teachers to come to Aboriginal knowledge with respect, integrity and productive intent. Teachers must negotiate and establish protocols when engaging with Aboriginal knowledge.

Teachers who engage with Aboriginal knowledge protocols can create their own innovative processes for coming to Aboriginal knowledge. Effective processes contain the following elements that are linked closely to the protocols:

- Observing/Listening before seeking to understand or act
- Learning in stages

- Bringing your own familiar identity, knowledge and stories
- Representing knowledge visually
- Seeking knowledge through relationships and community
- Shifting viewpoints

The communicative modes used by teachers to come to Aboriginal knowledge in the Cultural Interface are either individual or communal. Communal modes are presentation-based, technology-based, or one-on-one. Teachers demonstrate mostly passive learner behaviours in these modes, which are only effective when reframed as active, practical activities. Individual modes are more likely to encourage an active learning orientation. These include reflection and personal trial and error, which are most effective when supplemented with personal study or reading. The best way for teachers to come to Aboriginal knowledge is through a combination of all these modes, with a balance struck between active/passive, communal/individual orientations to the learning.

In order to implement this knowledge in classrooms in the most effective way, teachers need to build learning around deep understandings of Aboriginal processes (i.e. pedagogy) and design learning through intercultural collaboration with community members. Then they can allow quality cultural content to emerge through these Aboriginal processes and intercultural collaboration.

Aboriginal content presented without an Aboriginal framework of values or pedagogy only damages relations and marginalises Aboriginal learners. It also decreases engagement and intellectual quality, while taking up valuable curriculum space. There is no educational benefit to this practice. However, approaching Aboriginal or even mainstream content explicitly through an Aboriginal pedagogy framework improves student engagement, student behaviour, quality of student work, deep knowledge, intellectual quality, relevance/connectedness and high expectations. These in turn raise standards for quality teaching and increase work satisfaction for teachers.

Ethnicity is not a factor in successful implementation of Aboriginal pedagogies. Groundedness in the reconciling ethic of the Cultural Interface ensures that both

Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal teachers are able to come to this knowledge equally. Competence in Aboriginal pedagogy depends on personal effort and adherence to Cultural Interface ethics and protocols. Applications of Aboriginal pedagogy at the Cultural Interface define a safe yet challenging ground in which teachers and students can engage with Aboriginal knowledge from perspectives that are multicultural, inclusive, intellectually rigorous, connected to curriculum and connected to community.

The findings of this project provide no miracle formula or magic silver bullet for Aboriginal education. However, this work does provide a way forward for a change in processes and attitudes, working with powerful metaphors at the Cultural Interface. There are many key ideas that may be used to affect attitudinal change, for example, the notion that western curricula are not alien entities, but simply aspects of the Dreaming we haven't incorporated into our worldviews yet.

There have been more findings and breakthroughs since the timeline ended for this project, with over 150 teachers joining the wiki and trialling the Aboriginal pedagogies in schools across the region and beyond.

Implications for Indigenous Research and Aboriginal Education Research

It is my hope that the idea of *relationally responsive research* will be further developed in the future as a means to ensure rigour and ancestral accountability where spiritual and cultural practices are used in Indigenous research methodology. This project has challenged notions of Aboriginal cultural and spiritual knowledge as a soft or intuitive process to be added in the margins of research for Indigenous flavour. The ancestral core of our cultural knowledge processes needs to inform our involvement in (and the design of) systems and structures within the academy. We need to remember that we are representing sophisticated intellectual traditions that carry potential solutions for many of the problems facing the world today. These solutions are not contained in isolated snippets of local plant knowledge or the recording of songs. They are found or created in the sacred processes of learning, managing and developing this information within social systems that have stood the test of time for millennia. I hope that the ongoing dialogue about the use of Indigenous knowledge in the future will expand to centre the concept of Indigenous meta-knowledge – our knowledge processes rather than just examples of ecological information and cultural expression.

Additionally, this paper has presented an alternative Indigenous standpoint from those offered by the binary constructs of colonial and post-colonial discourses. As an Aboriginal intellectual, I have found critical theory and anti-colonial perspectives to be empowering and a vital step in my own decolonisation process, but as a man I have often wondered what comes next after decolonisation. I believe the reconciling principle explored in this project has offered me that way forward, and it is my hope that it might offer others a pathway as well – an epistemology beyond post-colonialism that comes full circle and brings us back to that ancestral core of knowledge with integrity and a clear heart. For me, this empowers a person to share knowledge and engage in equal dialogue with other cultures, including those of colonising peoples.

This reconciling principle also offers a way forward for Aboriginal education research, answering that crisis that Harrison referred to in 2007 as a dead end in the research. He saw this dead end as a forced choice between blaming educators or blaming Aboriginal students and community – measuring deficits and applying corrective services to the wrongdoer.

Two years before that, Harrison was seeking something beyond these false dichotomies and punitive interventions, when he wrote of the search for a meta-language in Indigenous education (2005). He also had a vision of the Cultural Interface, stating that "the learning is in-between" (871), with Aboriginal students and communities co-constructing a meta-language of learning with non-Aboriginal teachers. He claimed that this process of inter-cultural negotiation was already present in Australian classrooms, although obscured from consciousness. This represented a move from divisive bi-cultural theory to a more dynamic inter-cultural theory. However this movement towards a reconciling discourse of Cultural Interface seems to have died off in the intervening years, as Harrison ran into that 'dead end' of forced choices – the false dichotomies of Aboriginal education theory.

The major implication of my own research is that there now exists a new opportunity for Aboriginal education researchers and teachers to move beyond that dead end of binary oppositions, working with the synergising Indigenous principles described in my work. But the limitations of this study must also be addressed now, at the end of this 'smoothing' stage of the process, when the flaws of the 'wood' become apparent and the value of the piece is determined. First I will address the apparent problem of Interface and pedagogy themes drawing focus from the research questions.

It has been suggested to me that the issue of the Cultural Interface should be added as a third research question in this thesis. But this would be misleading, as the findings around this issue came from grappling with the core research questions of how teachers can come to Aboriginal knowledge and how they can use it in schools. It became clear to me very early in the study that oppositional discourses were a barrier to teacher engagement with Aboriginal knowledge and so I proposed a theory of the Cultural Interface as a means to resolve this problem and answer the first question. The same applies to the issue of Aboriginal pedagogy, which was proposed as a way

of focusing on Aboriginal processes rather than tokenistic cultural content, to answer the second question. The title of this thesis 'Aboriginal Pedagogy at the Cultural Interface' is intended as a naming of my proposed solutions to the research questions. In other words, these cannot be questions because they are the answers.

Another issue that may be judged to draw attention away from the research questions is my focus on Indigenous standpoint and methodology. I wish to clarify that I do not see this as a digression. The auto ethnography and Indigenous methodologies were intended to demonstrate how the Cultural Interface and Aboriginal intellectual processes can be used to successfully navigate academic learning – even at the level of doctoral study. To this end, the methodology was used not only for investigating the research questions, but for demonstrating the solutions to those questions as well.

The primary limitation of this text is its inaccessibility both to teachers and Aboriginal community members, the very people upon whose experience and knowledge the study was built. Much of the arcane Aboriginal cultural knowledge used for this study may be dismissed by non-Aboriginal teachers and academics as superstition, mythology and exotica, while my residual anti-colonial discourse will exclude them even further. The word-length and academic discourse of the text will exclude many Aboriginal community members (and I dare say teachers as well). For academics and linguists, my unsubstantiated Whorfian assertions of language shaping cognition will be a point of contention. Anthropologists may also disagree with my kinship diagram.

My cultural mentor advised me to address the major flaws in an early draft the same way I would approach a knot in the wood when carving. My way of doing that is to turn it around and cut from both directions. So I spent a lot of time addressing these flaws by attempting to place myself in the various viewpoints of potential readers. I smoothed a lot of flaws in this way, but I was unable to resolve the abovementioned limitations of the text. Currently I am working on a number of texts for different audiences to communicate the findings to participants and community, but also to report the ongoing developments in this constantly evolving body of knowledge. The research was just one small window on this – beyond the timeframe allocated for data collection there has been a surge of teachers and community members across the region and beyond working with the eight pedagogies and creating new knowledge.

Closing Ceremony

Preparing the Ceremony

My work in this region began with two old fullas developing the Wangkumarra language program, beginning with the Dreaming story of Ngamadja, a white owl lady who was abducted and murdered thousands of years ago by a Nungar man from South Australia. He cut off her head with a left-handed pakarandji (type of boomerang), then her body turned into a giant quartz crystal rock which is a significant site for Wangkumarra people today.

It was not long after working with that story that I had that white owl vision of the Cultural Interface (see chapter 3), with the two eyes coming together to make one. Throughout the research project I was approached by several Elders and clever people who were doing that same Business, most recently by Karen Martin, who had this totemic magic from her mother's side. I had not mentioned this aspect of the research to her before – she just called me up one day and asked me to pass that Business on to her. I gave her the carving I had made for this and we began to work with it together over the following week. In the way knowledge works in our culture, I could not truly know this Law until she had told it to me.

That same week I travelled down the Darling River to the junction with the Murray River with one of the old fullas who originally shared the Ngamadja story with me. He asked me to share that white owl Business I had been doing with Karen Martin. He came to a decision then that we needed to plan a ceremony to close the research, come full circle back to Ngamadja where it all began, but more importantly to heal a wound that was thousands of years old. We sang the Wangkumarra rain song throughout that trip and a storm began at Tibooburra (where the Ngamadja rock stands) and swept southwards, covering Sydney and much of New South Wales in red dust. On the return journey the sky cleared before us and the old fulla planned out the form the ceremony would take.

The ceremony would involve acknowledging the research as coming full-circle, as being part of an ancestral action moving me around the region as a messenger and pushing me forward to accept accountability for the death of Ngamadja, healing an ancient wound. The old fullas had identified me as an ancestor of that murderer and for the duration of the ceremony I would have to become him, become that evil rapist and killer of women, offer an apology to Ngamadja and accept a cut for payback.

First I had to carve a left-handed pakarandji. When I asked how to make this, it was more than just shaping it to fly from left to right. I had to actually carve it with my left hand – very hard for me as a right-handed man. He said that the process determines the function – the process of carving with my left hand is what makes it a left-handed boomerang. There were cultural notions here of left-handedness being equated with wrong-doing and falsehood – in many of our languages the word for 'right' as a direction also means 'right' in terms of truth or correctness, just as in the English language (Evans, 2009).

As I write this, it is about ten days before the ceremony will take place. I have been carving the boomerang and it is still incomplete, but the work is bringing a strong non-verbal awareness and understanding of the Cultural Interface, through the synergy of left and right. The right hand is not passive – it is complicit in the actions of the left and they need each other – it balances the actions of the left, holds the wood, applies pressure from that side to meet the axe halfway. I could never see that before, not until I was forced to switch hands and see things from the other side.

Just now a Baakindji woman approached me while I was writing the words above, telling me that another big storm has been reported starting up at Tibooburra. This shows me how small this research project has been – just a tiny piece of a larger action, a movement of land and ancestors towards something that I can only glimpse through my work in this region. I will write the final part of this thesis, the closing paragraphs, after I have completed the ceremony and returned.

After the Ceremony

During the ceremony I took on more responsibility than I had originally imagined. I offered an apology that worked on several levels, a matrix that comprised the social dimensions of my reality and the dualisms within them. So apart from reconciling tribal ancestors over past transgressions, I was also apologising on behalf of my European ancestors for genocide and displacement, and on behalf of my gender for violence against women. The need for this arose during the ceremony and was unplanned. The peculiar circumstances of my eclectic identity made me the right person to do this.

Ngamadja was asked for forgiveness, then a deep punishment cut was made on my chest and my hands were placed on the rock to receive her judgement. As my hands touched the rock the cut immediately closed over and healed, leaving only a thin line of blood over a barely visible scar. The old fullas said that this healing action indicated Ngamadja's acceptance and forgiveness.

At that moment I felt myself standing dead at the centre of the Cultural Interface, a perfectly balanced point of intersection between multiple realities. I had never imagined this point could exist in such a chaotic and contested social space. I could see the creative purpose of my ambiguous identity – something that previously had only caused me shame. For just an instant I saw what reconciliation really is, the creative potential of harnessing the knowledge of diverse cultures in a dialogue of balance and respect. It is a Dreaming event, an act of Creation and Law that is necessary for singing up continued human existence. At the centre of this Business is learning and the knowledge processes we use to manage that learning.

The left-handed boomerang was buried in a dry creek bed halfway between Ngamadja's rock and the hill from which the original boomerang was thrown, closing this Business at the overlap of past (story) and present (research).

Figure 58: After the Ceremony

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