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**Audacious Leadership:**

**One school's journey to achieve educational equality for Indigenous students**

**Thesis submitted by**

**Eleanor Louise Wilkinson**

**B. Ed. (Art)**

**In November, 2005**

**For the degree of Masters by Research**

**In the School of Indigenous Australian Studies**

**James Cook University**

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## Acknowledgements

This work was made possible by the support and willingness of the many Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff, students and parents of Kirwan State High School. I am very grateful to the Principal, Mr John Livingston for providing me with the opportunity to conduct this study in the school as well as allowing me the work-time and resources to do it. I owe much to Mrs Shirley Collins and Miss Shelley Laing, for their dedication to Indigenous students and their faith in me. The ongoing support and advice of Regional Executive Director, Mrs Vicki Baylis has also been invaluable.

Thanks especially to my supervisors – Associate Professor Sue McGinty who persuaded me to return to tertiary studies after a 20-year absence and Professor Jeannie Herbert who willingly shared her own study strategies with me. I would have not completed my work without Sue's relentless encouragement, emails and capacity to make getting through huge tasks seem doable or Jeannie's wisdom on writing approaches. As a result of my affiliation with the School of Indigenous Australian Studies, I have also met and got to know many other inspirational Aboriginal, Torres Strait and non-Indigenous people.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge my parents and other family and friends who have cheered me on. In particular, I give special thanks to my husband [REDACTED] and son [REDACTED] who were always willing to provide me with love, understanding and time in the right quantities.

## Abstract

The core issue of achieving educational equality for Indigenous Australian students is examined through a critique of the policy and practice of one very large urban state secondary school in North Queensland. Uniquely motivated by a discourse of success, the study determines what school based factors have contributed to the progress and achievements of its Indigenous students.

The thesis is an instrumental case study that is written from the worldview of a non-Indigenous feminist insider-researcher, using the philosophical paradigm of critical theory. Significant Indigenous education literature is explored in themes of time, progress and inequality with an emphasis on schooling in Queensland. This is followed by a detailed description of the context of the school community setting and the broader social and political background. Multiple data sources of: observation; interviews and physical/documentary evidence are used to identify different ways the core issue is addressed in the school and analysis and interpretation is derived from a synthesis of the literature and school review findings.

The term, '*audacious leadership*' is coined to describe the most significant intrinsic variable or school-based factor found to be contributing to the success of educational outcomes for Indigenous students in the school studied. The thesis concludes with implications of this for educational leaders in the wider context of the Queensland education system.

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## **Chapter 1: Why is it so? Success in Indigenous educational outcomes**

### *Introduction*

The course work for this study started with a research question, “What is behind the continued and steady increase in enrolment, retention and achievement of Indigenous students in one of the largest secondary schools in Queensland?” As the administrator in charge of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education program in the school, I was motivated by a discourse of success rather than the frustrations of failure or poor performance which is often the situation for researchers in Indigenous education.

My interest in Indigenous issues is however, only recent. With a third generation white Anglo Saxon father and post-war Dutch immigrant mother, I started my education in the mid 1960's in a one-teacher primary school in rural Northern NSW, going on to the local state high school and then a College of Advanced Education in Sydney where I graduated as a secondary art teacher in 1982. Throughout those years, I do not recall fellow students who were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander nor did I have any great involvement with or more than a passing interest in Indigenous issues. I did not personally know any Indigenous people until I started teaching in 1983 where I had classes with a few Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the school had an Indigenous education worker. After seven years and teaching in two schools in southern and central Queensland, I was promoted to a Townsville secondary school as a Senior Mistress and in 1995, I was appointed to Kirwan State High School (the site of my study) as a Deputy Principal.

It was in this role, after experiencing first hand some of the effects of situations surrounding Indigenous children and their families and at the same time,

unprecedented increases in their enrolment, retention and achievement in the school, that I saw the need to understand what was happening through formal studies. Subsequently, I returned to university in 2001 to commence a Masters in Indigenous Australian Studies by Research where I realised just how limited my knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history was. Four years on, with an increased understanding and an appreciation of the broader socio-political context of Indigenous education, I can answer the question often asked by my supervisor: What is the Wilkinson thesis? Called *“Audacious leadership: one school’s journey to achieve educational equality for Indigenous students”*, it is written from the worldview of a non-Indigenous feminist insider-researcher, using the philosophical paradigm of critical theory (Lather, 1986, Guba and Lincoln, 1994, Kinchloe and McLaren, 2003). Specifically it is an instrumental case study (Merriam, 1988, Stake, 2000) that examines the core issue of educational equality for Indigenous Australian students. It focuses on one North Queensland secondary school, critiquing its policy and practice to determine what school-based factors have contributed to the success experienced by its Indigenous students and explores how these might be transformed and improved with application into other Queensland schools.

This thesis consists of six chapters. In this chapter: *“Why is it so?”* provides a detailed description of the phenomena that triggered the study and the research questions around the core issue are presented. In Chapter two: *“From a rhetoric of urgency to a reality of action”*, the literature is reviewed. Sources both past and present, pertaining to Indigenous education with a focus on the Queensland context and key themes that have relevance to the case study are examined. In Chapter three: *“The research journey”*, insider research, theory and principles that underlay the conduct of the case study are discussed along with an explanation of the strategy

of inquiry used. In Chapter four: "*The story so far*", the school and community context is discussed. Starting with an explanation of the school setting, specific reference to the school's Indigenous education profile is made. This is followed by a description of the broader political and social contexts: the local demography, school/community alliances and relationships with a commentary on the application of government policies up until 2004. In Chapter five: "*Confirming the known, uncovering unknowns*", are the results and findings of a review of the school where data was collected from multiple sources: observation, interviewing and physical evidence. Some comparisons are made with that of the findings of previous studies conducted about the school. Finally in Chapter six: "*Lessons to be learned*", synthesises the findings of the literature and school review. The term, '*audacious leadership*' is coined to describe the most significant intrinsic variable or school-based factor found to be contributing to the success of educational outcomes for Indigenous students in the school studied. The chapter concludes with implications of this for educational leaders in the wider context of the Queensland education system.

### *The phenomena*

Kirwan State High School (Kirwan High) is considered a very large rural secondary co-educational school. Opened in 1979 with a small cohort of Year 8 students, it grew to the size classified by the system as very large - a 'Band 11' school in 1991 and Queensland's largest government school in 1997. With the creation of Primary to Year 12 (P-12) colleges around Queensland, the school is no longer the largest, but continues to maintain an average annual enrolment of 1,966 (Calculated by averaging the annual February census enrolments from 1997-2004). The current Principal has been at the school since 1988 with the exception of 1999-2000, when he was on leave.

The student enrolment stability over the last decade is above that of the state and the same as like-schools (Department of Education, 2004a). This trend is mirrored in the enrolment mobility rate over time – there are a high number of students moving into (not out of) the school that have come from other secondary schools and live outside the catchment area (Department of Education, 2004a). Such above-state rates in progression and mobility drove the decision by the Executive Director in 1997 to make the school undertake an enrolment strategy of capping Year 8 enrolments. This means Year 8 students are permitted to enrol from outside the natural catchment until the cap of 360 is reached. Once this occurs, only students from within the natural catchment or who already have siblings who have previously attended the school are to be enrolled (Kirwan State High School, 2004a).

Disproportionate to the growth of the general student population, however, was the rapid growth of the Indigenous student population. In July 1994, 60 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were listed as enrolled in the school's July census while as of the February census, 2004, there were 280 Indigenous students (Department of Education, 2005) (See Figure 1). Examination of Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data shows the representation of Indigenous students at the school is higher than that of the Indigenous population rates in the surrounding suburbs, indicating students are coming from areas other than the immediate geographic location (Office of Economic and Statistical Research, 2002). A search of 2003 enrolled students' addresses confirmed this point. 78 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were found to come from the Upper Ross suburbs of Kelso, Rasmussen and Condon, which means they bypass a closer state high school to come to Kirwan High (Kirwan State High School, 2004b).

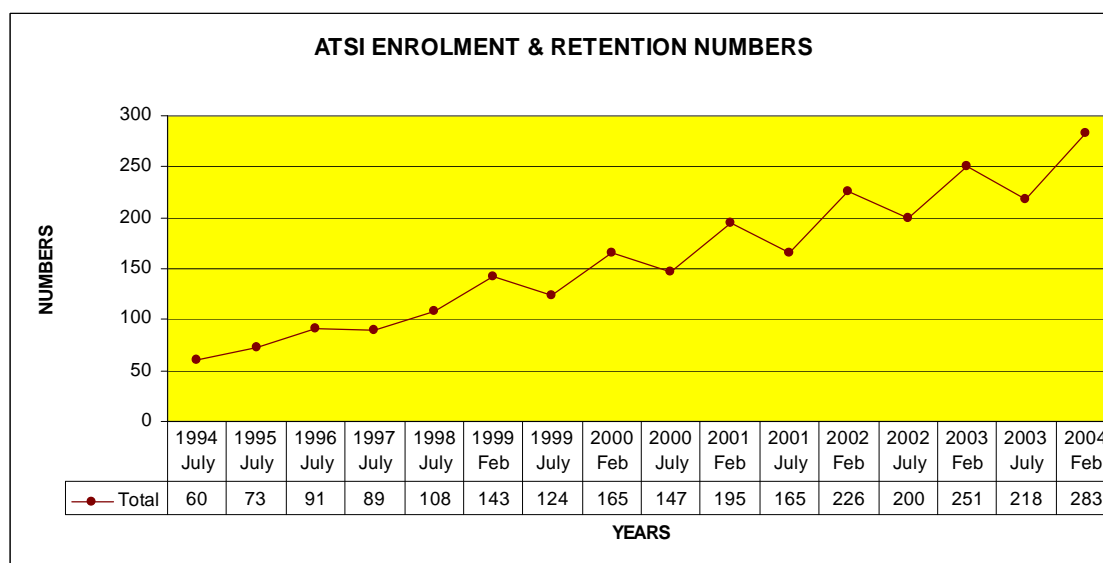


Figure 1 Kirwan SHS Indigenous Student Enrolment Numbers 1994-2004

Another significant trend with Indigenous students was their apparent progression rate. While the school's non-Indigenous apparent progression rate is above that of all Queensland government schools, more significantly, the apparent progression rate of Indigenous students at the school is much higher than the school's non-indigenous rate and the Indigenous rates of all other Queensland government schools. The school's average Indigenous apparent progression rate from July to July for Year 8 to Year 12 from 1997 to 2004 was 114.3% compared to the school's average of 83.6% and the State average of 48.6% (Calculated by averaging the annual July census percentages from 1997 – 2003) (Department of Education, 2004a). Such a trend is attributed to the constantly increasing overall enrolment of Indigenous students, particularly in the Senior School.

It must be noted, that 'apparent' progression rate and 'actual' progression rate are very different sets of data. Actual progression is just that, it refers to the students who remain in the one school from Year 8 and continue without leaving to Year 12. Education Queensland (EQ) however is only required to report on 'apparent' progression ('Actual' retention information could only be obtained on

request). Kirwan High's 'actual' progression rates therefore read differently from those cited above. From Year 8, 1997 to Year 12, 2001 - of all students, 52.7% completed Year 12 from the original Year 8 cohort and of the Indigenous students, 30.7% completed Year 12 from the original Year 8 Indigenous cohort. From Year 8, 1999 to Year 12, 2003 – of all students, 65.1% completed Year 12 from the original Year 8 cohort and of the Indigenous students, 51.3% completed Year 12 from the original Year 8 Indigenous cohort (J. Johnstone, personal communication, November 5, 2002) (See Table 1 below). While the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students remained evident, a Senior Information Officer from the Portfolio Performance Management Branch in Education Queensland advised that Kirwan High's actual rates were 'still better than other schools' (J. Johnstone, personal communication, November 5, 2002).

<b>Completion of five years of schooling: Year 8 to 12 in the same school</b>	<b>All students</b>	<b>Indigenous students</b>
1997-2001	52.7%	30.7%
1999-2003	65.1%	51.3%

Table 1 Kirwan State High School *actual* progression rates for Indigenous and all students 1997-2003

Complimenting this information was the attendance data of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. On the surface, school data showed that over the period from 1998 to 2003, the average absence rate for all types of absences for Indigenous students has been mostly the same as state or like-school rates (See Figure 2). Closer examination of disciplinary (suspension) and unauthorised (truancy) absences however, showed that Indigenous students from Kirwan High were in 5 out of 7 years, below the means of suspension or truancy of the state or like-schools (See Table 2). The disciplinary increases in 1998 and again in 2004 were as a result of suspensions from fights in the school between Indigenous and



non-Indigenous male students (Kirwan State High School, 2004d). These school behaviours seemed to mirror the increase of incidents of racism-based violence occurring at the same time in the local surrounding community. No specific explanation can be offered for the 2000 truancy rate that was actually flagged as above state and like-school rates.

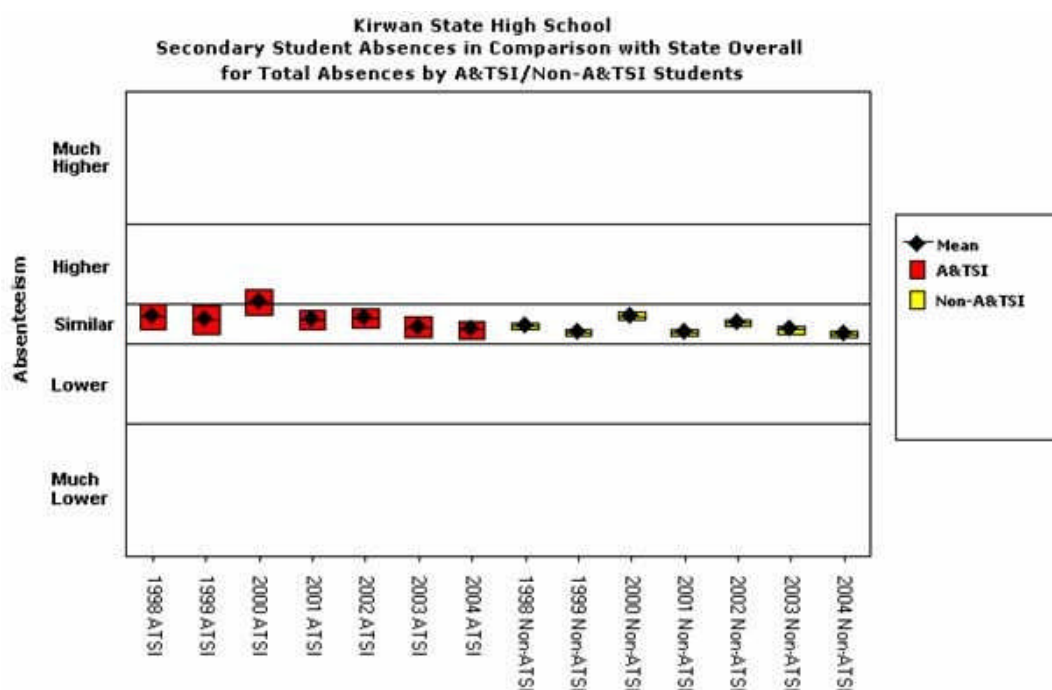


Figure 2 Indigenous and non-Indigenous absence comparisons 1998-2004

Disciplinary Absences (suspensions)				Unauthorised Absences (truancy)			
Year	School Mean	State Mean	Like-schools Mean	Year	School Mean	State Mean	Like-schools Mean
1998	.89	.70	.83	1998	8.50	15.56	14.64
1999	.49	.84	.74	1999	12.50	15.52	13.78
2000	.45	.84	.65	2000	19.39	14.94	14.36
2001	.54	.95	.98	2001	13.41	14.98	13.81
2002	.72	.97	1.10	2002	14.14	15.61	13.08
2003	.96	1.09	.82	2003	8.25	16.11	11.75
2004	1.16	1.04	1.00	2004	13.46	15.99	13.46

Table 2 Unauthorised, disciplinary rates for Indigenous students, Kirwan SHS 1998-2004

Overall, the available data showed considerable improvement in enrolment and participation. What was behind these phenomena? There was already an audit on Indigenous student issues in the school undertaken by the School of Indigenous Australian Studies (SIAS) at James Cook University, (JCU) which was completed in 1998 and repeated in 2001, and I conducted a pilot study as part of my Masters coursework to determine why Indigenous students were coming to Kirwan High in 2002. These works found similar trends, that students chose to come and parents chose to send their students to the school - primarily because of reputation, opportunities and family connections (SIAS, 1998, 2000; Wilkinson, 2003). Students and parents perceived it to be a 'good school' with a wide range and choice of subjects and 'more opportunities' than other schools. The excellence programs in sport and music were particularly attractive to the students (SIAS, 1998, 2001; Wilkinson, 2003).

The previous studies, while certainly beneficial, had not accessed data beyond focus group interviews. Three years on, what specifically was the school doing or not doing now that was contributing to the current success? This thesis provides a very recent and comprehensive examination of Indigenous education in the school. It starts from a point of success and focuses on what school-based variables have contributed to Indigenous student accomplishments. Why were the progression rates 'still better' than other state schools? Importantly, of the Indigenous students who came to and stayed on at Kirwan High, many seemed to achieve well. Why? How do their achievements compare to other schools? What was the true extent of this success and what contribution was the school making towards this?

### *Core Issue Research Questions*

While the above topical questions have provided information for the description of the case, to seek greater understanding of the presenting phenomena and the core research issue, the following research questions were devised and provide the conceptual structure for the thesis:

- How are the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures represented within the school?
- How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students positioned as learners within the school?
- How is the staff positioned in relation to their knowledge and understanding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students they teach?
- How has school leadership affected perceptions and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?

## **Chapter 2: From a rhetoric of urgency to a reality of action: a literature review**

Over the past thirty years, despite some public perceptions to the contrary, considerable progress has been made in the educational attainments of Indigenous Australians...However, while substantial advancements are now being made; significant inequality remains... (Buckskin, 2000, p.1)

### *What has been and what is for Indigenous students – their educational outcomes*

Peter Buckskin's comments in his address to principals, at the 2000 Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC) sponsored "Dare To Lead" forum, aptly describes the current situation, even five years on. These comments provide three important contexts that need to be explored further. These are: time, progress and inequality.

#### *Time*

The thirty-year time frame refers to the significant changes that began to occur towards end of the 1960's, early 1970's, when Australia began some long overdue reforms to the constitution and government policy. Namely, all Indigenous Australians were given the right to vote (1962) and recognition as citizens of Australia in 1967. Queensland was the last state to provide Indigenous enfranchisement in 1965 (National Archives, 2003).

Prior to this, the administration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs had been primarily a State responsibility, Aborigines were defined under legislation as 'full-blood' or 'half-caste', and while they completed census forms or were

included by 'counting heads', they were excluded from the statistics of Commonwealth citizens. Torres Strait Islanders were often included in the same figures and many Indigenous people wanted to deny their origins (Rowley, 1970). Consequently, accurate social statistics on the Indigenous population of Australia were difficult to get. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) reports from the 2001 census,

The Indigenous count has increased by 12% due to births and deaths, and a further 4% primarily due to an increasing propensity for persons to be identified as Indigenous on Census forms, giving a total increase of 16% for the intercensal period (ABS, 2003, p.2).

Gray (1997, cited in DEST, 2002, pp.12-13) attributes this increase, which is much greater than the total population increase of 6% over the same period, to several factors: "...improved collection processes for the Census, higher fertility rates compared with the non-Indigenous population, and the increase in the number of people willing to identify as Indigenous" (DEST, 2002, pp12-13).

After 1967, the prime responsibility for funding for educational services for Indigenous people was reclaimed from states and territories by the Federal Government who allocated specific funds to supplement states' spending (Tripcony, 2000). In the same year, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs was formed and it was later replaced in 1990 with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). Although significantly in April 2004, the Australian Government announced its intention to close down ATSIC and the associated agency, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Services (ATSIS). This took effect from March 24 2005 and the responsibility for ATSIC-ATSIS programs and services such as Indigenous health and housing were transferred to other federal government departments in July 2005.

An Office of Indigenous Policy Co-Ordination (OIPC) within the Department of Immigration and Multicultural and Indigenous Affairs was established (OIPC, 2005). Through these recent policy changes and numerous previous name changes, the Federal Department of Education Science and Training (DEST), has retained prime responsibility for the funding of Indigenous educational programs whether it is directly through specific activities or indirectly through State education systems.

Regardless of any of the above infrastructure revisions, if statistics were and still are an important tool used by government to provide useful information to inform legislation, policy decisions and consequent budgets to support reform and initiatives, the mere fact Indigenous people have only officially appeared as an identifiable 'target group' since the late 1960's, would also explain Buckskin's reference to thirty years. Partington comments on this same situation,

It has only been in the last 30 years that they have been acknowledged as full members of society, and even then, the acknowledgement has been legal and political rather than social and economic. While Indigenous people share in some aspects of Australian society as equals, for example the right to vote, not all have equal access to the resources of society nor are they treated equally by other Australians (2002, p. 3).

While 'thirty years' is a common theme used in the literature to frame documented development in Indigenous education, it is also important to note that it actually took one hundred and eighty years after the first Aboriginal school in Port Jackson, Sydney opened that a policy was implemented in 1990 by the Federal Government to provide a coordinated national approach for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Indigenous education - the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy* (NATSIEP) (DEST, 2002). This was a joint policy statement of the Commonwealth, States and Territories and was developed in

1988 by a working party made up of Indigenous educator representatives from those areas. In 1989 the NATSIEP was endorsed by all states and territories and published and launched to be implemented the following year (P. Tripcony, personal communication, February 9, 2006). Since then, the most concentrated and substantial governmental efforts have occurred, with the introduction of the "...Aboriginal Education Strategic Initiatives Programme...(now IESIP) and the Aboriginal Direct Assistance Programme (now IEDA)...National Strategy for the Education of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 1996-2000...establishment of the MCEETYA Taskforce on Indigenous Education...the National Indigenous English Literacy and Numeracy Strategy 2000-2004...and the National Strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in VET: Partners in a Learning Future" (DEST, 2002, p.7). Overarching these and all schooling policies and strategies are the *National Goals for Schooling in the 21<sup>st</sup> century* (1989, cited in DEST, 2002, pp.127-128) determined by the Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA).

Within Queensland, a similar pattern of development has occurred. The Queensland Education Department first formed the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee (QATSICC) in 1976, which ran as an advisory body to the Department of Education until 1990 (QIECB, 2005). In this year it was re-formed as the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Consultative Committee (QATSIECC). Then in 1996, the committee's name and function changed again, as it became the Ministerial Advisory Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education (MACATSIE). It re-emerged in 2000 to what is currently known as the Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body (QIECB) Of note is the fact that all of these changes coincided with the

changes of government In Queensland. (P.Tripcony, personal communication, February 9, 2006).

A search of the literature provided over time by or to the Queensland Department of Education as references for state educators that directly relate to or include the need to address Indigenous education, revealed there has been nearly as many discussion papers, reports and policies produced as there have been years. They include:

- *Education for Queensland Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders*. 1978 and 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1978. Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee. A report to the Director General of Education by this committee (QATSICC). The second edition included illustrations and photographs and a reply from the Director General.
- *The Education of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders: Queensland Programs and Provisions*, 1978. Queensland Education Department. A formalised response to the report issued in the same year by QATSICC.
- *Guidelines for Studies About Aborigines in Queensland Schools*. February 1980. Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee. A report compiled by QATSICC and presented to the Director General of Education.
- *The Education of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders: Queensland Programs and Provisions 1981*. Queensland Education Department. An official response to QATSICC's 1980 report with explanations of the personnel, resources, services and programs offered in Queensland schools and Technical and Further Education Colleges (TAFE).



- *Strategies for Teaching Aborigines & Islanders in Urban/Rural areas, Queensland*. 1984. Compiled by Neil McGarvie, this 18-page A5 booklet was distributed to Queensland schools for use by teachers.
- *Peninsula QATSICC Education Policy 1988*. Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee. A policy document produced by QATSICC. It recorded the outcomes of workshops on policy development and training workshops held in Far North Queensland from 1983-1988 and the work in 1983-1985 of Torres Strait Islander communities in preparing a policy document for their community schools.
- *The Teaching of Aboriginal Studies and Torres Strait Islander Studies In Queensland Schools- Draft: Preschool to Year 12 Guidelines and Framework – Companion Booklet*. 1995. Queensland Education Department. Distributed to schools on improvement strategies in education for Indigenous children.
- *Trial Pilot Senior Syllabus for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies*. January 1998. The first time a specific curriculum study was introduced for Queensland secondary schools that focused on Indigenous Australian history and cultures. Developed in 1990, trialled in 1998-99, evaluated 2001 and implemented for Year 11 students in Queensland secondary schools in 2002.
- *Aboriginal Education and Torres Strait Islander Education Resource Booklet One: Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program (IESIP)*. November 1998. Queensland Education Department. A guide for schools in using money provided by the Commonwealth Government. Includes strategic planning processes and performance indicators and targets.

- *Aboriginal Education and Torres Strait Islander Education Resource Booklet Two: Community Approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Behaviour Management*. November 1998. Queensland Education Department. Provides advice on processes to use in establishing and maintaining appropriate behaviour management practices within schools that have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- *Review of Education and Employment Programs: for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Education Queensland*. February 2000. Queensland Education Department. Contains findings of a six-month review conducted by Education Queensland with school communities and district personnel across Queensland. Outlines nine clusters of issues with suggested strategies and solutions for them. Provides recommendations for significant policy change within Education Queensland.
- *Partners For Success*. February 2000. Queensland Education Department. A specific strategy document produced in response to the previous review. Distributed to all state schools, it aimed at improving the education and employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queensland, it outlines 6 major policies for state government implementation. It was initially trailed in 38 state schools and then released as a specific policy for implementation in all state government schools in 2003.
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Unit Resource Booklet Three: Reconciliation, Walking Together, towards the future*. June 2000.

Distributed to all state schools, it provided advice on how to observe Indigenous protocols and provided reconciliation strategies through classroom and school applications.

- *Queensland State Education: 2010*. 2000. Queensland Education Department. A future strategy document used by Education Queensland to guide the direction of state education for 10 years from 2000 – 2010.
- *Destination 2010*. 2002. Queensland Education Department. An action plan document that provides outcomes, key performance measures and performance indicators and targets for state schools to aim for on an annual basis. It has been revised three times since 2002.
- *The Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Survey: Teachers' Summary*. 2001. Queensland Education Department. Issued to every teacher in Queensland, it summarised the key findings of the longitudinal survey. It proved that combining enhanced school-based management, high quality external support and good teacher practice did improve student-learning outcomes. Significantly it found that the least apparent pedagogical practice in classrooms was recognition of difference. This survey signalled the changes that would later come to strategic policy, teaching and leadership within state schools in Queensland.
- *Department of Education Strategic Plan 2001-2005 and now revised, 2004-2008*. Queensland Education Department. Provides the system's objectives and strategies to achieve them. Contained mention of improving Indigenous education outcomes.
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education 2001-2002*. July 2002. Queensland Curriculum Council. A report of forums conducted by this

council. It makes 10 recommendations to the Queensland Studies Authority (QSA) aimed at improving Indigenous education outcomes.

- *Review of Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program – Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (IESIP-SRA) Funding*. October 2002. Queensland Education Department. A report that identified a number of issues surrounding the methodology of grant application, management, application and reporting of IESIP funds at the school level. Distributed to principals in schools only.
- *Position Paper on schooling and teacher education – Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body*. March 2003. A position paper presented to the Queensland Minister for Education and the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Science and Training by the QIECB. The QIECB focused on seven key areas from its strategic plan and conducted several 2-year research projects across urban, rural and remote areas in both government and non-government institutions. It presented its findings in the key areas and provided its position on each of them.
- *Education and Training Reforms for the Future: A White Paper*. April 2003. Queensland Education Department. A follow up to a 'green paper' previously issued the year before by the Queensland Government; this paper proposes 19 specific actions throughout the stages of schooling in Queensland including legislative changes to the age for entering and leaving school.
- *Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Program – Supplementary Recurrent Assistance (IESIP-SRA): A Guide For Schools*. 2003.

Queensland Education Department. Received in schools in early May 2003, this document was an upgrade of the previous *Resource Booklet 1: IESIP* issued six years earlier.

- *Partners for Success: School Information Kit 2003-2004*. October 2003. Queensland Education Department. A guide for schools on how to include the 'Partners For Success' Policy within their school annual planning. Mandated priority action areas, targets and performance measures are listed.
- *Report on Indigenous Education*. March 2004. Ministerial Advisory Committee for Educational Renewal. A report presented to the Minister for Education and the Arts by this group (MACER). It outlines seven key issues for the improvement of Indigenous educational outcomes and makes nine recommendations to the Minister.
- *Report on Indigenous Education*. June 2004. Queensland Education Department. This is a formal response from the Department of Education and the Arts to the recommendations from MACER. All nine recommendations were accepted. At a local level, the Regional Executive Director at a Townsville District meeting on 18th November 2004 handed both reports to school administrators and Indigenous Education workers.
- *Indigenous Education – Everybody's Business: Implications for Teacher Education*. December 2004. A report from the Working Party on Indigenous Studies in Teacher Education to the Queensland Board of Teacher Education.

It can be seen by the above list that the quantity of the release of strategic policy, strategy and other advice to Queensland state schools has increased

significantly since 2000, ten years after the first raft of multiple Federal policies were rolled out. Mandated accountability demands for Queensland state government schools only occurred in 2003, when specific Indigenous outcome performance targets and reporting requirements were set for the first time (Department of Education, 2003c). Yet all of this has still not improved equality for the Indigenous child at school - Buckskin's point at the start of this section. He does however make comment about "considerable progress" and "substantial advancements". So what has actually happened in schools?

### *Progress*

Optimistic examples of improvement and progress on a national scale can be found in the *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2001*, such as:

- Secondary enrolments have increased by 23% since 1997, indicating that more Indigenous students are staying longer in secondary schooling
- An improvement in the apparent grade progression and retention rates from the beginning of secondary school to Years 10,11 and 12, with Year 10 apparent retention increasing to 85.7% in 2001
- A reduction in the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous apparent retention rates from Year 10 to 12, which was 36.8 percentage points in 1994 compared to 32.6 percentage points in 2001 (2001, p. xvii).

These and other successes have been achieved through many different strategies. At the end of 1997, the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA) launched 83 Strategic Results Projects (SRP's) through the Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) across Australia. They ranged in scale from small single-site operations to large systemic

initiatives. Considerable progress and success in Indigenous educational outcomes was achieved in over 71 of them. The findings identified four fundamentals associated with the improvements for Indigenous learners: "...they must be given respect; their culture and its relevant implications must be respected; they must be taught well; and they must attend consistently" (Cumming, 2000, p.4). Commenting on these key findings, McRae, Ainsworth, Cummings, et al. (2002) put it down to three things: namely, the projects were well resourced, they used targets or goals and benchmark data and the people working on these projects appeared to share certain attributes, "...the distinctive factor they all shared was a fundamental and fixed belief in the value of what they were doing and the prospect of success" (McRae, Ainsworth, Cummings, et al. 2002, p.5).

The discussion paper also put out in 2000 by MCEETYA explicitly articulated "A Model of More Culturally Inclusive and Educationally Effective Schools" (p.22-25). It proposed three focus areas for schools and systems to create sustainable change and improvement for Indigenous outcomes: Community, school and classroom. Each focus area had a number of elements that needed to be addressed. It proposed that this model would allow for the successful integration of Indigenous programmes into mainstream provision. The MCEETYA paper promoted the afore mentioned 1998-99 IESIP SRP's as "...initiatives that demonstrate elements of this model" (2000, p.25).

While these examples do show progress is occurring and success is evident, when put back into the context of achievements for the rest of the Australian school population, the real picture re-emerges.

### *Inequalities*

Buckskin's concluding comments on inequality describe this picture. The disparities are overwhelming – there are still incontrovertible gaps between the

achievements of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in Australian schools. Here lies the focus of the remainder of the literature reviewed in this section. It must be said that educational equality and educational equity are inextricably linked. These terms are used interchangeably when discussing Indigenous educational outcomes. They come from concepts that have a great deal in common – liberty, democracy and freedom from bias (Grant, 1989, p.89). As well, more has been said about their opposites – inequality and inequity and consequently they have often been defined through these terms. Foster, Gomm and Hammersly's (1996) definition of equity is used for this thesis, which draws on the work of Secada (1989), namely that educational equity means 'fairness' and 'justice', it is concerned,

...with what *ought* to be treated the same; though it also (necessarily) prescribes what *ought* to be treated differently (Foster, Gomm and Hammersley, 1996, p.44).

Secada succinctly describes equality when he says, "Equality is used to describe parity between groups along some agreed upon index" (1989, p.69). He goes on to provide a clear distinction between the two,

The fundamental difference between equity and equality is that equity is a qualitative property while equality is quantitative (1989, p. 82).

Given these definitions, it is very clear that both concepts are important indicators in the study of outcomes in Indigenous education in Australia. Much quantitative information exists. Hunter and Schwab's study on the determinants of the educational attainment of young Indigenous Australians, found that attendance, participation and retention rates of Indigenous students was "consistently lower" when compared to non-Indigenous Australians and that, "the absolute difference in the percentages [between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students] at school increased for all age groups over 15" (1998, p. v). They also found that, "Aboriginal



and Torres Strait Islander people have poorer educational outcomes than the Indigenous populations of Canada and New Zealand” (1998, p. v). The Program of International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000, shows that, “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were found not to be achieving “anywhere near” the educational outcomes of the rest of Australia (Townsend, 2002, p.16).

The *National Report to Parliament on Indigenous Education and Training, 2001* provides overwhelming statistics:

- In Years 11-12, the proportion of Indigenous students enrolled falls to half that of non-Indigenous students, with 6% Indigenous students and 13% non-Indigenous students (p.30).
- In 2001, the apparent retention rate to Year 12 for Indigenous students who were in Year 10 in 1999 was 43.6%, compared with 76.2% for non-Indigenous students. In Queensland, these rates were 59.1% and 80.6% respectively (p.57).
- In government schools in 2001, Indigenous secondary students’ average attendance rates ranged from 70%-86% while the range for non-Indigenous students was 86%-92% (p.60).
- In 2001, Indigenous students’ reading and numeracy achievement levels in Year 3 and 5 were more concentrated in the lower levels of achievement than non-Indigenous students (p.40).
- In Queensland in 2001, the mean scale score of Indigenous students in reading, viewing and numeracy in Years 3,5 and 7 were lower than those of non-Indigenous students at all three year levels, with the gaps being widest in Year 7 (p.41).
- Across all sectors the numbers and proportions of Indigenous teachers and Aboriginal and Islander Education Workers (AIEWs) were low,

particularly compared to the overall representation of Indigenous students within each sector of education and training (p. xix).

An extensive amount of qualitative research has gone into establishing the reasons for inequalities Indigenous educational outcomes. Richer, Godfrey, Partington, Harslett and Harrison (1998) reveal in their study of Indigenous student attitudes, that it is not necessarily because of a poor attitude to education, "...the majority of students have positive attitudes to school. They wish to remain at school until Year 12 and gain further education" (p.6). In another study, Harslett (1998) focuses on characteristics of effective teachers of Aboriginal middle school students as a contributor of improved educational outcomes. He suggests improvement can be gained if schools practice explicit teacher induction and professional development, relationship based teaching and consideration of middle schooling pedagogy and curriculum principles. In the same year, Hunter and Schwab focused on the study of determinants of education outcomes for Indigenous teenagers, youth and adults. They identified extrinsic issues such as: the experience of arrest; place of residence; local social environments in the household; and difficulty with Australian English. They concluded that

...family and social variables dominate the decision to stay at school...increasing retention rates and education levels among indigenous people relative to the rest of the population may be extremely difficult where there is no attempt to address ongoing social inequities, especially the high rates of arrest among indigenous youth and poor housing stock of many indigenous households (1998, p. vi).

A paper on teaching practice by Partington and Richer (1999) highlights barriers to effective teaching of Indigenous students. Their findings indicated four main factors as barriers to success: "background" factors, the teacher's own value

system, power relations within the school and inadequate communication between the home and the school. They conclude that success could be achieved by a more cohesive and collaborative effort within the school, which includes greater involvement of Indigenous parents and community members.

A notion of extrinsic and intrinsic factors impinging on Indigenous students is explored by Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe and Gunstone (2000) who draw links of positive self-identity for Indigenous students and its relationship to school outcomes. Their project for DETYA was conducted across Australia and had two elements: firstly a detailed literature review on self-identity and secondly consultations with a national sample of Indigenous and non-Indigenous school and community people. They go on to make nine recommendations for education in Australia including that school communities should work better with other community services including health and social services, schools clearly define the position of appointed Indigenous education workers, increase teacher awareness of Aboriginal language, implementation of Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum, increased teacher numbers, include vocational education subjects for Indigenous students and promote positive images of Indigenous people.

In the same year, Bourke, Rigby and Burden on behalf of DEST conducted another significant national study. Investigating improving the school attendance of Indigenous students it acknowledged extrinsic factors as certainly influential in the attainment of their educational outcomes. The report advocated the need for a holistic approach by governments and communities to address issues such as health, housing, and employment, while at the same time supported the idea that schools do and can make an increasing and important contribution to the achievement of success for Indigenous students (Burke, Rigby, Burden, 2000).

In a project to improve access for Indigenous students to vocational education and training (VET) in schools programs, Helme, Hill, Balatti, Mackay, Walstab, Nicholas and Polsel (2003) identified factors impacting on successful engagement. They gleaned these from their perusal of the research literature on Indigenous attendance and retention rates. The ten factors they identified were:

teacher/student relationship, the school/parent relationship, school/community engagement, teacher expertise, relevance, literacy, the student's home situation, racism, self-identity and accessibility to resources (2003, p.26).

The *Position Paper on Schooling and Teacher Education* (2003) released by the QIECB is one of the most extensive independent analyses on the current state of Queensland schooling for Indigenous students in recent times. The QIECB outsourced research projects to be conducted in seven key areas of focus, namely:

- Completion of twelve years of schooling, or its equivalent;
- Pre-schooling experiences;
- Independent Indigenous community kindergartens and preschools;
- Teacher education;
- Standard Australian English and languages;
- Community capacity building; and
- Accountability (inclusive assessment, monitoring and reporting) (2003, p.14).

The paper acknowledges the “underachievement of Indigenous students when measured against the performance of other students” (2003, p.2). It also believes the solutions to these outcomes are obvious, and despite “...being recognised and promoted for decades, systems have been unable to achieve a demonstrable shift in the under-participation and under-performance of Indigenous students” (2003, p.3).

The most critical question asked during this process was, “Why do education

systems continually fail to meet the needs of our children, youth and adult learners?” It finds conclusively that, “the predominant reason for Indigenous learners’ continued underachievement in current education systems is the lack of demonstrated commitment and accountability” (2003, p.3). The QIECB report does acknowledge a level of ‘good will’, particularly in schools, but, “...there appears to be very little real commitment” (2003, p.3).

Such a stance was reinforced by an internal review conducted by Education Queensland late in 2002. While it acknowledged data on student literacy performance is gathered from primary schools, “At the secondary level, no similar state wide scaled measures of Indigenous student performance are administered and collected. What is available are indicators such as Indigenous student attendance and apparent retention rates” (Department of Education, 2002a, p.22). In one of the solutions offered to the numerous key issues, the report goes on to emphasise increased accountability by schools,

IESIP-SRA funds and the school priorities they support must be included in the school’s strategic planning, budgeting and reporting framework as part of a cycle of continuous improvement and accountability (2002a, p.30).

At the same time the QIECB was releasing its position paper, then Queensland Minister for Education and the Arts, Anna Bligh requested her Ministerial Advisory Committee for Educational Renewal (MACER) provide her with advice around Indigenous education reforms in the state (MACER, 2004). A sub-committee was formed and a year later, they released a report in March 2004 to the Minister.

The key issues identified were:

- Challenging Mindsets
- Quality Teacher practice

- Need for professional learning and development aimed at renewal and transformation rather than maintenance
- Leading the reform agenda
- Improving authority and accountability to adequately improve Indigenous outcomes
- Strengthening school leadership
- Developing partnerships and cross-agency linkages (2004, p.3).

The Minister issued a response in June 2004, where significantly all nine recommendations were listed as 'accepted' by her. The blunt conclusion of the MACER report may have contributed to her decisions,

The sub-committee concludes that a failure to clearly articulate the accountabilities of education officers and teachers for improved Indigenous student outcomes is the major silence in previous Indigenous policies.

Accordingly the sub-committee advocates mechanisms for ensuring that the current Indigenous education policy is worth retaining. It is crucial, however, that this policy moves beyond rhetoric and creates positive realities for Queensland's Indigenous children. In 15 years from now, great leaps forward should be able to be demonstrated, not more rhetoric of urgency against a background of continued endemic failure (2004, p. 8).

Just after the release of the MACER report, the Board of Teacher Registration Queensland (BTR) released a report from a working party on *Indigenous Studies in Teacher Education 2004*. The messages from the previously mentioned studies and reports are repeated. Four key areas emerged from their consultations with teachers, principals, paraprofessionals, district education officers, Indigenous parents and community. These were: teachers' knowledge and understanding of Indigenous history and culture; partnerships and protocols for

working with the community; applying pedagogical knowledge to the Indigenous learner; and language and literacy issues (2004, p.7). The report also makes the point that in 1993 the BTR released the “Yatha Report” and ‘there is little to suggest that the Board’s position should shift significantly from that which is reflected in the recommendations of the Yatha report...’ (2004, p. 14). The report recommends that there must be a shared responsibility to provide quality education for Indigenous students and teachers must be ‘prepared and confident’ to teach Indigenous Studies to all students.

The messages from all of these reports and papers are loud and clear and yet Buckskin’s comments cited at the beginning of this review resound five years on. Of the literature reviewed, especially Education Queensland’s IESIP internal review to some degree, the BTR Report, the QIECB’s paper and the most recent MACER report to a much stronger degree, recognise these inequalities and suggest stricter accountabilities and performance management structures as a way to force greater commitment and thus improve Indigenous educational outcomes to bring them on par with their non-Indigenous peers. The advice offered is based on strong evidence from extensive consultation and empirical research.

However, will increased accountability alone actually drive ongoing commitment? The results are yet to be seen. Performing for compliance versus performing because of a genuine desire for improvement are two very different things. The next part of the literature review explores this difference. It examines the literature around beliefs and assumptions of non-Indigenous educators from Indigenous perspectives as well as the underpinning theory of social exclusion.

*What could be for Indigenous students - relocating the problem*

Why is there "...a systemic lack of optimism and belief in educational success for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students? [and why is] education of Indigenous students ...often not regarded as an area of core business in education systems?" (Buckskin, 2000, p.14).

In Queensland in 1978, the report, *Education for Queensland Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders* to the Director General of Education by QATSICC was the first formal statement from Indigenous people to the government,

The low scholastic achievement of Queensland Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in all areas of education has been a major concern of this committee. This low achievement has resulted not only from the failure to recognise cultural differences, but also from political, economic, social and educational factors (QATSICC, 1978, p.19).

Twenty-five years on, the QIECB *Position Paper on Schooling and Teacher Education* (2003) is not substantially different. The Indigenous perspective is loud and clear,

As Indigenous Australians we seek to live in a society that:

- values us as individuals and as Indigenous Australians
- acknowledges that we are the first nations of this country
- respects the diversity of our histories, cultures and peoples; and
- recognises us as equals in all aspects of Australian society (QIECB, 2003, p.1).

In the time between the releases of these two statements, twenty-five other significant policy and practice informing documents have been released to



Queensland schools with the expectation educators would listen and act upon them. Why haven't they?

*European ways of knowing and resulting perceptions*

It is proposed that the answers to this question lie in the beliefs and assumptions of many non-Indigenous educators and their resulting worldview of Indigenous Australians. Past and present solutions procured by governments, schooling systems, individual schools and ultimately, the mostly non-Indigenous teachers in those schools, are all shaped by their worldviews and their consequent interpretations of reasons for Indigenous disengagement in education. The literature reviewed gave terms to describe a non-Indigenous way of knowing as *Euro centrism* (Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist, 2003) and *Whiteness* (Kincheloe and Steinberg, 1998). Lovat (1999) and Buckskin (2002) refer to the Platonic worldview. That is, one which promotes the 'survival of the fittest', social Darwinism, and, "...a picture of society as one of hierarchy and unevenness. Some people are born to superiority and others to inferiority...the privileged few are the guardians of all knowledge" (Buckskin, 2002, p.153). Buckskin goes on to argue further that such a worldview has continued to impact on the non-Indigenous perceptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the education process. He cites evidence from the 1991 *National Report of the Royal Commission into Deaths in Custody* and the 1997 *Bringing Them Home* report as examples of the ongoing effects of such a worldview.

Regardless of what label this worldview is given, once the Western construction of Indigenous peoples as 'the Other' (Smith, 2001) is recognised, it becomes apparent that the most accurate explanations of Indigenous educational inequality comes from Indigenous people themselves and they have been saying it for a long time.

In 1986 Roberta Sykes wrote a response to the educational policy of her day. She makes an important point that still has currency and is implied in earlier arguments and in that of many current Indigenous-authored responses to the issues surrounding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. That is, the concept of colonisation, which Sykes points out, "...is usually understood by non-Aboriginals to be a time-bounded act, whereas Blacks understand colonisation to be a continuing process" (p.23).

This same position is taken in a publication produced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) in 1998, *As A Matter of Fact: answering the myths and misconceptions about Indigenous Australia*. It addresses popular misconceptions or resentments about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their government programs of assistance. An Indigenous position is taken in response to the statement: "There's no point in dwelling in the past – what's done is done" (1998, p.10). ATSIC counters with,

The fact is that many Indigenous people remain affected by relatively recent experiences to which they were subjected because of their Aboriginality. Australians who know the facts of the frontier may be unaware what followed the defeat and dispossession of Aboriginal people over much of settled Australia. Survivors were subject to government policies, which attempted variously to displace, convert, isolate and eventually assimilate them...for Aboriginal people today a sense of our collective past is basic to our cultural and political identity. For too many of us it is inscribed in our personal experiences, or the experiences of those near to us (1998, pp.10-11).

In a presentation to the National Education and Employment Forum in Brisbane in 2000, Penny Tripcony echoes what the previous writers and documents have said. She believes that inequalities of educational outcomes for Indigenous

students can be attributed to “overarching issues...and specific (current) issues: (a) those extrinsic, and (b) those intrinsic, to schools and educational institutions” (p.5).

She outlines the overarching issues to be culture, identity and power,

...all infused both overtly and covertly with elements of racism... Specific current issues as reported through the popular media such as Native Title, Reconciliation and the plight of remote Indigenous communities along with Aboriginal deaths in custody, unemployment rates and poor health are outside the control of educators, yet at the same time form the basis of racist comments and actions within schools. Teacher/staff attitudes towards Indigenous students, their families and communities, teacher expectations and curriculum relevance are factors schools can influence (2000, p.5).

In this same presentation, Tripcony also strongly advocated that while there must not be modified objectives for the education and training of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people, there must be differing and multiple pathways to those objectives.

In the light of the discussion above, the proposal that the types of beliefs and assumptions of many non-Indigenous educators shape their resulting negative worldview of Indigenous Australians holds true. Achievement for Indigenous students must not be seen as problematic and only recognised as ‘good’ when successful in the hegemony of the dominant discourse pursuits. As a way forward, Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist (2003) suggest teachers must engage in different and authentic ways of educating. To do so they need to study alternative epistemologies, multiple perspectives and critical multicultural pedagogies.

#### *Discourses on disadvantage and resistance*

The location of the Indigenous person in the discourse of disadvantage is therefore a very important one. In her critique of a significant 1982 report, *Aboriginal*

*Futures*, by Betty Watts at the request of the NSW Education Research and Development Committee, Sykes (1986) cautions that, “if one is to look at history only from the stand point of post-British occupation and expropriation of the country [and not that of] pre-British occupation as the standard which they view their contemporary lives...” (p.15), it positions Indigenous people as passive, as mere victims of inequality and neglect and the government as charitable, supportive and benevolent.

Herbert, Anderson, Price and Stehbins (1999) in their *Study of the Factors Affecting the Attendance, Suspension and Exclusion of Aboriginal Students in Secondary Schools*, they found much of the literature reviewed was, “...located within deficit discourses of Aboriginal students their families and Aboriginal culture” (p.2). The other themes that emerged for them were from Groome (1995, cited in Herbert, et al, 1999, p.2-3), who calls ‘culturalism’ – imagined cultural characteristics and negative stereotyping; racism; and, school curriculum and teaching. They suggest it is appropriate to consider what Giroux (1985, cited in Herbert, et al, 1999, p.2) believes resistance theory is in the view of education,

...that allows for human agency and the notion of resistance and acknowledges the struggles that are taking place in schools in terms of contesting meanings and challenging the status quo (1999, p.2).

Herbert et al, also deduce that critical to understanding the Indigenous education situation is, “a need to move beyond deficit discourses on Indigenous failures and success” and “to adopt a resistant perspective” (1999, p.5). This means shifting the location of ‘the problem’ away from Indigenous learners and to see the real issue more as their rejection of the hegemony of a Western-styled Australian education.

If non-Indigenous educators can begin to understand this and factor it into their actions to truly address Indigenous issues, comments in the public domain from the following Indigenous educational leaders make greater sense:

Mandawuy Yunupingu provides his first hand example of the discourse around resistance and rejection when he reflects on his own education and his love of learning English,

...But looking back now I can see that the teachers probably saw things differently to me. Many of their demands were quite incomprehensible. They weren't just teaching me "useful things", they had a theory, an ideology. I see now that it was a curriculum driven by the ideology of assimilation. I marvel at the ways we knew how to resist it...I see now that a lot of what motivated those white teachers was a view that it is only when Yolngu stop being Yolngu could we become Australians. This is not an acceptable view in most places in Australia now, but very sadly it is still happening (2002, p.27).

Penny Tripcony, current chair of the QIECB and a long time advocate for improvement in schooling for Indigenous people acknowledges that a range of education policies and strategies have been implemented but, "the majority...have demonstrated little or no consideration to the values and beliefs underpinning Indigenous lifestyles, needs and aspirations" (2002, p. iv).

Noel Pearson, Director of the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership suggests as one policy in his four part 'positive political program', that young Aboriginal people would benefit greatly by geographic mobility between remote and regional areas to seek secondary and tertiary education. He believes this "... is not assimilationist, but rather allows for a combining of knowledges of Standard Australian English, European culture with an Aboriginal cultural identity" (2004, p.20).

Chris Sarra, former principal of Cherbourg State School, 2005 Queenslanders of the Year and now Head of the Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Queensland, presented his outline for Indigenous success in education at a seminar in Townsville in 2003. He believes that in order to reform schooling for Indigenous learners, non-Indigenous educators must first consider: "...how Aboriginal people see their children, how these children see themselves, how Aboriginal people see Aboriginal people and how non-Indigenous Australians see Aboriginal people" (2003, p.1).

These ideas resonate within and were already embodied in a significant document drawn up in Coolangatta, Queensland in 1993 by a group of Indigenous people for Indigenous people across the world. Called the *Coolangatta Statement*, it was ratified at the World Indigenous Peoples' Conference on Education in Hilo, Hawaii, 1999:

1.3.1 Historically, Indigenous peoples have insisted upon the right of access to education. Invariably the nature, and consequently the outcome, of this education has been constructed through and measured by non-Indigenous standards, values and philosophies. Ultimately the purpose of this education has been to assimilate Indigenous peoples into non-Indigenous cultures and societies.

Volumes of studies, research and reports dealing with Indigenous peoples in non-Indigenous educational systems paint a familiar picture of failure and despair. When measured in non-Indigenous terms, the educational outcomes of Indigenous peoples are still far below that of non-Indigenous peoples. This fact exists not because Indigenous peoples are less intelligent, but because educational theories and practices are developed and controlled by non-Indigenous peoples. Thus, in more recent times, due to the

involvement of Indigenous peoples, research shows that failure is indeed present, but that this failure is that of the system, not of Indigenous peoples.

(1999, p.1)

In this context, the so-called “dropout rates and failures” of Indigenous peoples within non-Indigenous educational systems must be viewed for what they really are - rejection rates.

### *Social exclusion theory*

Another synonym for rejection is exclusion. Exclusion can be considered through the notion of social exclusion theory. Sen (2000) writes that ‘social exclusion’ is a relatively recent term, giving Renee Lenoir (1974) the credit for authorship of the expression. Sen says social exclusion is,

...a relatively late entry into the literature of poverty and deprivation. Indeed, its early stirrings, attributed to the writings in the 1970s, were about two hundred years after Adam Smith’s (1776) pioneering exposition of deprivation in the form of ‘inability to appear in public without shame’, and more generally, of the difficulty experienced by deprived people in taking part in the life of the community (2000, p.5).

While he believes social exclusion is both a cause and consequence of poverty, Sen uses social exclusion theory to explain the relational issue of poverty. He defines the view of poverty as ‘capability deprivation’ (that is, poverty is seen as the lack of the capability to live a minimally decent life) and uses the Aristotelian perspective that an impoverished life is one without the freedom to undertake important activities a person has reason to choose (Sen, 2000).

Klasen (2000) argues for the separation between poverty, unemployment and social exclusion. He believes social exclusion derives from four sources, namely

economic, birth or background, social, or societal/political and can occur in two ways.

Namely,

...the exclusion associated with the disadvantage stems directly from the disadvantage...[and] the exclusion stems primarily from public policy that turns an existing disadvantage into a form of social exclusion (2000, p.5).

Combining the of the work of Sen (1992, cited in Klasen, 2000, pp.1-2) and Room (1995, cited in Klasen, 2000, pp.1-2) to couch the issue of social exclusion in a capability and rights-based language, Klasen proposes social exclusion is the denial of, "...the ability...to be integrated into the community, participate in community and public life and enjoy social bases of self-respect" (2000, p.1-2). The work of Walker (1997) reinforces Klasen's belief that the burden of responsibility is with society to ensure it enables participation and integration of all its members, thus shifting the blame from the excluded for their fate.

McGinty, Anderson and Price (2003) use social exclusion theory to in their argument to explain factors that contribute to inequity of Indigenous learners and the inadequacies of current educational practice. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are being, "...denied access to an adequate and effective education... [which in turn leads to]...being denied the opportunity to integrate themselves into the social and economic aspects of broader society" (p.17).

The need for the relocation of the discourse on Indigenous education is therefore clear. The source of the failure is not with the Indigenous child and this is not a new message - acknowledgements were made in Queensland over 20 years ago when McConnochie (1973, cited in Queensland Department of Education, 1978, p.21) said, "...the failure of Aboriginals to succeed at school is primarily a result of factors associated with our social institutions rather than the Aboriginal child himself." In recent times, not only does Don Zoellner, chairperson of the Australian Principals



Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC), re-emphasise this point, he specifies who is responsible in the institution. In his 2001 *Dare To Lead* address he makes comments that simultaneously shift blame while emphasising the role of school leaders. His words provide unambiguous direction as to who has to lead and take action,

To my mind, however the major impact of *Dare To Lead* had two inter-related facets. The first was the demonstration that the issues are not so hard as to be impossible to deal with in a positive manner. There is a way forward for every school in Australia and there are colleagues willing to assist on the journey. The second is more fundamental. The nature of the conversation between the Indigenous community, in all of its manifestations, and school leaders has altered. The position of Principal has changed from being part of the problem of chronic underachievement of Indigenous students now to being seen as a major part of the solution (APAPDC, 2001, p. 4).

### *Conclusion*

The literature reviewed has revealed the scope and breadth of the issues surrounding equality of educational outcomes for Indigenous students. It shows while current policy is appropriate, resulting change is slow and below par. Also revealed is how social exclusion and simultaneous rejection of a hegemonic Australian culture have created the double-edged effect of inequalities and inequities for Indigenous children in schools. Strong arguments are posed for non-Indigenous educators' attitudes and beliefs to change, as must their positioning of the Indigenous learner. The most insightful observations and appropriate advice comes from Indigenous people themselves. Their call for major cultural and attitudinal changes in tandem with increased ownership and responsibilities throughout education systems

resounds repeatedly in the literature reviewed. The evidence is overwhelming, the messages are loud and clear: accountability for and commitment to improving Indigenous educational outcomes are vital for future progress. It is every educator's responsibility to drive the 'rhetoric of urgency' into a reality of action with one of the major change agents in a school being those who are charged with leadership in the school - the school administration.

### Chapter 3: The research journey

This chapter explains the phases of my research: from a description of the theoretical underpinnings to analysis. It situates my 'researcher self' (Roberts and McGinty, 1995) discussing the theory that underpins the study and methodological framework. This is followed by a description of the strategy of inquiry, methods for collecting and analysing data and interpretation of results.

#### *Paradigm and Perspective*

Guba is often cited in the literature on qualitative research when the definition of paradigm is called for. He uses a 'common and generic' definition of the term. It is "a basic set of beliefs that guide action, whether of the everyday garden variety or action taken in connection with a disciplined inquiry" (1990, p.17). Later, he wrote with Lincoln that a paradigm "may be viewed as a set of basic beliefs...that deals with ultimates or first principles. It represents a worldview that defines, for its holder, the nature of the world, the individual's place in it, and the range of possible relationships to that world and its parts" (1994, p.109).

More recently, Denzin and Lincoln (2003b) call a paradigm 'an interpretive framework'. Further to this, they add that perspectives are not as 'solidified' or 'well defined' as paradigms, although they may share epistemological or methodological assumptions. They argue that the 'personal biography' of the researcher, that is, one whose perceptions are configured by their gender; race, class and experience – their 'multicultural' components, drive him or her to adopt particular views or perspectives of the 'other' who is studied. As such, this study is situated within the paradigm of critical theory and is informed by a feminist perspective.

### *Critical theory as it applies to this study*

Critical theory has its origins with a group of scholars at the Institute of Social Research at the University of Frankfurt who, over 70 years ago, were influenced by the devastations of the First World War and post-war Germany. They explored the theories of Marx, Hegel, Kant and Weber in a search for a new way forward (Agger, 1991, Kincheloe and McLaren, 2003). Into the 1960's and 1970's, critical theory shaped academic discourse in questioning power and knowledge, in particular Habermas is identified as a significant contributor (Agger, 1991). This was paralleled in other social movements and events across the world as more and more groups such as students, feminists and indigenous people expressed their dissatisfaction with 'liberal theories of modernisation and development' (Smith, 2001, p.165). Then came work from academics such as Fay, Foucault, van Manen, Popkewitz and Derrida who re-examined relationships and actions in social affairs in order to improve the human condition (Coomer, 1984). While this basic desire has not waned, knowledges have shifted and grown and consequently so has the definition of critical theory. It has changed and evolved to become more multi-faceted and reconceptualised.

Kincheloe and McLaren (2003) acknowledge the work of others before them and present their 'idiosyncratic take' of critical theory for the new millennium, saying it is "...concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy, matters of race, class, and gender, ideologies, discourses, education, religion and other social institutions, and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system" (pp. 436-437). Their definition positions critical theory as an attempt to disrupt and challenge the status quo and to confront the injustices found in the field site. In this study, the injustices are those inequalities that result because of the disparity between the educational outcomes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous

students, yet uniquely the starting point or trigger phenomenon is in fact one of success. The investigation looks into the continued and steady increase of enrolment, retention and achievement of Indigenous students in one of the largest secondary schools in Queensland. The 'status quo' emanates from the school and its policies and practices. These are closely examined and challenged. Providing answers to the core issue research questions has created emancipatory knowledge that has informed my own leadership practices and provided pragmatic evidence that can be used in professional discourse to influence the practices (Bassey, 1999) of other leaders in Queensland schools to improve educational outcomes for Indigenous children.

*What of the feminist perspective in this context?*

Lather (1986), Wadsworth and Hargreaves (1991), McGinty (1992), Beasley (1999), Barry (2002), Olesen (2003) and Bhavnani and Coulson (2003) provide explanations of feminist qualitative research. Lather (1986) called for praxis-orientated research or emancipatory social research that allows both the researcher and the research to change, "...by encouraging self-reflection and a deeper understanding of their particular situations" (p. 262). Wadsworth and Hargreaves start their paper by saying,

If there is a central reason why feminists do feminist research it revolves around the need to know and understand better the nature of the hurt we sustain as a group - a group that is subordinated on the grounds of our female gender. This is not 'knowledge for its own sake' but rather is knowledge explicitly dedicated to bringing about change and improvement in our situation as women (1991, p.1).

More recently Barry (2002) discusses 'what feminist critics do' and lists actions around feminist issues that 'rethink', 'challenge', 'explore', 'examine', 'revalue' and 'question' women's issues, text and discourse. Olesen (2003) believes that present feminist qualitative research "is highly diversified, enormously dynamic and thoroughly challenging for its practitioners, its followers and its critics...[and] centres and makes problematic women's diverse situations as well as the institutions that frame those situations" (p.333). McGinty (1992) argues that within the framework of material feminism 'gender oppression' should be expanded to include other oppressions of class, race and sexual preference. Beasley (1999), Olesen (2003) and Bhavnani and Coulson (2003) emphasise the issues around race, arguing that there has been an 'unremitting whiteness of feminist research' and that attention must be shown to recognise the impact of colonialism, identity and difference. Australian Indigenous scholars such as Moreton-Robinson (2003, cited in Bamblett, 2005, p.7) have adapted this notion of whiteness in her work when she says,

Whiteness is both the measure and the marker of normalcy in Australian society, yet it remains invisible for most white women and men, and they do not associate it with conferring dominance and privilege.

In duly considering these notions, particularly the latter, such an understanding has been applied to the research practices for this study. A feminist perspective is expanded to that of the consideration of oppression of race, namely, Indigenous Australians, while simultaneously being mindful of the influence of my own worldview as a non-Indigenous woman.

*Research ethics, defining my 'researcher self' and challenges of a practitioner-researcher*

In terms of the moral principles and values (axiology) underpinning this study, Deyhle, Hess and LeCompte sum up the ethical dilemma faced by researchers, when they say,

...we believe that ethics in qualitative research in education is not an issue one faces when he or she goes into a field site but, rather, is a reflection of the entire way in which one lives his or her life. One is not suddenly faced with ethical decisions when one goes into the field. He or she is faced with behaving in an ethical manner at every moment; doing qualitative research in the field simply creates specialized situations with more extensive ramifications that must be examined (1992, p.633).

Williams reinforces this point and is critical of, "ambitious, white, pro-Indigenous professionals" (2001, p.25). He argues that it is time for researchers to develop relationships before research is carried out and separate from the research activity. Deyhle, Hess and LeCompte (1992) provide a definitive and helpful way to articulate my ethical position as a qualitative practitioner 'insider' researcher and as a non-Indigenous woman who examines an Indigenous centred issue: that of a covenantal ethic. In other words, an ethical position based on well-established relationships, trust and a mutual obligation of respect. Credibility had been achieved over a six-year working relationship established prior to the commencement of the study. Respect, trust and confidence of the school community, in particular, with the Indigenous staff, students and parents had been gained. It is not coincidental then, that relationships are significant and central to feminist inquiry (McGinty, 1992).

As such, the expected ethical procedures, protocols and processes for this study have been observed, the data for which was gathered between January 2003

and December 2004. Successful approval was gained from (i) the school principal in accordance with Education Queensland's statement and guidelines for conducting research in schools and (ii) James Cook University's Ethics Review Committee, Approval Number: H1515 which included the endorsement and support of the school's Indigenous parent group, the Kirwan High ASSPA committee.

In conducting this study, the observations of Glesne and Peshkin are relevant, "novice researchers are understandably tempted to undertake backyard studies, but they soon become aware of the problems generated by their involvement in and commitment to their familiar territory" (1992, p.22). The main intertwined problems or challenges faced as a practitioner 'insider' researcher were recognising the effects of my power position (hierarchical status) in the school as a Deputy Principal and establishing a clear difference of procedures between the act of research and that of professional practice (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992, p. 536). On another level, the demands of conducting part-time research had to be juggled with that of the responsibilities of a full-time job in the same location.

It was important to recognise the possible effects of the first and main issue on the participants interviewed or surveyed. There was an awareness that they might tell me what they thought I wanted to hear to 'please' or would not say what they really thought through fear they may 'get in trouble'. This was addressed by: explicitly acknowledging these concerns about participant responses with the participants themselves prior to conducting the interviews; explaining the aims of the study; encouraging participants to 'tell it how it is', and assuring them of anonymity and confidentiality.

While this study aimed to critique the policy and practice of the school, it was necessary to be mindful that this would involve the investigation into my own practices as an administrator who was part of the school. In particular, one of the



core issue research questions focused on the affects of leadership on Indigenous student outcomes and this included my leadership. I had to risk that the study would be testing my own taken-for-granted views about what was happening in the school and that information could not be suppressed or manipulated to suit my administrative interests. While Smith (2001) acknowledges this kind of positional dilemma as a challenge for Indigenous insider researchers in their own communities, her ideas have parallels within the context of this study and remaining true to my researcher self was therefore a challenge. Juggling my roles, I guarded against duplicity by reminding myself of the question, 'Who am I right now?' Was I the researcher observing and critiquing the school and actions of my administrator self or was I the administrator going about my daily job? I was also clear in articulating what role I was playing with the participants in the study. Adopting the paradigm of critical theory proved to be an appropriate ontological position.

### *Ontology*

Critical theory and related ideological positions privilege a materialist-realist ontology which Denzin and Lincoln (1998, 2003a) explain as one where "the real world makes a material difference in terms of race, class and gender. Guba (1990) argues with critical realism there is no doubt that there is a reality 'out there', but one can never be sure the ultimate truth has been uncovered. He cautions researchers to be critical of their work because it will be shaped by their values that have in turn been shaped by their perceptions of reality. He goes on to say

If the findings of studies can vary depending on the values chosen, then the choice of a particular value system tends to empower and enfranchise certain persons while disempowering and disenfranchising others. Inquiry thereby becomes a political act (1990, p. 24).

This concept of 'multiple realities' (Stake, 1995) was carefully considered within the study. I was aware that my perceptions as a researcher and those of the participants in the same site at the same time could be very different.

### *Epistemology*

My research epistemology is transactional and subjectivist. That is, as a practitioner insider-researcher I have been interactively linked and well known to the researched – the students, the staff and the parents of the school and my values and (feminist) beliefs, previously described, have influenced the inquiry actions (Guba, 1990, Guba and Lincoln, 1994, Denzin and Lincoln, 2003b).

### *Methodology*

The ontological and epistemological formulation of the chosen research position has enabled employment of qualitative methodological procedures that have been participative, dialogic and transformative (Guba and Lincoln, 1994, Denzin and Lincoln, 2003b). In other words, the pre-established base of trusting relationships enabled two-way dialogue to be used with participants to convey the purposes and intent of the study, allowing for an exchange of ideas and where possible, opportunities for action to be taken in ways to improve what was seen as needed in the school for the benefit of Indigenous student learning outcomes. This choice of methodological procedure is congruent with critical theory and feminist research, which has always been dialectical (based on conversation with those researched) and committed to action in the world.

### *Inquiry Strategy*

Given this theoretical paradigm, researcher perspective and research aim, the chosen strategy of inquiry was case study (Merriam, 1988, Hamel, 1993, Bassey, 1999, Yin, 1994, Stake, 2000) and specifically, what Stake calls, an 'instrumental case study',

...a particular case is examined to provide insight into an issue or refinement of theory. The case is of secondary interest; it plays a supportive role, and it facilitates our understanding of something else. The case is still looked at in depth, its contexts scrutinised, its ordinary activities detailed, but because this helps the researcher pursue the external interest (2000, p.437).

Bassey describes this strategy as "theory-seeking and theory-testing" case study. "The singularity is chosen because it is expected in some way to be typical of something more general. The focus is the issue rather than the case as such" (1999, p.62). Therefore this instrumental case study has the capacity for both the general and particular. With the former, exploration of the issue of the inequality of Indigenous education outcomes enables generalisations and external application with potential for replication of the ideas for improving school-based practice for other educational leaders and in Education Queensland policy in general. With the later, there are numerous internal beneficiaries and positive spin-offs for the immediate school and community.

Stemming from the growing enrolment, retention and apparent achievement of Indigenous students in a very large urban high school, this case study looks behind such phenomena to determine what school actions contributed to the success if any. It was carried out in three phases: Firstly, a literature review, which examines contemporary thinking on educational inequality, inequity, human condition theories, different values systems and worldviews with specific reference to

Indigenous students in an Australian and then Queensland school context. Secondly, a school review, which includes the provision of a description of the context of the school setting followed by a presentation of the findings of the data gathered. Finally, the study synthesises the literature and school review findings to provide a discussion of outcomes and conclusions that aim to critique, directly influence and make for changes to improvement in school policy, planning and practice.

### *Literature Review*

The review examines selected literature related to Indigenous Australian education with an emphasis on schooling in Queensland. In two parts, the review initially focuses on 'what has been and what is' for Indigenous students. It looks at the extent of Indigenous education outcomes using the concepts of time, progress and inequality and provides an overview of past and current National and State Indigenous education policies, programmes and strategies. Citing data and findings from studies on reasons for current educational outcomes of Indigenous students, the review defines equality and equity and places attention to two significant recent papers. Both have been presented to Queensland's Minister for Education: the 2003 position paper by the Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body (QIECB) and the 2004 report on Indigenous Education by the Ministerial Advisory Committee for Educational Renewal (MACER).

The second part of the review gives an explanation of 'what could be' for Indigenous students. It provides an exploration of the effects of European ways of knowing, resulting perceptions and relocates the position of the Indigenous learner. As a result, discourses on disadvantage, resistance and social exclusion theory are presented as underpinning issues in past and present educational contexts with literature extending back over the last 30 years being deliberately cited. The source

of the problem is redirected to be with the institution and practitioners of schooling rather than the child. The review concludes with the finding that equality of Indigenous educational outcomes will only come if increased accountabilities for performance by educators are coupled with opportunities to apply attitude-changing learning.

#### *School review – data collection*

A description of the school context is provided to set the scene for the case study. It was created by documentary review - searching school documents on the profile of the school, informal dialogue with participants and interpretive study (Stake, 2000) that is, reflecting on my own experiences as a practitioner in the site for nine years. Next is the case record that collects data came from multiple sources: observation data – my own first hand observations, respondent data – focus group interviews, enumeration data – numerical data already available in the field and elicitation of questionnaire/survey data and documentary data – files, records, artefacts and ephemera (Ball, 1997). Contemporary ideas on school improvement also influenced data collection (Harris, 2002) and as such data came from:

- Searches of school and Education Queensland documents on policies and practices, including previous school reviews, planning documents, school artefacts, icons and other physical school-based records. For practical reasons, not every document or item that has been produced over the past 10 years was included. However, selection for inclusion was on the basis that it was linked to policy, strategic direction, procedure or was representative of the general organisational culture and where possible, was specific to Indigenous education (See Appendix A for the list of all documents surveyed).

- Focus group interviews with selected school staff, students and parents on their knowledge and opinions of the school's policies and practices in working with Indigenous students with suggestions for improvement. Invited participants were: all indigenous staff; non-indigenous staff who worked directly with large numbers of Indigenous students; Indigenous students enrolled continuously in the school for at least 4 years; parents of Indigenous students; and/or members of the school's Indigenous Parent Committee (ASSPA) (See Table 3).

	Parents	Students	Teachers	Indigenous staff
Number	6	7	5	2
Date	28 May 2003	4 June 2003	30 July 2003	30 July 2003
Venue:	School Conference room	School Conference room	School Conference room	Indigenous Staff/Parent room

Table 3 Summary of details of focus group interviews

I conducted all interviews with the same base questions being systematically asked to the participants. The questions were determined by the key research questions of the thesis and through consultation with my supervisor, Indigenous colleagues in my study group and the Kirwan High ASSPA committee. All participants were provided with written core questions just prior to the interview and they were read out at the interview (Appendix B). All interviews were audio taped and then transcribed verbatim. All participants signed written consent forms and were given copies of their respective interview transcripts for comments and/or alterations and to validate their data.

- A survey of all of teaching staff on their knowledge of and attitudes towards Indigenous people and their professional development needs in cross-cultural training. Its content was inspired by two sources, firstly from the work of Peter Reynolds (1998) who had devised a survey to measure attitudes of pre-service

teachers studying a unit on Indigenous studies at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia and secondly from the “What Works” program (2002) produced by the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) as part of the “Dare To Lead” project for principals in schools created by the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC). Four pages long, the survey was in two parts: the first was structured to gather some basic background information about their work profile and perceptions of the students they worked with. It concluded with an open-ended question about teachers’ learning needs. The second part of the survey was a test of general knowledge of Indigenous culture, featuring questions about local, state and national Indigenous information. The questions were modified slightly in the first part of the survey for the teaching/non-teaching staff to account for the differences in the nature of their work (Appendix C). The survey was issued to all teachers during a scheduled whole staff meeting on a pupil-free day in Term 2, 28<sup>th</sup> April 2004. Prior to handing it out, I gave a brief power-point presentation of my research and explained the purpose of the survey. Written consent had been previously gained from all staff. Of the 100 teacher surveys distributed on the day, 57 completed forms were returned within a few days. On my behalf, the registrar distributed a non-teaching staff survey to the teacher aides and other ancillary staff through one of his scheduled meetings later that same week. Of the 20 distributed, 7 completed forms were returned.

- Quantitative data was gathered from mostly pre existing data already formulated by either the school or Education Queensland since 1996. The categories of data are based on the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development’s (OECD) Indicators: that is, participation (attendance), enrolment and achievement (OECD, 2002). Education Queensland has named them as ‘priority

action areas', providing statewide data for schools on their student attendance; retention, and attainment in literacy (Department of Education, 2004b). School based data had to be used for literacy results as Education Queensland does not yet require secondary schools to report on literacy achievement.

- A school curriculum survey to find evidence of Indigenous perspectives in school work-programs. It was designed to ascertain the extent of inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in the school's curriculum that offers 28 Junior and 52 Senior subjects. Mindful of the workloads of teachers, the survey had to be simple to complete. It was therefore a one-page table with six sections. The survey asked some basic information about the units of work taught in a specific subject and then had two sections on (i) the number of units taught with explicit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and (ii) the number of units that do not have specific Indigenous content, but state processes that allow students to use an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander perspective. Examples of work units were also asked to be attached (Appendix D). I spoke at a management team meeting to the Heads of Department (HODs) and distributed copies to them in April 2004. Completed survey sheets for 11 subjects were received from three out of the twelve HODs only - the LOTE, Maths and English departments. This response had to be accepted given the busy nature of such a large school, that the survey was voluntary and I was on study leave during this time and not present daily. Apart from two reminder memoranda to the remaining HODs they were not pursued any further to reply.
- Diary and field note entries of my observations in the school over the duration of this study. I kept 2 main types of written records. The first was my daily diary that I used as part of my work role as a Deputy in the school. In it I recorded my daily timetable, summaries of any meetings, phone calls, etc. The other was a study



log where I kept notes made since commencing the course. In it there were recorded reflections on activities that had been conducted as part of the pilot and main study, notes on ideas for the format of the main study, notes from face-to-face activities at university and other notes on summaries of relevant readings or quotes.

#### *Data Analysis – the first level*

Data analysis is the process of making sense out of one's data (Merriam, 1988) and the biggest challenge faced was working through the volume and variety of raw data collected. Wolcott (1990, cited in Stake, 1995, p.85) wrote in his manual, "the critical task in qualitative research is not to accumulate all the data that you can, but to 'can' (get rid of) most of the data you accumulate" and Merriam says, "...data that have been analysed while being collected are both parsimonious and illuminating" (1988, p.124).

The first level of data analysis therefore occurred at the collection of each piece of raw data. The observational and documentary data items were read and scanned for evidence of inclusion of Indigenous perspectives. With the enumeration data, responses to the staff and curriculum surveys were separately collated into categories based on answers to the questions. Quantitative information was collected by conducting queries with the school's own 'Student Management System' (SMS) database and searches of other existing site-based or Education Queensland-based records and reports about the school with the results of data for Indigenous students compared and contrasted with those of non-Indigenous students. The respondent data transcripts were read and reread in two stages. The first sought to summarise all of the participant's literal answers to the actual interview questions. At

the second stage, patterns or topics across the transcripts were sought. Mini post-it notes with words or phrases written on them that described the topics were placed alongside the text of the transcripts as flags to indicate where they were located in the text. These words or phrases were also recorded as topic lists from each transcript, along with an indication of frequency of mention. Next, recurring patterns and themes were looked for across all transcript topic lists and these were clustered under general ideas or categories that related to the core issue research questions (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, et al., 1990). There were between sixteen to twenty three topics in the respective transcripts, which were then placed into six overall categories. The categories included: School Characteristics, Completion of Year 12, Racism, School-Community Relationships, Staff Knowledge and Key Personnel. These data categories were then used as contributing evidence to substantiate answers to related core issue research questions, (i.e. 'Completion of Year 12' was used to relate to answers provided from the question: "How are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students positioned as learners within the school?").

#### *Data analysis - the next level*

Merriam (1988) and in particular Minichiello, Aroni and Timewell, et al. (1990) explore the idea of thematic concentration when they say that, "for data to become meaningful for analysis, the researcher has to identify common themes and/or propositions which link issues together and ground the analysis in the informant's understandings and in scientific translations of it" (p. 248). Once the first round of analysis occurred, the next step was to search for meaning or patterns across all of the data items. This was done through direct interpretation of the individual instance and aggregation of instances (Stake, 1995) that included looking the data over again and again, reflecting and using what Denzin (1970, cited in Merriam, 1988, p. 69),

Yin (1994) and Stake (2000) refer to as triangulation. Multiple sources of evidence where converged to clarify meaning, identify the different ways the core research issue was being addressed at the site and to provide validation of answers to the research questions. Table 4 summarises this process:

<b>Core Issue Research Questions</b>	<b>Findings from Data Sources</b>					
	School/EQ documents, icons, artefacts.	Diary, Field notes	Quantitative Data	Focus Group	Staff survey	Curriculum survey
How are Indigenous cultures represented with in the school?	√			√		√
How are Indigenous students positioned as learners?	√	√	√	√	√	√
How are the staff positioned in their knowledge and understanding of Indigenous students, their families and cultures?		√	√	√	√	√
How has school leadership affected outcomes for Indigenous students?	√	√	√	√		√

Table 4 How the data findings informed the answers to the core issue questions

Presented in Chapter 5, “Confirming the known and uncovering unknowns”, assertions are based on the findings from the data and are collated under headings that were derived in response to the core issue of educational equality for Indigenous

Australian students. Where applicable, comparisons are made with the findings from previous research by School of Indigenous Australian Studies (SIAS) on the school.

In the last chapter, Chapter 6, "Lessons to be learned", analysis and interpretation is derived from a synthesis of the literature and school review findings. Generalisations are made with implications and recommendations to address the core issue both within the school and beyond to Queensland schools in general.

## Chapter 4: The story so far

### *Introduction*

In two sections, this chapter represents the first part of the school review. It sets the scene for the case study and was created by documentary review, searching school documents on the profile of the school, informal dialogue with participants, interpretive study (Stake, 2000) and from interpretation of experiences on the part of this researcher as 'an insider' of the school for nine years. The chapter provides a background description of the school community and broader social and political context. Firstly, there is a description of the characteristics of the school ethos, its staff, curriculum, facilities and Indigenous education profile. Next is an explanation of the local demographics; school-community alliances and relationships; and finally, a commentary is provided on the relevant developments in state government education policy and strategy that sit behind the school locale.

### *School Ethos*

Developed through a community consultation process in 1988, the school's vision statement is, "...to provide Educational excellence for tomorrow's citizens" (Kirwan State High School, 2004c, p.1). Kirwan High became the first state secondary school in North Queensland to declare itself a "School of Excellence". As a result, special curriculum, sports and personal development areas were created above and beyond standard state school programs with a focus on excellence in achievement and participation. Since then, the school has continued to expand this platform to incorporate, what is now promoted as 'six key strategic areas' namely: academics, music and the arts, sport, vocational education, information and

communication technologies and care and personal development. With its stated aim “to attract high achievers, develop the capacity of existing students and maximise the participation of all” (Kirwan State High School, 2003, p.18), the school has won a number of awards and attracted many students who have achieved to high levels in various local, state and national competitions and events.

The school pays for its students to participate in at least six annual National academic competitions in Mathematics, Sciences, English and Information Technology and many Kirwan High students achieve from a high distinction to a credit or merit level. School-based data reveals that in Year 12, over the last 10 years, an annual average of 60 students have graduated with university entrance scores, Overall Positions (OP's) of 10 or higher and between 1 to 8 students annually have achieved an OP1. Although in 2003, for the first time since the inception of this tertiary selection system, no student was awarded an OP1. No Indigenous student at the school has ever achieved an OP1. Prior to 2004, Education Queensland did not require schools to collect data on Indigenous results, however, for the purposes of this study, a scan of school data showed that from 1999 – 2002 an average of 49.9% Indigenous Year 12 students at Kirwan High received a sound level of achievement or higher in at least 3 QSA subjects they studied.

Each year, an average of over 500 students participate in industry placement and work experience. In 2003, 298 Year 12 students were enrolled in one or more of subjects that contain a Vocational Education and Training (VET) module. Of these, 39 out of the 45 Indigenous students in Year 12 were enrolled in these subjects. Students also attended TAFE, were in school-based apprenticeships or traineeships or were undertaking Certificate II courses in such areas as Information Technology. In 2001, 2002 and 2003, Kirwan High students won North Queensland and State Vocational Education Student of the Year Awards. In 2004, a record number of 35

out of 53, Year 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students participated in work experience, which was actually a higher participation rate than the non-Indigenous students who took this opportunity in the same year.

The school's Instrumental Music Program has over 200 students and the annual musical is a very successful community event. Kirwan High runs the Duke of Edinburgh program and has its own Cadet Unit. Anecdotal evidence shows there is Indigenous representation, albeit low, in all of these activities. In 2004 the school's full time nurse, policewoman and chaplain worked together to run a once a week breakfast club for Year 8 students. This was well attended by many students including a number of Indigenous students. The school also has an 'Interact' club, which is the youth arm of Rotary International. Operating since 1995, between 1-5 Indigenous students have been annual members.

Since 1996, Kirwan High has won 13 State Championships in the team sports of Hockey, Rugby League, Touch Football, Soccer, Indoor Cricket and Volleyball. Since the early 1990's, Kirwan High has an average of 1 to 5 students represent Australia in a variety of sports such as Rugby League, Touch Football, Darts and Cycling. A significant proportion of Indigenous students participate in and are enrolled in the Sports Excellence programs, when compared to any other "Excellence" or co-curricular program (Kirwan State High School, 2004b).

On entering the school's front foyer, visitors see a large glass cabinet filled with awards and trophies. On its walls and that of the Principal's office, are a large number framed photos and award certificates. Amongst these are some representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander success, with framed photos of sports champions, "student of the month" students, senior leaders, and Aboriginal and Islander Tertiary Aspirations Program (AITAP) award certificates and trophies. During 2003-2004, a photo of the Indigenous staff and a written description of their

roles was posted on the front counter window. Above the counter hangs a framed painting that is a copy of a very large Indigenous mural that covers all of a long wall outside the school's Multi-Purpose Shelter. Commissioned by the school's Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) committee in 2002, it was designed by a local Indigenous artist who enlisted volunteer Indigenous and non-Indigenous students to help paint it (Figure 3). The same artist painted one other mural on the wall of the Indigenous parent/worker room. Other Indigenous icons such as ceremonial weapons, artefacts and a painting are displayed in the Year 8 centre, the Library and the Administration block.



Figure 3 Kirwan High's 10 x 3 metre Indigenous mural

### *The Staff*

In 2004 there were 135 teaching and 55 non-teaching staff. Of these, there were 6 part-time teaching staff and 17 casual non-teaching staff. Approximately 60% of total staff were female. One teacher and 4 non-teaching staff were Indigenous. Over time, the school has had a very low number of staff requesting transfers out of



the school. The greatest movement comes from the younger teaching staff who go on maternity and special leave for travel. In 2004, 25 new or returning teaching staff commenced at Kirwan High. 15 of these were beginning teachers. Since 1998, the school has had between 12-27 new or returning staff with 8-15 beginning teachers annually (Kirwan State High School, 2004b).

While the Principal has responsibility for the overall day-to-day running of the school, the leadership and management processes and structure are based on program management. Each member of the Administration team is responsible for major program areas in the school. Two significant middle manager groups exist within the school: For curriculum - 17 Heads of Department and a Teacher-In-Charge of the Special Education Unit (SEU) and for pastoral care - 5 Year Co-ordinators. While the former are classified officers, and the latter school-created positions, both groups perform their leadership and management responsibilities during a reduced contact teaching load relative to the size of their department or year level. The school has a variety of other specialist permanent support staff, including two Guidance Officers, a Chaplain, a Behaviour Management Teacher, a School-Based Police Officer, a school-based youth health Nurse and an Indigenous Community Education Counsellor (CEC). From 2002-4, there were three casual Assistant Community Liaison Officers (ACLOs) employed under a Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) grant. A team of five learning support teachers and two teacher aides provide in-class and pullout support for students. In 2003, a teacher was appointed for a .8 time allocation specifically as a Literacy teacher and is a key member of the school's Literacy Committee that is responsible for leading the implementation of Kirwan High's Whole-School Literacy Strategy, 2003-2005.

### *The Curriculum*

On the surface, the school's overall timetable structure is similar to that of the majority of Band 11 schools across the state. However, in 2002, in response to increased community partnerships and teacher/student/parent demand for more uninterrupted contact time, the school moved to three, 80 min lesson blocks, with one 40 min lesson after the first block, a day. With five-year levels, from year 8 to 12, the school curriculum offers 60 subjects in the Senior School and 30 in the Junior School. These range from those with tertiary score eligibility to vocational to school-based subjects. In 2004, the School's Literacy Strategy expanded beyond Year 8 to include all students in Year 9 to undertake compulsory studies in a subject called "Literate Practices". Students are grouped according to their levels of literacy, which was tested at the beginning of the year and are taught by a range of trained teachers from across the school. The subject has rolled into Year 10 in 2005.

Since 1994, Year 8 classes have been specifically created to cater for a range of students. In keeping with the school ethos, there are Learning Support, Academic, Music and Sports Excellence classes with the remaining classes being a heterogeneous mix of other non-specialised students. Students must nominate to be in the Excellence classes. In Years 9-12, the students in the core subject classes are generally grouped heterogeneously, with some homogenous classes for gifted and talented students and where resources allow, supported smaller classes for students with low literacy levels. The latter classes generally have a high representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in them. Apart from standard Key Learning Area syllabus (KLA) subjects several other elective school based subjects have been created to cater for students who are very high achievers or special aptitudes.

### *The Facilities*

Kirwan High is a single level school built to accommodate wheel chair students. The SEU is housed in a purpose-built facility, which was opened in 2000. In 2004, the Unit had 44 students enrolled in it. Six were Indigenous. While learning support has been provided in Kirwan High for over 10 years, a specific Learning Centre facility was created out of the old SEU building in 2000 for students with learning difficulties.

In 2001, the ASSPA committee budget and IESIP funds jointly paid for the refurbishment of a space inside the Year 8 centre to create an Indigenous parent/workers room, called the KAIR – Kirwan Aboriginal and Islander Room. In 2003-4, two ACLOs were based there. At the back of the 13.72 hectares of school grounds is a former Education Queensland support centre/district office, which was reclaimed by the school in 2003 to become a “Futures Centre” where computers and other technologies are set up in open classrooms. In this building, the school also leases office space to the Australian College for Tropical Agriculture (ACTA).

Kirwan High has developed and uses a school-based intranet data management system that it has been marketing for sale to other Queensland state high schools. The ratio of students to computers is 1:5. All teachers were provided with a personal laptop at the beginning of 2004. While all students can access the school intranet with its internal records for free, if they pay a small levy, they have annual supervised access to the World Wide Web and email. In 2002-2003, the annual IESIP grant was used to assist those Indigenous students who could not pay their intranet levy ensuring all had access, however significant unexpected cuts to IESIP by Education Queensland prevented the school from continuing this practice in 2004.

Sporting facilities include: a soccer field, a rugby league field, a full sized flood light athletics track, 3 tarmac basketball courts, a grass netball court, cricket nets, and a 25 metre heated swimming pool, built by the school's P&C Association in 1997. The school also has a small rainforest area, which was recently redeveloped in a joint project with ACTA and the school.

The school tuckshop's average net annual income for the last 5 years was approximately \$120,000.00. No parent of an Indigenous student has ever worked in there as a volunteer on a regular basis, although in 2004, the convenor invited Year 12 students to participate and two Indigenous students helped on a regular basis.

#### *Indigenous Education Profile*

I willingly became the program manager for Indigenous Education at Kirwan High upon my arrival in 1995 after an existing Deputy Principal asked to drop it from their portfolio. Anecdotal evidence from my interactions with a number of deputies and principals from other secondary schools over the last 15 years indicates it is not an area many non-Indigenous administrators queue up to work in. Afforded a considerable amount of autonomy from the Principal, I was the allocated contact person in the administration for all year levels of Indigenous students and parents.

The Indigenous program in the school received a significant boost in 1998 when Education Queensland allowed a significant proportion of their allocation of IESIP funding to be paid direct to schools. These funds steadily increased proportionate to the school's Indigenous student enrolment growth and in 2003 was \$72,204. Without warning or consultation in 2004, Education Queensland reduced all Queensland school IESIP budgets and the school's allocation was cut back to just over \$51,000. This had a significant affect on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program in terms of staffing, with existing casual employees having their

work hours reduced and capacity to purchase resources and provide training. At the time of writing this chapter, no formal advice had come from Education Queensland's Central Office about what will be the methodology for the operating budget for the next quadrennium.

I was the school's representative on the ASSPA committee which met monthly and also provided advice and support for the committee of the Homework (ATAS) programme which ran in the school's library twice weekly from 3.00pm-5.00pm from 1995-2003. Due to a shortage of available Indigenous staff, the program did not run in 2004. In 2004 the ASSPA budget was \$44,800.00. In consultation with Indigenous parents through the ASSPA committee, both the IESIP and ASSPA budgets were run to compliment and support each other's activity plans. In 2003, the ASSPA committee used, with permission of the artist, artwork based on the large mural to create unique stationery used by ASSPA in all correspondence.

As part of my management role, I oversaw the work of the CEC and other Indigenous staff employed as ACLOs. I negotiated the roles played by these staff based on their expertise and aptitude. The current CEC has been employed in the school since 1994. Education Queensland pays her wages. Over the first few years, six part-time Indigenous workers came and went for various reasons in the ACLO positions including: offer of a full-time permanent job elsewhere, family or other prior commitments, unsuitable to the demands of the job, further full-time education or training. Stability of personnel was achieved over 2001-2004, when three Indigenous women were employed as ACLO's. The CEC provided counselling and support for all students, especially those new and those in Year 8 and 9. Of the three ACLOs, one provided in-class tutoring support for Years 8 to 9 students, another gave career advice and support for Year 10, 11 and 12 students and the other gave administrative support to monitor attendance, contact parents and clerical work for

ASSPA and me. In 2001, the school was able to acquire the services of a part-time school-based Indigenous Police Liaison Officer (PLO) and with the exception of a pause in 2003, the position continues today. A non-Indigenous teacher worked with students and the CEC in the school's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Tertiary Aspirations Program (AITAP). The students in this group mainly participated in activities organised at a district level as part of the AITAP Challenge. Entering a team every year from 1996, in 1999 the school actually won the State Challenge. The interest from the school's Indigenous students in this program has waned as has Education Queensland's state level support for it and while a local AITAP camp ran in 2004, no Kirwan High students attended. Also at a local district level, in 2000-2002 the CEC went with a number of Year 8 students to several Aboriginal and Islander Career Aspirations Pathways Program (AICAPP) career days.

Kirwan SHS participated in the trial pilot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (ATSI Studies) in 1999-2000 and implemented the QSA course in 2001. Parallel to the offering of this course, in 2003, due to the increasing enrolment of non-OP eligible students who were mainly Indigenous, a Vocational Education and Training (VET) accredited subject, called "Social, Indigenous and Community Studies" was introduced. This introduction was also in response to the fact that the students who had previously chosen to do the QSA subject did not have the level of literacy skills required to successfully complete the course. Once offered, the appeal of the VET subject continued to outweigh the QSA subject, although ATSI Studies was still offered concurrently within the same class for those individual students who were using it for university entry. In 2004, of the 58 students studying the VET subject in Year 11 and 12, 53 students were Indigenous.

Kirwan High's Indigenous Education Program budget enabled a number of teachers, Indigenous Education workers, parents and I to attend a variety of

professional development opportunities including: FELIKS (Fostering English Language in Kimberley Schools) linguistics training seminars (2000 and 2001); a “Cross-Cultural Pedagogy Conference, hosted by Bwgcolman Community School on Palm Island (2001); visits from elder and education advisor Mr Ernie Grant (2002 and 2003); the second National Australian Indigenous Education Conference (2002); and a 2-day “cross-cultural” training workshop for 8 selected staff run by James Cook University’s School Of Indigenous Australian Studies (SIAS) in 2004.

As well, in 1998 and again in 2001, the school commissioned SIAS to conduct an Environmental Scan and Case Study research respectively. Data for the 1998 study was collected under seven main headings and recommendations were made under each accordingly. The headings were: Characteristics of the Kirwan High School Community; School – Indigenous Community Interactions/Relationships; School Management, Administration and Organisation; Staff Cultural Awareness; Curriculum and Teaching; Racism; Quality Assurance Practices: Attendance, Truancy and Behaviour Management. In the 2001 study, data was gathered and comparisons were made with the previous study. It was noted that the 1998 recommendations were still relevant and additional issues were raised. They were: Retention to Year 12; Teacher Education; and, Community Capacity Building. These relate to the Queensland Indigenous Education Consultative Body’s (QIECB) key strategic issues (QIECB, 2003). There were 19 recommendations made overall in the 1998 study and a further six in the 2001 study (Appendix F).

From 1995 to 2004 I worked with parents on the ASSPA committee to ensure the school recognised and celebrated NAIDOC week in some way. Many Kirwan High Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students marched annually in the Townsville NAIDOC march. Since 2000 in-school weeklong daily activities have been held for NAIDOC week. In 2001, 2002 and 2003 in-school NAIDOC celebrations

were held outside the actual official dates to allow for greater participation of local indigenous dance, singing and art groups who are invited to perform at the school's NAIDOC Week celebrations. In 2004, NAIDOC was celebrated over one day in late July.

From 2000-2004, the school had regular annual visits from Indigenous Australian and International dancers, performers and motivational speakers, such as Sean Choolburra, Eddie Quansah, Dion Drummond, Boori Prior and speakers from "Success with Attitude" have also visited the school. In 2002, a group of Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Cook Islander girls self-initiated an Indigenous dance troupe and as the school time-table for 2002, I was able to allocate them class time and negotiated for some funding from ASSPA to create costumes, practice and rehearse their dances. They performed at various school events held inside the school like celebration parades and Reconciliation Week.

In 2002, I nominated Kirwan High to participate in the federal government sponsored project, *Dare To Lead- Taking It On*, an initiative of the Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council (APADC) that began in 2001. At the end of 2002, as part of the Education Queensland's *School Improvement and Accountability Framework* (Department of Education, 2002b) Kirwan High, embarked on a three-year strategic planning and reviewing cycle. The school was required to undergo a review process and when this was completed, to produce a School Partnership Agreement (SPA) followed by a School Annual Report and Operational Plan (SAROP). In early 2003, it was my job to write the "School Context" section of the SPA. While I was to a degree constrained by what Education Queensland required to be mentioned, I was able to build on what had been previously written to construct a school profile that included a greater presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives than had been ever presented



before in a public document on the school. The SPA was disseminated to staff, the School Council, the P&C, the ASSPA committee and relevant District Office personnel.

### *Local Demographics*

Situated in the suburb of the same name, in a sister city of Townsville, called Thuringowa, Kirwan High is one of seven state government secondary schools out of a total of 40 government schools in the area. There are also eight private secondary schools in Townsville and Thuringowa. The school is located on Thuringowa Drive directly across the road from the Thuringowa City Council Chambers.

Research indicates that Thuringowa is not an Aboriginal word, originally as thought. It could, of course, be a corrupted form of Aboriginal dialect, but evidence suggests that it is an ill-pronounced German word. There is a 'Thuringia' historical division in Germany as well as the Thuringian Forest. In the 1870s John Steiglitz (often called von Steiglitz) was one of a number of Germans in the region. He resided at the base of Mt Stuart and was a founding member of the Thuringowa Divisional Board. More significantly, in the 1870s, Steiglitz was the Town and District Surveyor. As such, it would probably have been his responsibility to suggest demarcation lines for the Thuringowa Divisional Board. It seems likely that he also suggested a name that had significance for him. Thuringowa remained a predominantly rural authority until the 1960s when the urban fringe of Townsville reached the Thuringowa area. Thuringowa was proclaimed a City in 1986...(Hornby, 2003, pp.13-14).

The first recorded accounts of European contact with Aboriginal people in the Townsville Region, was 1841. At this time it was thought there were six groups of

Aboriginal people living in and around the Townsville Region: the Wulgurukaba, Warunga, Warakamai, Bindal, Juru and Nawagi (Findlay, cited in Hornby, 2003, p.7). There are currently two Native Title claims over the city of Townsville lodged by the Bindal people and Wulgurukaba people respectively. The Bindal people have also lodged a native title claim over the city of Townsville (SIAS, 2001). When asked the question who are the traditional owners and who should be acknowledged in official ceremonies, members of the Kirwan High ASSPA Committee, local elders, and various Aboriginal students from the school consistently say, "Its best you say both groups."

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2001 Census shows Townsville and Thuringowa have a combined population of 145,879 (Thuringowa has 51,206). This represents an increase of 10% since the 1996 census and is greater than the Queensland and Australian growth rate in the same period. Thuringowa suburbs of Mt Low-Bushland Beach, Deeragun, Condon and Kirwan are even higher, having all experienced an average growth rate of 29.8%. 55.7% of the population of the Townsville Region resided at a different address 5 years ago, making this mobility rate higher than that of Queensland and Australia, however this mobility is one of movement into the area as well as one of internal regional change of address (Hornby, 2003). In a promotional website, Townsville (and Thuringowa) is touted as one of the fastest growing regions in Australia with a Gross Domestic Product growth rate of twice the national average. It states, "Townsville is also a home to the largest contingent of defence personnel in Australia, with some 6,000-7,000 Air force and Army serving members and their families based here" (Townsville Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 2002, p.1).

As at June 2001, the resident Indigenous population of Australia was, 410,003 or 2.2% of the total estimated resident population of Australia. 112,772 Indigenous

people lived in Queensland (3.1% of the state's population) and notably Townsville was recorded as "...the Indigenous Area with the most Indigenous Australians" (ABS, 2003, p.5). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population recorded on the 2001 census for Thuringowa was 2,851, (representing 5.6% of Thuringowa's total population) with 68.8 % being of Aboriginal descent. The immigrant population for Thuringowa is 9.7% with just over half of these from either the United Kingdom or New Zealand (Hornby, 2003). These proportions are not represented in the school, where over 10% of the school student population is Indigenous and another 10% are not born in Australia. For the last 5 years Kirwan High has an annual average enrolment of 200 students who represent a very diverse English as a Second Language cohort, including students from Iran, Russia, El Salvador, Malaysia, Hong Kong, Tibet and New Zealand. Of these, on average 3-6 are exchange students who stay at the school for 12 months to two years.

Thuringowa is considered as having a high-density population with relatively high proportions of children in all age cohorts. In 2001, 52.5% of these lived in two parent families (OESR, 2002). The Townsville Region has an unemployment rate of 8.5%. Of those who work, the largest occupational groups are clerical, sales and service workers (30.8% of working population) and professionals and associate professionals (28.0%). 32.8% of the total population have attained post-secondary qualifications. (9.8% have attained a degree or postgraduate degree) 16.2% of all families excluding couples without children are living below the poverty line. The poverty baseline of \$511.75 per week is the benchmark used by the Melbourne Institute of Applied Economic and Social Research (Hornby, 2003, p.70). This figure is not supported within the Kirwan High context for Indigenous families where a search of the school's financial records for 2004, showed 100 (nearly 36%) out of the

280 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the school have their Abstudy payments sent directly to the school.

#### *School/Community Alliances and Relationships*

Kirwan High has well-established connections with the mainstream community, industry government departments, and other educational institutions. It has had a long-standing agreement with the North QLD Cowboys Rugby League Club to host a number of their junior development squad. The school established a home-stay program to support the young men while they complete their schooling. In return, the school has benefited from this relationship including receiving Cowboy's gym equipment to establish a school gym, coaching and training and access to their club facilities.

The school pool represents a three-way partnership between the Thuringowa City Council, Kirwan High's P&C Association and a private licensee. Since 2003 Heatley Gymnastics has used the school twice-weekly training in Cheersquading. The school enables other community groups and organisations like local church groups, ballet and dance schools to use its own facilities during and after school hours. Such activities earned on average, \$12,000.00 annually between 1999 and 2004.

The school has worked with Barrier Reef Institute of TAFE (BRITAFE) in Townsville in providing courses in VET such as Child Care, Hair Dressing and Automotive skills. In 2004, 13 Indigenous Year 12 students were enrolled in a Pathways course at BRITAFE. The University of Queensland has formed a partnership with the school in its Literacy Strategy for Years 8-10 students and an extension Chemistry course in Years 11 and 12. In 2002-3, Kirwan High was invited and participated in a joint project with an initiative called, "TIDEL", funded by the

Department of Education Science and Training to increase Indigenous student completion of Year 12 and transition into work, further education or training. Four Indigenous students successfully completed that program. In 2002-2004, ACTA ran courses for Indigenous students in Year 9 to 11 in Horticulture on the school grounds and on its own campus in the Burdekin. In 2004, six Year 12 students attended radio announcer training one day a week at the local radio station, 4K1G. Other ongoing alliances with external agencies include: the Department of Communities, Reconnect, the Migrant Resource Centre and the Townsville Aboriginal and Islander Health Service.

Kirwan High adopted a school-based management model of "Enhanced flexibility options Model 2" (Department of Education, 2002b, p15) in 1997 and has maintained it ever since. This means that due to the size and complexity of the school, it has a School Council which "...monitors school performance, provides advice, and approves and signs the Annual Report and Operational Plan when satisfied that it meets school needs and systemic requirements" (Department of Education, 2002b, p.15). The School Council is the legislated governance body in the school. It meets quarterly. There is a prescribed formula of parent, student, staff and community representation on School Councils. In 1998, I advocated for and enabled a member of the ASSPA committee to be a parent representative on the Kirwan High School Council. This representation continued up until and including 2004.

The school's Parents & Citizen's Association (P&C) also contributes as a consultative and decision-making forum. The P&C manages a large budget almost predominantly generated by the school tuckshop. It funds the ongoing and maintenance of the school grounds and the Music Support Group's

activities including the purchase of large musical instruments and other small school-based projects on a needs basis. Previously enjoying a strong membership of core parents, in 2004 the P&C dwindled to virtually the executive and those parents who are also staff at the school. In 2003, one parent from the ASSPA committee used to regularly attend P&C meetings, but as their child left the school, they no longer attend.

### *Indigenous Community-School Relationships*

The prime source of direct communication with the Indigenous parent community has predominantly been through the school's ASSPA committee. In 1995, it was barely functioning (Three parents, the CEC and I would frequently be the only ones to attend). After changing meeting times and formats, by the end of 2003, the average ASSPA meeting attendance had reached twenty-two parents.

In early 2004, parents voiced their concerns at two consecutive ASSPA meetings over practices and actions of the school over a series of suspensions and exclusions involving Indigenous students. At the same time there was increasing unrest in the wider community with riots in the suburb of Redfern, Sydney after the death of an Indigenous youth that had been pursued by police and an increase in race-related violence in local Townsville suburbs with the death of an Indigenous youth in a hit and run accident. The Principal, regional Executive Director, School-based nurse, police officer and police liaison officer also attended these meetings. I chaired a sub-committee of parents to distil issues raised at the meetings and these were presented to a special meeting of school, district and parent representatives in April 2004. Attendees of that meeting suggested the formation of a special parent Advisory/Reference group outside of ASSPA to work with the school on the issues raised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents. The rationale for its role was

that parents would not be constrained by the added bureaucratic demands of DEST and could focus on mainly giving and receiving advice to/from the school.

By co-incidence in April, 2004 the principal (as did all school principals across Australia), received a form letter from Brendan Nelson, Federal Minister for DEST advising of sweeping changes to ASSPA from 2005. Called a new 'Whole of School Intervention Strategy',

The previous per student funding formula for ASSPA committees will be replaced by a proactive submission process that will require committees to work closely with schools to identify specific approaches to address indigenous learning needs (B. Nelson, personal communication, April 14, 2004).

In the same month, the Prime Minister of Australia announced the impending abolition of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Education Queensland had in 2004, severely reduced the IESIP allocation to Queensland state government schools. A reliance on the automatic provision of substantial funding was therefore going to be a practice of the past. Schools and communities were now being forced to think more creatively about how to make improvements for their children and to tender for grants and support on a needs basis.

The formation of Kirwan High's Indigenous parent reference group had therefore been very timely. Called the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Parent reference Group (ATSPRG), this group met immediately after an ASSPA meeting throughout 2004 to work through and suggest strategies for the school to create better communication with the Indigenous community. It became apparent in these meetings as the year went on, that Indigenous parents were more satisfied that the

school was listening to them and responding to their concerns. With the impending closure of ASSPA, all had to work together to prepare for what was to come in 2005.

### *State Government policy and strategy*

Behind the scene that has been painted about the school and the series of events described above sits another backdrop of implementation of State Government education policy and imperatives. Forming an important aspect of the context, they are explored in a chronology of execution.

In 1997 there was a protracted industrial dispute between the Queensland Teachers Union (QTU) and Education Queensland as a result of pressure for change in Queensland state schools under the leadership of Education Queensland's Director General, Frank Peach. The following year, the seat of state government changed from Labour Party to a Liberal-National Party Coalition rule, as did the leadership of Education Queensland. Education Queensland embarked on different tack to push forward a reform agenda. In 1999, a discussion paper was launched and parents, teachers, students and community members were encouraged to 'have their say'. What emerged was a defining strategic document that has been the force behind the policies, action plans and mandated priorities that have attempted to drive the agendas of state schools in Queensland ever since surviving even another turn over of the seat of power in state government. As an example, when I attended a district meeting for administrators in May, 2002, the then District Directors gave an address to put the expectations of Education Queensland into perspective for schools. One of their power point slides had the title, "Expectations for Schools 2002-2003". There were 17 'mandates' listed. Over 2003 – 2004, a further 3 rolled out to schools.



This defining document was called, *Queensland State Education – 2010*, (QSE-2010) (Department of Education, 1999). It is seen as, "...the endorsed statement of strategic direction for Education Queensland...the goals...are to improve the quality of the education experience and increase the number of Queensland students who successfully complete 12 years of schooling" (Department of Education, 2002b, p.3). *Destination 2010*, the action-plan to operationalise the goals of QSE-2010 (Department of Education, 2002c) was released to all state schools in August, 2002. At the same time, a defining strategy for Indigenous people in Queensland was also launched, called *Partners for Success: a Strategy for the continuous improvement of education and employment outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland*. A review conducted prior to the launch of the strategy highlighted, "...the persistence of significant and unacceptable gaps..." (2001a, p.1), in educational outcomes for Indigenous students. The strategy was also an attempt to address the poor "...employment profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Education Queensland" (2001a, p.1). The strategy provided six new policies that were designed to drive system wide improvement and 38 schools were selected from around Queensland to trial them.

In March 2002 the government released a 'green paper', which subsequently became a 'white paper' called *Education and Training Reforms for the Future* (ETRF) (Department of Education, 2003b). This put educational reform into the realm of legislation. Then Minister for Education, Anna Bligh, wanted students to 'Learn or Earn' and the nineteen specific recommendations are to be enshrined in law for implementation in 2006. In 2003 a number of education districts provided funding for trial programs to test the recommendations. Indigenous students gained a specific mention, mainly under the category of 'students at risk'. Kirwan High was able to

send students to participate in a project run by ACTA, which was a 12-month residential Horticulture III training course for Indigenous students.

At the end of 2003, the fifth Director General to run Education Queensland since 1997 launched the system's first *Strategic Plan 2003-2007*. From it came another new framework for schools to construct their improvement and accountability cycles – SAROP's. In the same month Education Queensland rolled out to all state government schools, the *Partners for Success Action Plan 2003-2005* in the form of an executive summary and School Information Kit (2003c). It was the result of the school trials and outlined the priority areas for action in 2003-2005: "attendance, retention and completion, literacy attainment against national benchmarks, workforce and leadership in Indigenous culture" (Department of Education, 2003c, p.12). For the first time ever the system had mandated targets for Indigenous students. As far back as 1978, the newly formed Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consultative Committee (QATSICC) made recommendations to the then Director General of Education and finally 25 years later, Education Queensland responded with the introduction of target levels and mandatory reporting for schools on Indigenous outcomes. All state government schools in Queensland were now expected to include these in their strategic planning documents from 2004 and beyond.

### *Summary*

It can be seen that the school is a large, complex and generally successful organisation set in a steadily growing regional city. The school has attracted a wide range of students and its size allows the provision of a considerable variety of opportunities and programs for them. The Indigenous Education Program at Kirwan High has been able to develop many different opportunities and services for

Indigenous students proportionate to their growth in enrolment and retention and it is developing improved working relationships with Indigenous parents. Within a broader political and social context, there is a 'quickenning' of policy, strategy and demands from the public at a local, state and national level to reform education, especially in Queensland and especially for Indigenous students. The Federal Government has devolved more funding and responsibility for the achievement of Indigenous education outcomes through the state education system, while at the same time retaining indirect control by placing greater caveats on them.

## **Chapter 5: Confirming the known and uncovering unknowns**

### *Introduction*

This chapter represents the second part of the school review. It explores the findings and results of data gathered that shows how this school is faring with its Indigenous students. Data was collected from multiple sources: observation, interviewing and physical evidence (Bassey, 1999). Assertions from the collation of data are listed under four main headings derived from the core issue research questions:

- Representations of Indigenous culture
- Situating Indigenous students as learners
- Non-Indigenous staff knowledge and understanding of Indigenous students
- Effects of school leadership

### *Representations of Indigenous culture*

Indigenous representation within a school can be defined as ways the school acknowledges, recognises and supports Indigenous cultures, cultural values and identity (Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council (APAPDC), 2001). The school in question has an Indigenous enrolment that has grown from 3% of the total student population in 1994 to 14.2% in 2004 (Department of Education, 2005) and data reviewed showed that there was provision for some affirmation through the presence of murals and artefacts on display, 'one off' school activities like National Aboriginal and Islander Day Of Commemoration (NAIDOC) week and in specific budgetary and documents from mandated reporting requirements. Yet at an across the school policy and practice level, the recognition

and valuing of Indigenous culture does not have an equal part in the mainstream school ethos.

The School of Indigenous Australian Studies (SIAS) Case Study (2001) found that the participation of parents and community members in school governance and communication activities, “would appear to be very limited” (SIAS, 2001, p.3). It goes on to say that with the exception of NAIDOC week celebrations, the school’s Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) meetings and the like, “...there is little evidence to suggest parent involvement in “mainstream” activities aimed at fostering better relationships between the school and the wider community” (SIAS, 2001, p.3). Since then, while Indigenous parent involvement in Indigenous issues has increased and school/Indigenous parent relationships have improved, the overall situation remains the same. At major school events, such as full school parades or major evening functions like speech night, a welcoming to country or acknowledgement of the traditional owners is not included as standard practice nor will it be under the incumbent principal (The Principal, personal communication, October, 2004). Only the school’s Parents and Citizens Association (P&C) and School Council members are usually invited to have a speaking part at these major functions. The school’s 2004 NAIDOC celebration day did launch two new flagpoles, which now fly the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags on a daily basis.

In searches of documents, Indigenous culture and perspectives is generally not mentioned beyond compliance with systemic reporting requirements. This is evident in key strategic documents, which drive the planning and budgets of the school, namely the School Partnership Agreement (SPA) and the School Annual Report and Operational Plan (SAROP). Both had little mention of Indigenous

perspectives or issues until the mandated systemic changes of 2003. Now there are explicit Indigenous targets set for objectives of the school's SAROP, which have equal status with other system targets. Mention of the school's Indigenous profile is made in the School Context of the SPA. There is a written school policy on strategies for the implementation of Indigenous funding in a separate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Annual Plan and Budget. This has been in place since the introduction of Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) funding in 1998. The original format and content was drawn up in direct consultation with the ASSPA committee and each year since up until 2004, ASSPA ratified the school's annual plan for IESIP. The activities carried out by the IESIP plan were designed to compliment those of the ASSPA committee.

Acknowledgement of Indigenous cultures or inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in the school's major publicity and communication device, its prospectus, is limited. Distributed annually amongst the school community, especially to new students at enrolment and to Year 7 students at feeder primary schools, the prospectus is typically forty pages long. A summary of the extent of the inclusion of Indigenous perspectives in the 2005 publication is listed in Appendix A, Table 14. Of the 54 photos in this particular prospectus, seven of them have an Indigenous student present and two of these are photos of the same student who is one of the 2004 school captains. This is also the school's first Indigenous student ever to become a school captain although this is not mentioned. In another first, the photo on the 2005 cover does include an Indigenous student.

The SIAS Environmental Scan of the school report had recommended the school undertake a 'curriculum audit' (SIAS, 1998, p. 15) and their later case study reported, 'there is little evidence to suggest that Indigenous content is integrated into the school's broader curriculum, particularly at the senior schooling level' (SIAS,

2002, p.6). The curriculum survey for the current study revealed there was still no evidence of Indigenous perspectives being integrated systematically across the curriculum. The survey revealed that none of the 11 subjects taught by the teachers who responded had units of work with explicit Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander content. One did mention that in their Senior Mathematics A work program Indigenous content was “not explicit, but sometimes referred to.” Responses to the other section of the curriculum survey were more numerous (See Table 5) although very few could answer they had processes to encourage Indigenous perspectives:

<b>Subject</b>	<b>Year Level</b>	<b>Length of each unit</b>	<b>No. of units with explicit Indigenous content</b>	<b>No. of units that do not have explicit Indigenous content but state processes that allow students to use such a perspective</b>
French	8 and 9	1 Term	0	Can include Aboriginal content in music/Variety show unit (Year 9), Rock Concert Unit and Healthy Eating Unit (Year 8)
Indonesian	8 –11	1 term	0	Nil, but it could be possible to include something in units on topics like History of Clothing, Sporting Heroes, Weather, Neighbours and Healthy Eating.
Science	10	1 term	0	1
Maths	8	1 term	0	1
English	8	1 term	0	All units
English	10	1 term	0	Could use a novel that has ATSI content. eg 'Gracey' and also film studies could allow ATSI content to be explored.
English	11 and 12	1 term usually	0	It is possible to allow students to complete a project such as the 4K1G project that has an Indigenous focus.

Table 5 School curriculum survey results

As program manager of the Humanities department, I knew that explicit Indigenous content and perspectives were embedded in a number of their junior and senior subject units, especially the senior subjects: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*

*Studies and Social, Indigenous and Community Studies.* However, at the time, the Humanities Head of Department did not return the survey and it could not be included in the above survey results table.

All focus group responses corroborate the assertion of limited representation of Indigenous culture across the school. They showed there was some recognition with the students, parents and teachers mentioning the visual evidence but there was very little comment about it being authentically included in the curriculum:

*Like the painting on the wall over there. We helped paint that... (Student 1)*

*Its part of Year 12 Modern History study we had to learn about race or racism...the white Australia policy (Student 2)*

*Yeah, I can't say that I've seen any actually brought into a classroom, other than on special occasions again, like NAIDOC (Indigenous worker 1)*

*I haven't come across it personally myself yet...But like you said, yeh you see the murals and you think, oh well, they know we're about (Parent 1)*

*I see it as all very stereotypical stuff the um music, the dancing, the painting and those sorts of things, but not the actual learning styles and those sorts of things that would probably help them as well... (Teacher 2)*

*I think its often a case of just adding colour, we'll do an Indigenous novel now, or we'll look at some Indigenous poets and ah, we're just doing it so we can say that we've addressed Indigenous culture, I don't think we're doing it for the right reasons (Teacher 3)*

*I have seen how the school acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and interests...but I don't know about teaching Indigenous issues in the other subjects...it's pretty hard to do that when you have a work program and you have a syllabus to follow, I'm not saying that they don't because I know there are elements...let's do an Indigenous novel in English and then that's our little Indigenous thing for the year...I would like to see a more integrated approach (Teacher 5)*



Given the lack of recognition of Indigenous culture, parents of Indigenous students still liked the school and thought it was generally welcoming: “but, you could do a bit more with new parents” (Parent 2). The students were more indifferent than the parents:

*I wasn't really worried about if it was a welcoming place for Aboriginals*  
(Student 4)

*Yeah, I'm just here for a good education, so that's my opinion* (Student 5)

The teachers were also less convinced and their comments reflect the effects of social exclusion theory, (Sen, 2000, Klasen, 2000), where inadequacies of practice prevent Indigenous students accessing education like their non-Indigenous peers (McGinty, Anderson & Price, 2003):

*There seems to be to my mind, um what I'd call institutionalised racism and its not because people are racist per se, it's a lack, it's an ignorance actually about um the individual child and so they're, they're just you know applying one set of understandings and expectations to every child that's obviously [different] or Indigenous...(Teacher 4)*

*I would have answered no...and its not because we don't have all these programs in place, we have amazing community liaison officers and we have all these things in place for kids, but I don't see it sustaining...it might be OK first semester Year 8, but for the other end of the scale, last semester Grade 12, I don't see that, that Kirwan's a very welcoming place for them because I see how they're, like they're segregated at lunch time... (Teacher 5)*

All parents agreed the school was very large and this could be a daunting factor for Indigenous parents. The Indigenous workers and students also commented on the size of the school:

*Oh, I've heard that it's that big our kids fall through the loop, or fall into the black hole sort of thing, and I said 'Oh I don't think, I don't think so', but anyway, that's a couple of comments that I've heard along the way...(Indigenous Worker 1)*

*The school's too big, it is, and it's too big to work the school for the workers*  
(Indigenous Worker 2)

*There's just too many kids and not enough teachers...(Student 1)*

The parents thought the teachers were helpful and the Indigenous workers felt the teachers were very accepting of their help but they wanted more Indigenous workers:

*...the staff they're, I feel very comfortable in the classroom, the teachers they respect you and that and they do...they're happy for you to be there...(Indigenous Worker 2)*

*...teachers...they're really good with me anyway, yeah...they ask about certain students and its like they're willing to try with kids, like keep trying., let the kid know that if he ever turns up...there's no like I give up on you...(Indigenous Worker 2)*

*I've felt the same about the teachers, they all seem, most of them that I've come across 'cause I'm not in a classroom, they seem to accept us and welcome us in the room. I think we need more staff here I really do (Indigenous Worker 1)*

All students, Indigenous staff and parents interviewed mentioned the presence of 'skinheads' in the school, a local anti-black group that exists within the local community. One parent was particularly concerned:

*They've [skinheads] got baldheads and you know it's intimidating for small people. My son's big and he got intimidated, he was intimidated and its not fair he's, he's going to this school and he loved this school, and when he got bullied by um skinheads, his whole attitude changed and he's still recovering from it...I think it's a big problem and I think it's not only in this school I think it's all over Townsville and Australia, you know, there's nothing you can do about it, it's just you gotta live with it (Parent 1)*

A teacher also commented on what they saw as 'blatant racism':

*The other thing I have seen is blatant racism in the classroom, and but that's again, that's not necessarily a culture in the school, so you know there's certainly racism which is another barrier for their learning and their comfort levels in the classroom (Teacher 4)*

The SIAS environmental scan report found this as racism being interpreted in terms of "action by people towards others" (SIAS, 1998, p.16). The current study found that racism also existed in terms of the structures, pedagogy and curriculum of the

school. The teachers in the focus group interviews had a sense of the implications of their teaching:

*I think we do have lower expectations, and that in itself is racist isn't it?*  
(Teacher 2)

*And we don't mean to be racist when we do that, we probably think that we're helping by lessening the standard...(Teacher 3)*

*...we respect, we value, but we're not representing them in what we're doing in the classroom and I think that, that step we're not taking is keeping us back in a fairly racist position, or as you said adopt, we want to keep, you know we want to keep that dominant position, I think that's maybe where we feel safe*  
(Teacher 2)

*There seems to be to my mind what I'd call institutionalised racism and its not because people are racist per say, it's a lack, its an ignorance actually about the individual child and so they're, they're just you know applying one set of understandings and expectations to every child that's obviously...Indigenous*  
(Teacher 4)

*...a lot of it I think is through ignorance of what's, you know, I think some people don't even realise it, that they are actually treating the children in a different way, because you know they're Indigenous, so that's a bit of a worry*  
(Teacher 5)

A summation of the responses of participants to the questions in the focus group interviews that relate to the recognition of Indigenous culture is provided in Table 6:

Question	Summary Response	Quotes from the text
Is Kirwan High a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families? Why do you say yes or no?	Not significantly welcoming	“Yes and no...” (Teacher 2) “[Its] like any other school...” (Student 4) “In some ways...but you could do a bit more with new parents.” (Parent)
Have you seen how the school acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures/interests? If yes, where? In programs? Practices? Services? Teachers?	To some extent	“...I haven’t been in direct contact with sort of any of it as yet.” (Parent) “I have a lot to do with kids and I try to make them feel welcome...” (Indigenous worker 1)
Do you think this school is a racist institution, a non-racist institution or an apathetic (don’t care either way) institution? Why?	Yes	“Its not intentional, I don’t think its intentional” (Teacher 4) “It’s a half, half situation, half of the teachers are racist and half are welcoming you with open arms” (Student 3)
Any other comments to help the school improve its policies or practices to best serve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students/families?	A wide variety of ideas	“More Indigenous teachers” (Student 2) “There should be more parent involvement” (Indigenous worker 1)

Table 6 Summary of participant’s responses to focus group base questions

While this summary shows the responses represent different perspectives, there are some common agreements about the school. These responses correlate with the findings of the document search.

### Summary

Therefore, to answer the core research question, *how are Indigenous cultures represented with in the school?* the data supports the assertion that overall, the school’s recognition and support for Indigenous culture are not held in equal terms with that of the European hegemony of the school. There are some policies that are culturally inclusive, the school is providing a number of programs in an attempt to address the needs of Indigenous learners and the teachers are willing to help them. The school is perceived to be relatively welcoming by Indigenous parents,

although the Indigenous students and staff are more indifferent as to how Indigenous-friendly it is. The findings also show there are problems and concerns in the areas of the amount of Indigenous staff employed, racism and inclusivity of curriculum and teaching practice.

### *Situating Indigenous students as learners*

This section presents findings on where Indigenous students are placed as learners within the school context. That is, in terms of: *opinions* - how the Indigenous students see themselves as learners and what parents and school staff think of them; and, *outcomes* - how Indigenous students are achieving in terms of the Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development's Indicators: that is, participation (attendance), enrolment and achievement (OECD, 2002).

#### Opinions – Students' own perceptions of their learner position

The overall responses of the students in the focus group interviews showed they felt somewhat separated out from the rest of the school - either ignored or 'picked on' by teachers or other students because they were black. Yet despite this they were all determined to finish their final year at the school. Significantly, all students interviewed were the first in their families to finish Year 12. Their responses showed that they did not attribute anything much to the school as helping them continue to Year 12 – it was more to do with family influences and what they did for themselves - the 'self-as-agent' (McGinty, 1999). In other words, the students perceived it was through their own actions and own doing that they were still at school. This idea is illustrated in their responses:

Interviewer: *How come you are still sitting here?*

Student 1: *'Cause we want to be.*

Interviewer: *Good, so has the school helped you to be here, or have you done it all by yourself?*

Student 1: *By ourselves.*

Student 2: *Yeh, by ourselves.*

A few moments later in the interview when asked about the role of parents in their completion of Year 12, one student said:

*They just want us to go through, as best we can and don't make the mistakes they did (Student 3)*

One student acknowledged the Homework centre as playing a helping role, saying it was 'pretty good'. Further into the interview when asked again why they were still at school, students said:

Student 4: *Well, it's not that bad, it's not that bad...*

#### Opinions – parent perceptions of Indigenous learners

The parents interviewed saw it as very important that their children finished school to Year 12. They believed the school was encouraging although they saw it more as a parental responsibility to encourage students to finish school,

*I think the parents should be the ones, even though the school should encourage them as well (Parent 1)*

*That question starts at home... (Parent 2)*

*... Oh you only went to grade 10, but it was different in our day, you know, you could get a job, if you finish Year 10, but it's hard for them these days to get a job and I think they realise that themselves and with the teachers encouraging...(Parent 3)*

#### Opinions – staff perceptions of Indigenous learners

Indigenous workers believed many of their students were disadvantaged because of their low literacy and the shame they felt about that:

*Even though it's with whites, whites can always tend to fall into jobs later when they leave school, the black people don't, yeh with the low literacy level as well, it just puts them right down past even the lower, the lowest of white people...(Indigenous worker 1)*

Teachers had positioned the students as problematic and expressed frustration at not being able to help,

*I think once they recognise that there are gaps in their education compared to the boy or girl that they're sitting next to, they become withdrawn...*  
(Teacher 2)

*Yeah, I think we are committed to it, but there's so many obstacles that you know we face as teachers and that the kids face as students that makes it very difficult for us to get them right through to the end with the best possible result...so I think we are committed to it but the things like truancy, the lack of engagement in the classroom, language barriers again, or just the academic capital that they come into the school with... (Teacher 3)*

*...I was initially, I was uh, going to say yes and no as well, um simply because I think it is very welcoming and there are kids who ah, um achieving reasonably well, given their language difficulties, um but there is sort of an undercurrent I think of um, lack of expectation in some cases, lack of expectations in terms of um, um you know if they're not in class, I guess it's, it's a lack of energy to actually chase...in the classroom, in the academic areas, um I think there's a lack of expectation from their classmates, and lack of maybe, I don't know maybe a lack of expectation from themselves because they don't have the confidence... (Teacher 4)*

In the staff survey, 57 teachers out of a possible 100 responded. They could tick more than one attribute to describe their Indigenous students. These attributes were then classified as either positive (+) or negative (-). There were a total of 117 positive attributes ticked by teachers versus 104 negative attributes (Table 7). The largest number of teachers (42) ticked a positive descriptor of 'Sporty'. The next two most popular descriptors of Indigenous students were both positive and negative and were equally selected: 'Poor attendees and/or often late' (33) and 'Co-Operative' (33). The least selected positive attribute was 'Musical' (9):

<b>Descriptor (in order of most popular selection)</b>	<b>Number of times teachers indicated this descriptor</b>
Sporty (+)	42
Poor attendees and/or often late (-)	33
Co-operative (+)	33
Having Literacy problems (-)	26
Often disruptive in class (-)	22
Generally doing very well (+)	21
Allocated in-class support/withdrawal to learning centre (-)	13
Gifted and talented academically (+)	12
Hearing/visually/physically disabled (-)	10
Musical (+)	9

Table 7 Descriptors selected by teachers to describe their Indigenous students

These results show that teachers have almost equal positive and negative perceptions of their Indigenous students with more positive descriptors being 'sporty' and 'co-operative' rather than in achievement in academics.

### Outcomes

As previously mentioned in this thesis, the rates of enrolment, apparent and actual retention, disciplinary and unauthorised absences of Indigenous students at the school are on average, generally better than those for Indigenous students in 'like' schools (schools determined by Education Queensland as having 'similar' characteristics) and across the state. Of significance are the school's apparent progression rates of Indigenous students, which have been consistently better than those in surrounding state high schools. Table 8 shows these comparisons:



Year	Apparent Progression Rates of Indigenous Students in the Northern Region relative to State								
	Kirwan SHS	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
1997	100.0								
1998	161.5								
1999	78.9								
2000	131.8	53.3	21.4	44.4	70.6	50.0	N/A	37.5	25.0
2001	115.4	46.7	55.6	30.0	104.5	28.6	37.5	41.7	33.3
2002	134.8	29.4	53.3	60.0	84.2	35.7	22.2	50.0	66.7
2003	110.0	42.9	60.0	75.0	113.3	14.3	38.5	47.4	30.8
2004	81.8	30.0	40.0	40.0	75.0	19.2	114.3	58.3	76.9
2005	72.7	35.0	15.0	110.0	50.0	37.9	36.4	55.6	45.5

Table 8: Percentage of Apparent Progression Rates from Year 8 to 12 as measured in the annual July census. Corporate Data Warehouse, 2005.

It can be seen in Table 9 that, not only are the school's apparent progression rates better than those of other local schools, and despite some obvious decline in the last two years, they are still well above those of the state average for Indigenous students and more importantly better than those of the non-Indigenous students within the school and the state:

Year	Kirwan Indigenous Students	State Average Indigenous Students	Kirwan Non-Indigenous Students	State Average Non-Indigenous Students
1997	100.0	43.6	85.5	72.2
1998	161.5	46.3	86.2	73.0
1999	78.9	48.9	85.4	73.0
2000	131.8	48.5	82.8	73.5
2001	115.4	48.2	83.2	75.1
2002	134.8	51.7	83.2	78.0
2003	110.0	50.6	91.5	77.7
2004	81.8	51.3	71.6	76.7
2005	72.7	50.1	70.8	74.6
<b>Annual av. % over 9 years</b>	<b>109.6%</b>	<b>48.8%</b>	<b>82.2%</b>	<b>74.8%</b>

Table 9: Percentage of Apparent Progression Rates from Year 8 to 12 as measured in annual July census. Corporate Data Warehouse, 2005.

The earlier studies of the school had revealed why Indigenous students had chosen to enrol at Kirwan High – it was because of reputation, family connections and opportunities (SIAS, 1998, 2000, Wilkinson, 2003). The support of teachers, the range of subjects and opportunities, especially sport (SIAS, 2001) were the intrinsic factors listed. This last set of reasons are validated by the responses of students and parents in the current study and provide insight into what the school does that contributes to keeping Indigenous students at the school.

Indigenous student literacy achievement has been recorded as part of the school's whole school approach to literacy program, but because of the lack of standardised testing across the state for secondary students in literacy, no comparisons can be made beyond the school. The program has run since 2003. Under the advice of Dr Carol Christiansen from the University of Queensland, a 'Literate Practices' reading and writing program was devised and implemented for all Year 8 in 2003, Year 8 and 9 in 2004, and in 2005 for all students from Year 8 to 10. All students in the junior school are allocated a Literate Practice class and depending on their literacy level, have more or less class time in this subject. The size of the classes is also structured to accommodate high, medium and low-level literacy students. (i.e. In Year 8, the lower literacy classes can have up to seven periods a week with a student/teacher ratio of 6:1. In Year 9 and 10, classes are 4 periods per week, but class sizes vary according to literacy level. A large proportion of Indigenous students are in the lower literacy classes.) A number of tests including a standardised reading test, called 'TORC-3' are administered to all students at the beginning and the end of each year. As at time of writing this thesis, not all data was available, however what can be shown in Table 10 are the numbers of Indigenous students and their reading ages at the beginning of each year:

Reading age	2003	2004	
	ATSI	ATSI	Non-ATSI
Year 3 or less	22	22	56
Year 4	12	8	46
Year 5	8	14	42
Year 6-8	16	19	110
Year 9 or more	2	5	94
Total	60	68	348

Table 10 Year 8 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reading ages February, 2003-2004

From this it can be seen that for 2004, proportionately nearly twice as many Year 8 Indigenous students (22 out of 68 Indigenous students or 32.3%) have significantly lower levels of literacy (Year 3 or less) in Standard Australian English compared to their non-Indigenous peers. (56 out of 348 non-Indigenous students or 16 %.) It is worse in the upper levels of literacy, where there are almost four times as many non-Indigenous students with above age reading levels (94 out of 348 or 27% compared to 5 out of 68 or 7.3%) than their Indigenous peers.

While the school maintains systematic monitoring procedures for student results, it had not been tradition to keep statistics specifically for Indigenous student results beyond Education Queensland compliance demands in the school annual plans. However, to support an initiative of the ASSPA committee, a record of the number of Indigenous students who receive annual academic awards was established in 1998. Due to the sheer size of the school, the awards ceremonies are split into Junior and Senior schools: an annual award evening for Years 10 to 12 and an awards morning for Years 8 and 9. All students are eligible for academic awards. There are three award categories: Excellence award which is the top student of the entire subject in their year level, Very High Achievement which is the highest level of achievement possible in a subject and Industry Award which is can only be given to

one student per class by their teacher in recognition of their good work efforts and positive attitude. The ASSPA committee provided recognition awards for all Indigenous students who received one or more academic awards. The figures in Table 11 represent the numbers of Indigenous students who received one or more of the awards just described. Award winners are only counted once:

<b>Year</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
8	8	14	14	18	8	20	20
9	6	4	11	10	3	13	17
10	17	6	7	15	3	14	10
11	4	10	5	9	3	9	7
12	5	5	12	13	8	12	10
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>64</b>

Table 11 Number of Kirwan SHS Indigenous student academic award winners 1998-2004

While these figures might look like they are generally improving, proportionately they are not. To get a sense of the level of success for Indigenous students, the above figures have been compared to those of their non-Indigenous peers. The results in Table 12 are expressed in proportion to the total enrolment of the specific groups of students:

<b>Year</b>	<b>1998</b>	<b>1999</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>2003</b>	<b>2004</b>
% ATSI Student Award Winners	37%	31%	33%	39%	27%	31%	25%
% non-ATSI student award winners	51%	48%	48%	47%	48%	54%	53%

Table 12 Percentages of per population of Kirwan SHS student academic award winners

These Indigenous results have fluctuated and in the main they appear to be decreasing while their non-Indigenous peers have maintained or improved their results.

In the Senior school, the level of students who complete Year 12 has increased significantly – it has nearly tripled over 10 years. The quality of retention, that is, successful academic achievement levels, has fluctuated, but overall there is improvement. The numbers of Indigenous students who receive a sound level of achievement or higher in three of more QSA subjects, however, are still not equal to the results of the whole of Year 12 (See Table 13).

Year	Indigenous students					Whole of Year 12
	No. receiving Senior Certificate	No. receiving sound or higher in any 3 senior subjects	%	No. receiving sound or higher in 3 or more QSA (university level) subjects	%	% receiving sound or higher in 3 or more QSA subjects
1993	11					
1994	12					
1995	10					
1996	17					
1997	15					
1998	15	13	86%	4	27%	
1999	13	7	53%	6	46%	
2000	22	18	81%	11	50%	
2001	30	13	43%	9	30%	75.2%
2002	28	16	57%	9	32%	72.8%
2003	36	18	50%	9	25%	71.4%
2004	27	23	85%	11	40%	78.5%

Table 13 Indigenous and whole of Year 12 receiving Senior Certificate and sound levels of achievement in 3 or more subjects at Kirwan SHS (Shaded areas - no statistics previously collected or available)

### Summary

In answering the core research question, *how are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students positioned as learners within the school?* the findings show that while Indigenous students in this school are marginalised as learners and they are

not achieving equally to non-Indigenous students, they still appear to be in a better position in terms of their enrolment, retention, attendance and achievement than other Indigenous students in other schools across Queensland. In particular, the high retention and by inference, the consequent better Year 12 achievement rates, can be attributed to a combination of several factors: those that come with the students – that they are self-determined and their parents support them; and those from the school – that it offers subjects and opportunities that are attractive to Indigenous students and a number of staff are willing to devise and implement strategies that monitor and aim to improve Indigenous learning outcomes through to successful completion of Year 12.

#### *Non-Indigenous staff knowledge and understanding of Indigenous students*

The SIAS environmental scan report (1998) found that the staff interviewed had limited knowledge of Indigenous cultures, but there was no existing data regarding the extent of this across the whole staff. The overall results of the current staff survey were able to define this extent – that the great majority of staff had very limited knowledge about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and in the main, limited knowledge of general Indigenous issues and culture (See Appendix D for a collation of the answers to the general knowledge section). The annual staff opinion survey conducted by Education Queensland had for the first time in 2004, asked staff to give their level of knowledge about Indigenous students. The school staff score was very low (Department of Education, 2005).

In the staff survey when teachers were asked about what they knew of their Indigenous students, the majority of teachers (44 out of 57 teachers) indicated that they knew “Something” about “Some” (28 responses) or “Most” (13 responses). When asked to rate the type of working relationship they had established with their

Indigenous students almost half of the teachers (28 out of 57) indicated they had “Good” relationships with “Some” (7 responses), “Most” (30 responses) or “All” (5 responses) of their Indigenous students.

All 64 respondents in the staff survey except one non-teaching staff member said they worked or had contact with five or more Indigenous students daily, yet only half of the teachers showed they had made contact with parents of Indigenous children and that it was in relation to non-submission of assessment, poor attendance or behaviour/attitude issues. 23 teachers indicated they had not yet made contact with parents and 6 had tried but had not been able to speak to a parent. In the focus group interviews, parents and teachers recognised the importance of good community links and the need for increased communication with parents.

Focus group students said they wanted ‘more Indigenous teachers’ in the school and all parents agreed there needed to be more awareness from existing teachers:

*That goes back to teaching kids, and then it goes back to teachers trying to teach them, ‘cause teachers don’t understand, as a matter of fact...the kid’s not gonna respect it if they don’t know what it means (Parent 3)*

*...but also teachers need to be aware of cultural things, even in primary schools they have the different language. You know Island children come to school and they speak different, and the teacher goes, oh they’ve got speech problems, I said no they haven’t, its just the way they talk (Parent 1)*

A poignant comment about understanding differences in worldviews and the discourse of resistance (Herbert, Anderson, Price and Stehbens, 1999) comes from one of the teachers themselves in the focus group interviews when reflecting on a discussion they had with their Indigenous students after watching the film, “Rabbit Proof Fence”:

*...I was saying wasn’t that wonderful, the triumphs of these girls making their way home, how proud we should be that they could battle all these obstacles*

*and get back home to where they wanted to be, how wonderful. The class just stood there and were shocked at my interpretation of the film. They were angry at the issues in the film, and they wanted to express their anger, there was no pride in that, in the message of the movie, they saw a totally different message to me and I didn't understand straight away that I could be wrong. I'm an intelligent person, I'm not a racist person, but the fact that I couldn't shift and really see where, what they were seeing and it took them to, to really get angry with me and shake me virtually and say, "You don't understand, you don't understand and you're pretending to understand"...so I'll never forget that...now...I stop and make sure that I've broadened my viewpoint, so they taught me something very important (Teacher 2)*

Teachers also mentioned a number of other factors preventing them having success with Indigenous students. These included: not enough time and lack of expertise or knowledge to integrate Indigenous perspectives into their teaching,

*...its difficult to gear curriculum towards Indigenous kids as well as still catering for the other students... (Teacher 3)*

*...it's not enough, I think we really need to try and see it from their point of view, I feel that you know maybe we're still thinking from the wrong side of the fence and we think we're doing it ok, but we're not, 'cause we're losing them emotionally... (Teacher 2)*

*I personally don't think I do because I think its that time factor too, that I don't get that energy into finding the right resources in order to contact those groups, 'cause I do have such little knowledge of those groups... (Teacher 5)*

*...we're falling short, because when I look back I think I can do a much better job with these students, but I haven't got the time to get out for half a day with them, I need that half day regularly...(Teacher 1)*

These responses correlate with the teacher survey where most of the teachers indicated if offered training, they would like to know more about Indigenous cultures, their students' backgrounds, how to improve their literacy skills and learning styles: 23 staff wanted to know more about Indigenous 'culture' and their students' backgrounds'; 10 staff said they wanted to know more about improving literacy skills for Indigenous students and/or their 'learning styles'; and, 6 staff wanted to know how to 'engage them' in learning. Single responses were "How to involve



parents/family in [Indigenous students'] learning"; "How to work with the 'city' Aboriginal/TSI students who have a big chip about whites." and; "I have already done the [cross-cultural] training." Interestingly only 42 out of 64 respondents provided written answers to the question, while the remainder left it blank. It is difficult to attribute a distinct reason for this. Either way, the answers that were provided would explain why so few Indigenous perspectives have been authentically incorporated into curriculum and pedagogy across the school.

### *Summary*

This section has provided data that answers the core research question, *How is the staff positioned in relation to their knowledge and understanding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students they teach?* It would appear that most non-Indigenous staff, in particular the teachers, are significantly distanced from their Indigenous learners. Their knowledge and understanding is limited and those interviewed acknowledge this fact. Many teachers showed they wanted training in how to better teach Indigenous students and had a genuine desire to help them succeed. Their responses also indicated that they did not know how to take the steps necessary to critique their practice and change it to accommodate another worldview.

### *Effects of school leadership*

The concept of leadership in the context of this study refers to the type of role played by certain staff to advocate for and promote the interests of Indigenous students within the school. The Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL) calls this 'broad-based leadership' whereby there are a number of leaders across the organisation (McREL, 2001). In this study those leaders include: the

Indigenous Education Workers (IEWs), some teachers and a member of the administration.

The SIAS environmental scan report and case study indicated the importance of the Indigenous workers within the school (SIAS, 1998, 2002). On recommendations from these studies, the roles and names of the Indigenous workers in the school had been explained on a number of occasions throughout the school year to all staff and parents within the school through staff meetings and memos, ASSPA meetings, and parent newsletters. In the staff survey, however, only half of the staff could name at least two of the four Indigenous workers in the school. Yet Indigenous students, their parents and teachers who worked a lot with Indigenous students all indicated how they appreciated and relied on the Indigenous workers,

*...and through [name of IEW] and that I think they do a fantastic job with our children (Parent 2)*

*...[name of IEW]'s name has come up on a regular occurrence in the last 15, 20 minutes, why? It's because she is linked to the community, I use her as a direct link and she is just great in heaps of different ways and I think we should have a close look at why we respect her and the, um, effort she's put into the school, with the various classes and we can see a noticeable change... (Teacher 1)*

*[name of IEW]'s pretty helpful you know she helped me find my class and that...(Student 3)*

When asked if the school works closely with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, one IEW responded,

*Only through us, that's how I feel, only through the Indigenous workers to my knowledge, I think they'd just, if we weren't here, they'd fall through... (Indigenous Worker 1)*

Some of the perceptions of Indigenous workers, students and parents on the influence of actions of teachers in the school have already been mentioned in

previous sections of this chapter. While it has been previously acknowledged the parents wanted the teachers to be more aware of their cultures, they generally had a positive view of the staff at the school:

*I find the teaching staff very helpful...(Parent 1).*

*...found the principal is very friendly...and then the other day we came, the first day of school, the staff were really good...you know really keen and really helpful (Parent 3).*

Parents recognised the important role of teachers in the education of their children although they would have liked to have seen more teachers at ASSPA meetings. When it was mentioned to students in the focus group interviews that one teacher on staff was Indigenous, none of them seemed to know and expressed surprise. This indicated that the particular teacher in question had, for reasons unknown, not made his cultural background common knowledge amongst students. Those teachers who showed they cared and related to Indigenous students were seen as 'deadly' by the students.

*Student 1: You get some good teachers and some bad teachers.*

Another student felt that about half of the teachers were helpful and the other half were 'racist':

*Interviewer: So when you say the teachers are racist, what do you mean?*

*Student 3: Walkin' around, lookin' down on me, you know they all look down on me and when they do that... [Makes gesture of looking down her nose at me.]*

The influence of the administration in the school had come out in the SIAS environmental scan report (1998) and emerged again as a theme in all the current focus group interviews. In the findings of this study, positive and negative effects of actions of the administration came through. The students had strong views on these

people. The following exchange came out of asking students what honest feedback did they have about the school:

Student 1: *I think [name of member of administration] is racist.*

Student 2: *I think the school's pretty shit because [name of member of administration]'s saying is a school of excellence, sports excellence, but you only have it for football and touch football.*

This set of students perceived that one of the members of the administration favoured only one group of students in the school – the footballers and that another was more Indigenous friendly. When asked what could be done to improve the school for Indigenous students, a number of the students made some interesting points:

Student 1: *Pay more attention to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, 'cause I know only you probably pay more attention than the other principals.*

Student 2: *Yeah, I reckon you do, they stick up their noses when they walk past. They don't say anything, its just, "Where's ya uniforms?" or "Get that nose ring outta your nose."*

Strong opinions were also seen in the staff interviews that had just occurred after the school had celebrated NAIDOC week and there had been an incident with a member of the administration and some Indigenous students who were not going to class:

*Like, I don't see you know our person at the top of the school being very supportive towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues or even students you know, I'm probably going to get shot for saying that, but that's how I feel about it and um the classic example this week ok, like that just spelt out exactly what Indigenous issues are at this school as far as the person in charge. And that was really disappointing to me, and I think, yeh well, that goes towards somewhere for me to understand why we have um issues with these kids... (Teacher 5)*

*...but anyway, ever since that incident the other day, I personally think that it's um gone right, right back now, what ever... had in place, there's just gone by the way side of what [name of member of the administration] did...yelling*

*at our guests for our NAIDOC week without thinking, I think it was very unprofessional...I've heard other people talk to me outside the school and mention how they didn't like it, what they're gonna do about it, there's nothing much, you feel like you've gone right back where people used to yell at you and belittle you and I don't know how they're gonna feel about their kids coming here now...(Indigenous Worker 1)*

When teachers and Indigenous workers were asked what the school could do to improve things for Indigenous students, both groups commented that they wanted to see more members of the administration more involved in positive ways with

Indigenous activities:

*...really it needs to be led from the top and I mean [name of member of administration] has to be as comfortable with chatting to all Indigenous kids, not just the ones who might be spots stars or what ever, and families and that sort of thing as comfortable as [name of member of administration] is talking to you know the school captains family...in a perfect world they [Indigenous parents] should be able to ring ... and say, you know what's going on here, as much as any other parent would feel comfortable doing that (Teacher 2)*

*...[name of member of administration] could go and talk at our ASSPA meeting even. A few times a year when [name of member of administration] thinks it's, oh you know whether [name of member of administration]'s got things to come and say to us and ...actually talking to the community. I think that ASSPA meeting was good that day [name of member of administration] turned up...they felt good [name of member of administration] was there, and when [name of member of administration] goes off like... last week, they might be able to understand [name of member of administration] a bit more, by understanding...and how [name of member of administration] runs the school for them to accommodate their kids (Indigenous Worker 1)*

In the SIAS environmental scan report it was noted there was a potential risk of just the one person in administration being seen as responsible for effecting change and contributing to improved educational opportunities for students (SAIS, 1998). The parents and Indigenous staff recognised this:

*But I think besides [name of member of the administration]... if [name of member of the administration] weren't here, I'd think, oh who can I go to and tell my problems to, that's going to be able to see my side...and I think a couple of the other deputies and that could make themselves known the parents, not just [name of member of the administration], and come to meetings occasionally or a couple of teachers...(Parent 2)*

*See what would happen if [name of member of the administration] left the school – it would be like the school I work at, it's fallen apart because the deputy who was there done everything you know, she'd have full on NAIDOC week, for everybody, the whole classes, the lot. She's been gone two years, there's absolutely nothing to do with aboriginal culture nothing. She's started to send the teachers in for training and stuff, she's been gone and that school, I wouldn't recommend children go...in that school now she's gone...so yeh...it would be good to see a couple of teachers faces at ASSPA meetings so that you know if [member of the administration] ...not always available...you'd be familiar with another face...*  
(Parent 1)

*Well when I first came here I um observed it was, it did fell like a good place for kids, for kids to come to, um and the kids felt good about it because of [member of the administration] not because of our um principal of the school, but make them feel welcome, and it was quite obvious 'cause the kids used to go to [member of the administration]...the other two teachers deputy principals didn't seem to be as lenient as [member of the administration] were with the kids... (Indigenous Worker 1)*

When students in the focus group interviews were talking about who in the school were good teachers, one of the students said to me: “And some people think you're black” (Student 3). In hindsight, I regret not exploring this comment further at the time to determine what was meant by it. My assumption here is that because I worked extensively with and showed a very active interest in Indigenous students and their families, by association, I could be considered Indigenous.

### *Summary*

The answer to the core research question, *How has school leadership affected perceptions and outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?* is harder to quantify than the other questions posed. The data gathered does show a representation of what Indigenous staff, some teachers and some Indigenous students think about the influence of leadership in the school on Indigenous issues. Overall there was agreement that certain staff played a significant role in supporting Indigenous students achieve to their potential, but a dependence on a few and any

consequent absence of these key people also meant this support could be weakened. The valuable roles played by the Indigenous education workers as a conduit between the school and community was recognised as was non-Indigenous teachers who could empathise with Indigenous students. Perceived negative actions by certain leader members in the school seemed to have hindered school-community relationships and the desire to have all members of the administration seen as promoting and advocating for Indigenous students was particularly evident in the student and staff responses. It is more difficult to conclusively prove that the improved retention and achievement rates of Indigenous students are directly related to the effects of leadership within the school. However, what can be confirmed by the findings of this study and those of previous studies of the school (SIAS, 1998, 2002, Wilkinson, 2003) is that the school is seen as attractive to many students, including those who are Indigenous. This study also shows the desire of the Indigenous students and their parents to get 'a good education', coupled with the leadership actions of some key staff who focused on supporting Indigenous students and creating opportunities for them to participate in either Indigenous specialised or mainstream programs or both, seemed to have increased Indigenous students chances of success. This is despite the situation that the equality of educational outcomes of Indigenous students is still not seen across the school as every one's business.

## Chapter 6: Lessons to be learned

To solve the problems that exist in education for Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders, changes in the present educational system are required. The present system does not serve us (QATSICC, 1978, p. 7).

### *Intrinsic factors – redirecting the gaze*

Schools in Queensland have been asked for three decades to change what they do, yet it is acknowledged that the sources from factors that contribute to the core issue of equality of educational outcomes for Indigenous students are twofold – those extrinsic and those intrinsic to a school (Tripcony, 2000). They have little direct influence on factors external to them like the poor state of Indigenous health, housing, employment and over representation in the criminal justice system (Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000, Tripcony, 2000). By redirecting the gaze onto the institution and what it is or is not doing that contributes to success, this case study has looked at the core issue from an initial point of success experienced by Indigenous students in one Queensland school. The final chapter synthesises the findings of the literature and school reviews and the discussion is distilled into two sections: acknowledgement of Indigenous culture and the individual learner; and leadership. From the generalisations of the study, implications are drawn with a conclusion and recommendations made to address the core issue both within the case study school and beyond to educational leaders of Queensland schools in general.

### *Acknowledgement of Indigenous culture and the individual learner*

An essential step either to relatively independent co-existence or any significant level of integration is the bringing alive of this past so that it



becomes both a point of pride for the Aborigine and a basis for new respect by the Australian European (Winder, 1971, p.4).

I want Australians to have more of a connection to Aboriginal culture, and a sense of belonging to it, so if you're born in Australia and you call yourself Australian, Aboriginal culture is somehow part of your identity. That's something we don't have in Australia, unlike in New Zealand...Maori culture is much more part of New Zealand's national identity than Aboriginal culture is part of Australia's (Rachel Perkins, film director, 2002, p.261).

The above statements, while thirty years apart, are indicative of the repeated message of importance of recognition of cultures as a factor contributing to successful learning outcomes for Indigenous students in the Australian schooling system (School of Indigenous Australian Studies, 1998, Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2000, Australian Principals Associations Professional Development Council, 2000, Bourke, Rigby and Burden, 2000, Purdie, Tripcony, Boulton-Lewis, Fanshawe and Gunstone, 2000). This study supports the assertion that acknowledgement and support for Indigenous culture is not held in equal terms with that of the western hegemony of most schools in Australia and reinforces what the literature calls the 'Euro centrism' of schooling, that the predominant worldview locates Indigenous culture as 'the Other' (Smith, 2001, Hickling-Hudson and Ahlquist, 2003).

Yet despite this situation, Indigenous students were still attracted to the case study school. Previous local studies showed and the school context description and case record confirmed it was perceived as a 'good school' that offered a wide range of opportunities for all students and had a successful profile in the community. At the

same time there was little evidence of the existence of a culturally inclusive approach being authentically embedded across school policies or practice outside of those sponsored by the school's Indigenous Education Strategic Initiatives Programme (IESIP) or Aboriginal Student Support and Parent Awareness (ASSPA) Action Plans. These were the main sources of a wide range of specific programs and strategies that attempted to address the individual needs of Indigenous learners and through them there was some affirmation of Indigenous culture in the school's physical environment and on special occasions.

In the case study, many non-Indigenous staff did want to help Indigenous students to successfully complete Year 12 but they recognised that they did not necessarily have the skills or understanding to do this. Their lack of knowledge and awareness of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultures prevented confident delivery of a curriculum that was relevant, engaging or inclusive for their Indigenous learners (Helme, Hill, Balatti, Mackay, Walstab, Nicholas and Polsel, 2003). This case study also showed, "the incorporation of Indigenous content into curriculum remains dependant upon the efforts of individual teachers rather than a school-based approach" (QIECB, 2003, p. 17). The integration of Indigenous perspectives into units of work, while scant, did operate in certain subject areas because of the willingness and interest of those few teachers to include it.

Underneath this also sits the recurring issue of racism. The school context description showed that there were disturbances in the local community around issues of racism and inside the school, racism was evident both in terms of action by people towards others as well as through the structures, pedagogy and curriculum of the school (SIAS, 1998). This marginalisation experienced by the students interviewed in the case study can be explained through social exclusion theory. That is, students felt that they were treated differently because they were black and

teachers saw them as problematic because of the 'energy required' to teach them. Walker (1997) argues that it is not the excluded that should be blamed for their fate instead, a society must ensure it enables participation and integration of all its members. The wealth of literature produced over time in Queensland for improving education of Indigenous students spells this obligation out for schools, yet the reality is that it is not happening. Many teachers in the case study school still had low expectations of their indigenous students. The Ministerial Advisory Committee For Educational Renewal (MACER) Indigenous Education Sub-Committee identified that, as a system, Education Queensland has demonstrated a tendency to readily accept Indigenous underachievement in schools. Accordingly, it seems there is an underlying assumption that Indigenous underachievement is somehow 'normal' or 'given' (MACER, 2004, p.4).

This study shows that contrary to previous studies, where schools might have large numbers of teachers who have low or negative expectations of Indigenous learners, little or no awareness of Indigenous culture and Indigenous perspectives are not explicitly part of the school ethos, Indigenous students can still survive and do well. If Indigenous students can have access to quality educational programs with a wide variety of opportunities and there are at least some key personnel who do not accept underachievement and provide support to rectify this situation, this can provide enough helpful conditions for the success of Indigenous students. In the case study school this was apparent for Indigenous students when compared to outcomes for those in surrounding schools and those across the state. If the Indigenous results at this school were assisted by the actions of a limited number of key staff, what could be achieved if equality of Indigenous educational outcomes was everybody's business?

### *Leadership*

The critical need to ensure that Indigenous students were the concern of the whole staff was highlighted in a Northern territory school, where the percentage of Indigenous students had increased dramatically. Indigenous students and their education has become part of the core business of *all* staff (Helme, et al. 2003, p.79).

In maintaining the gaze on the institution and what schools have the most influence over beyond the aspirations of parents and determination of Indigenous students themselves, it is school staff, therefore, that play an important and integral part in the achievement of equalities of outcomes for Indigenous students at school.

Many of the studies reviewed mentioned the importance of the presence of Indigenous staff in schools (Herbert, et al, 1999, QIECB, 2003), and in the case study school, their work was recognised and appreciated by other staff, parents and students. The two previous SIAS studies on the school had featured reliance on Indigenous workers as a concern (SIAS, 1998, 2002) and this study found there was an over reliance on the Indigenous workers to deal with Indigenous student issues, liaise with Indigenous parents and the community. Helme, et al. (2003) call this isolation of support as an 'Indigenous enclave' and say effectiveness is reduced because there is not "the spreading of support across the whole school staff" (2003, p. 107). The participants interviewed mentioned the need for 'more Indigenous workers and teachers'. Would more Indigenous staff be such a perceived need if the existing non-Indigenous staff were more culturally aware and comfortable in working with Indigenous students? Given that the study found there was a difficulty obtaining long-term employment of suitable Indigenous workers due to funding uncertainties

and other variables like better job offers or family commitments, it would make better sense to work to improve the capacity of existing non-Indigenous staff and therefore spread the support more across the school.

While the Indigenous workers have a key role, good teachers are also influential in the lives of Indigenous students. The Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) Final Report found that it was teachers who impacted on a child's education, "that some schools and principals, some teachers and approaches to teaching can make a significant difference in the quality of student learning outcomes" (QSRLS, 2001d, p.3). At the same time, the one dimension of productive pedagogies or aspects of good teaching practice that were found to 'appear least' in classrooms of the QSRLS study was 'recognition of difference' (Lingard, 2000, p.94). In this case study, even though the majority of teachers were significantly distanced from their Indigenous learners, those who did connect and engage Indigenous students were considered as 'deadly'. Again, if the capacity of teachers is developed to work effectively with Indigenous students, it is possible make a difference in their learning outcomes.

MACER (2004) acknowledges the Executive Director and/or school principals as the 'major change agent position' to lead the reform agenda for Indigenous education. The school context description showed the administrators of the school had allowed for and contributed ideas to the development of Indigenous programs and strategies, however the perceptions of most of those interviewed saw the leadership actions of some of them as not communicating that they saw achieving Indigenous equality as their core business. While Indigenous education was a major portfolio in the school, commanding a large budget and requiring a program manager to be responsible for it, parents and Indigenous staff recognised there was an over reliance on one member of the administration. They saw the problems that could

arise if that person left without having others who could carry on the leadership responsibilities. Perceptions of those in the study were that all members of the administration needed to be as interested or supportive. McGinty, Anderson and Price (2002) claimed some important dependent variables were necessary for 'community capacity building' or enhancing the capabilities of parents and members of the school community to participate and contribute to the life of a school. One of them was: "Leadership on the part of the Principal or Deputy, and leadership on the part of the Indigenous Community. The work of the Indigenous worker or CEC combined with a good working relationship between these two" (McGinty, Anderson & Price 2002, p.vi).

#### *Conclusion and Recommendations*

This thesis has set out to examine the core issue of educational equality for Indigenous Australian students and has focused on one North Queensland secondary school, critiquing policy and practice to determine what intrinsic factors have contributed to the success experienced by its Indigenous students. The school context description showed that there has been progress in addressing the recommendations made from previous audits, not by quick fixes, but by hard work. There is a more co-ordinated approach to the development of policies, programs and strategies for addressing the needs of Indigenous students and families (SIAS, p.9, 1998). Within whole school planning, there are now set targets and increased allocation of resources and within the Indigenous Education Program there are a number of key staff who have a collective belief that success is inevitable (McRae, 2001) and Indigenous student enrolment, retention and achievement is on the rise.

Yet the school-based variables found in many previous studies to be important contributors to indigenous student success, were by no means close to an

optimum level at the school: that is, recognition and valuing of Indigenous cultures; Indigenous education is core business for everybody; Indigenous perspectives are across the curriculum; most teachers have explicit literacy teaching skills for Indigenous students and high expectations of Indigenous student success; cultural knowledge protocols and community relationships/engagement are fully established, and there is high teacher understanding of Indigenous culture.

Significantly this case study shows that for Indigenous students to fare better than their peers in surrounding schools, they have been provided with a relatively supportive school environment that had just enough inherent leadership built across the school (QSRLS, 2001). As such, Indigenous students were provided with: some quality teaching and a few quality Indigenous staff to assist individual learner needs, some acknowledgment of Indigenous culture, and a wide variety of services and programs, albeit not all being culturally inclusive, to create conditions for achievement. Parent hopes and student's own self-determination to be successful cannot be ignored, and other studies show these are more or less constant factors for most Indigenous students often despite the system of schooling (Richer, Godfrey, Partington, Harslett and Harrison, 1998, McGinty, 1999).

Importantly what makes this school different is the leadership actions of some key staff who created the policy, practice, services and programs for Indigenous students that encouraged the above conditions for improvement to occur. The nature of the staff leadership is in fact the variable that in many ways determines the implementation and success of the other school-based variables. Current thinking on leadership asserts, 'effective leadership is primarily knowing when, how and why to do something rather than simply knowing what to do' (Waters, Marzano and McNalty, cited in MACER, 2004, p.5). The MACER report argues school principals in Indigenous schools require such leadership (MACER, 2004). This case study proves

that it can also happen with those who dare to lead in and around the traditional administration and hegemonic mindsets of a mainstream school. Those with audacious leadership, whether they are non-Indigenous or Indigenous and a willingness to champion the rights of Indigenous students are required to give momentum for success. This notion could provide a platform for further research such as investigation into the role non-Indigenous people can play to ensure successful initiatives and positive outcomes for Indigenous children in Australian schools.

This case study also shows that providing access of opportunities for Indigenous students and audacious leadership by key staff is still not enough. The overwhelming evidence from other studies cannot and must not be ignored. It is strongly recommended that leaders in all schools work hard to develop staff capacity to understand Indigenous education is core business for everybody. By providing professional development opportunities to ensure there is high staff understanding of Indigenous cultures, that most teachers have explicit literacy teaching skills for Indigenous students and there are high expectations of Indigenous student success, schools can begin to genuinely recognise and value Indigenous cultures. It follows that Indigenous perspectives would be more easily integrated in authentic ways across the curriculum and cultural knowledge protocols and community relationships/engagement could be better established.

To make this a reality, audacious administrators must be brave enough to create the dissonance needed to change mindsets and to strengthen the quality and quantity of positional and situational leadership in schools. "An essential lesson then, is that for school improvement to be sustained, a broad-based, shared sense of leadership must be alive in the school community. Building the capacity of many...to



engage in leading reform is critical" (McREL, 2001, p.12). The first people who must change, if they haven't already, are the administrators themselves.

### **Postscript**

At the time of the completion of this thesis, on a National level, Indigenous parents and schools across Australia are still coming to terms with the disbanding of ATSIC and school ASSPA committees. There are now supposed to be Indigenous Parent Committees (IPCs) in schools.

On a State level, after tendering several 'concept plans' and then a final application in time to continuously changing closure dates set by DEST, twelve months after the above changes, some schools in North Queensland have finally received funding for their Parent School Partnership Initiative (PSPI) plans. Funds are now paid directly to schools that have proven they have worked collaboratively to devise PSPI plans with their Indigenous parent community. In mid July, 2005 without prior notification, Queensland schools received a Semester 1 allocation of Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) funding and in September, their Semester 2 allocation. This now replaces the tutoring funding that used to be managed by ASSPA committees. A new Minister For Education and the Arts in Queensland was also appointed.

On a personal and professional level, the process of completing this thesis has enabled me to clearly understand and appreciate the role of leadership of educators and support workers in state schooling, especially in relation to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. A significant outcome has been my own transformation as a school leader. Citing the success of Indigenous student results and improved community-school relations as a major platform in a job application, in 2005 I was short listed for and then successful in gaining the position of principal in another state school in the same city as my case study. The challenge

now is to apply what I know to make a difference for the Indigenous students in my new school.

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## Appendix A

Items that are not for general publication or display are indicated with an asteric (\*). The documents considered in this study were:

*Kirwan State High School Indigenous Education Environmental Scan\**. 1998. Conducted by School of Indigenous Studies (SIAS) at James Cook University by request of the school in response to Indigenous parental concerns about role of Indigenous staff. Tabled at Indigenous parent (ASSPA) meeting in November, 1998.

*Kirwan State High School Prospectus 1995 to 2005*. Produced annually, this coloured booklet is given to all incoming Year 8 or new students at enrolment. Contains descriptions of the school's physical and human resources and services, curriculum and co-curricular programs.

*Kirwan State High School Annual Graduation and Awards Night Program. 1995 – 2004*. A booklet containing the order of ceremony and award winners. Handed out on the night to all attending.

*Kirwan State High School Strategic Plan 1998-2003*. An initiative of the school and was devised in consultation with an external consultant. Issued to Heads of Department and the Administration and available to parents on request.

*Kirwan State High School Indigenous Education Case Study\**. 2001. Conducted by SIAS three years later by request of the school in response to improving Indigenous educational outcomes. Tabled at Indigenous parent (ASSPA) meeting in November, 2001.

*Kirwan State High School Annual Report and Operational Plans from 2000 to 2004.* This document is written on an annual basis and is derived from the above. It is used by the Heads of Department to drive their own annual plans and budgeting and is available to parents on request.

*Kirwan State High School Student Manual 2000 to 2003.* Handbook issued to all students annually or at enrolment, containing school policy and procedures.

*Kirwan State High Staff Policy Booklets 2000-2004\*.* Issued to all staff at beginning of year or commencement of duty. Since 2003 booklets are not in hard copy, but have been online in the school's intranet for all staff to access.

*Kirwan State High School Partnership Agreement 2003-2005.* A major strategic planning document that complies with systemic requirements. It was created through consultation with staff, ratified by the School Council and endorsed by the District Director. Provides key areas of focus, outcomes and performance indicators for the school for 3 years. Issued to Heads of Department and the Administration and available to parents on request.

*Kirwan State High Student Diary 2004.* Introduced in 2004. It is issued to all students at commencement of year or at enrolment. Contains school calendar, some procedural information and a yearly diary.

<b>Page</b>	<b>Description of Indigenous representation</b>
Front cover	Photo of two students and a teacher from Kirwan High's "Top Scholar" (Academic) Year 8 class. One of the students is Indigenous.
2	Photo of the 4 school captains. One is Indigenous.
12	Three sentences about tutoring and AITAP.
15	Photo of Catering class. (20 students) 2 are Indigenous.
24	Photo of a student who was Australian NAIDOC student of the year.
27	One sentence and 7 dot points about the services of the Community Education Counsellor and Assistant Community Liaison Officers.
27	Photo of two former Indigenous students who are now National Rugby League players.
29	Photo of 3 music students. One is Indigenous.
34	One sentence about homework classes in the school.
39	One sentence description of ASSPA
40	Photo of 3 students and a sports teacher. One student is Indigenous.

Table 14 Summary of Indigenous perspectives in 2005 school prospectus



## Appendix B

### Focus Group Base Questions:

1. Is Kirwan High a welcoming place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families? Why do you say yes or no?
2. Have you seen how the school acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures/interests? If yes, where? In programs? Practices? Services? Teachers?
3. Do you think the school is committed to having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students complete school to Year 12 and achieve their best? If yes, how do you know this? If no, why not?
4. Do you believe the school works close enough with the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and families?
5. Do you think this school is a racist institution, a non-racist institution or an apathetic (don't care either way) institution? Why?
6. Any other comments to help the school improve its policies or practices to best serve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students/families?

## Appendix C

### STAFF SURVEY

Background:

- Male
- Female

How long have you been teaching?

- 1-4 years
- 5-9 years
- 10-15 years
- 16-20 years
- 20 + years

1. Do you have any Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in your classes?

- Not sure
- Yes
- No

2. If yes, approximately how many do you estimate in total?

- Between 1-5
- Between 5-10
- Between 10-20
- More than 20

3. Of all the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students you teach, approximately how many are demonstrating he/she is:

- Gifted & talented academically
- Musical
- Sporty
- Generally doing very well
- Having literacy problems
- Regularly poor attendees and/or often late
- Often disruptive in class
- Generally co-operative, but not working to capacity
- Hearing/visually/physically disabled
- Allocated support by in-class/withdrawal with the learning centre



3. Do you know any words in either of these people's language? If yes, list them.

4. List what local features/organisations such as electorates, municipalities, areas, streets, landmarks, sport clubs, other organisations, etc are named in Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander words?

5. In the Thuringowa area, do you know what are the main historical events associated with the arrival of Europeans? What are they?

6. What are the names of the current main local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families?

7. What are names of local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations or services? Also include what issues they deal with.

8. What does ATSIC stand for? What is it responsible for?

9. What are the names of 6 nationally/historically important Aboriginal or Torres Strait islander people:

○ Who lived before 1850?

○ Who lived between 1900 and 1950?

10. Forget sportsman and women. Name 10 well known contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and what are they known for?

11. Draw the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags (include labels of what their colours are)

12. What was the purpose and outcome of the Australian Referendum held in May 1967?

13. What is the estimated % of the Australian population that identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander?

14. What % of the Qld population identify as of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin?

15. Which state has the greatest number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living there?

16. Outside of Sydney and other capital cities, which area in Australia has the largest population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples living there?

- Weipa
- Alice Springs
- Townsville

17. What is the life expectancy for an Indigenous Australian male?

- 56 years
- 65 years
- 76 years
- 80 years

18. What is the life expectancy for an Indigenous Australian female?

- 63 years
- 71 years
- 82 years
- 85 years

19. True or False.

Death rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are higher than those recorded in the general population for almost all causes of death and for every age group.

20. What is the desired apparent retention (Year 8 to Year 12) target rate set by EQ for 2005 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in Qld?

- 72%
- 57%
- 80%
- 84%

THANKYOU

## Appendix D

KIRWAN STATE HIGH SCHOOL

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KIRWAN STATE HIGH SCHOOL SUBJECT SURVEY 2004  
DEPARTMENT: \_\_\_\_\_

SUBJECT NAME	YR LEVEL/S	NO. UNITS TAUGHT ANNUALLY IN THIS SUBJECT	AVERAGE LENGTH OF TIME FOR EACH UNIT	* NO. UNITS WITH EXPLICIT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CONTENT (i.e. Bush Tucker, The Kanakas, White Australia Policy, Fishing Practices In The Torres Strait, Aboriginal Art/ Music)	* NO. UNITS THAT DO NOT HAVE EXPLICIT ATSI CONTENT BUT STATE PROCESSES THAT ALLOW STUDENTS TO USE AN ATSI PERSPECTIVE. (i.e. Students make an item and encouraged/allowed to put ATSI motif on it <b>OR</b> during study of weather a discussion is held on how traditional Aboriginals determined predicted weather patterns)

### Appendix E

Summary of answers to “Test your Knowledge” multiple choice/short answer response staff survey:

Question in summary	Response			
1. Know traditional owners of lands surrounding the school?	Yes 11	No 53		
2. How far lands extend?	Yes 9	No 55		
3. Know language words?	Two or more 2	One 4	None 58	
4. List local landmarks/su burbs in language names?	Two or more 11	One 4	None 49	
5. Main historical events with arrival Europeans?	Gave an answer 6	Blank 58		
6. Names of current local Indigenous families?	Could name five 1	Could name two 24	Could name one 2	Blank 37
7. Names of local Indigenous services?	Two or more 9	Wrong names 14		Blank 41
8. What does ATSIC stand for? What is it responsible for?	Correct name 27 Incorrect name 23	Correct responsibility 5 Incorrect responsibility 2 'Being Abolished' 5 Blank responsibility 39		All blank 14



9. Names of important Indigenous people before 1850? before 1950?	One name < 1850 8	One name < 1950 6	Blank 50		
10. Name 10 contemporary Indigenous people?	Named 10 2	Named 7-9 4	Named 2-7 20	Named 1 14	Blank 24
11. Draw the Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander flags.	Both flags correct 16	One only correct Aboriginal 20 Torres St. 0	Wrong or blank 28		
12. Purpose/outcome 1967 referendum?	Right to vote 30	Other reason 2	Blank 32		
13. Estimated % Australians identify as Indigenous?	2-6% 14	7-12% 10	13-20% 9	>21% 3	Blank 28
14. % in Qld identify as Indigenous?	1-6% 9	7-12% 12	13-20% 7	>21% 5	Blank 31
15. Which state greatest no. Indigenous people?	NSW 2	Other 48	Blank 14		
16. Out side capitals, which city largest population Indigenous people? (Multiple choice)	Townsville 19	Other 29	Blank 16		
17. Life expectancy of Indigenous male? (Multiple choice)	56 years 46	Other 10	Blank 8		

18. Life expectancy Indigenous female? (Multiple choice)	63 years 52	Other 7	Blank 5
19. Death rates higher in Indigenous population? True or False?	True 53	False 2	Blank 9
20. Apparent retention rate to Yr 12 set by EQ? (Multiple choice)	57% 19	Other 34	Blank 11

## APPENDIX F

Below are summaries of two studies done by the School of Indigenous Australian Studies at James Cook University of Kirwan State High School:

### October 1998, Environmental Scan

No. Indigenous students: 123

Data was gathered under seven main headings and recommendations were made in each accordingly:

#### **1. Characteristics of the Kirwan High School Community**

*Recommendations:*

- The school develop a comprehensive strategic plan for indigenous education at Kirwan High.

#### **2. School – Indigenous Community Interactions/Relationships**

*Recommendations:*

- Maintain existing approaches for communicating between school/home.
- The school explores further opportunities for interacting with families outside the school premises.
- Identify ways in which to supplement this communication with staff other than a reliance on the current indigenous staff
- Examine its operations and interactions to identify existing barriers for parents
- Examine ways to increase and legitimate participation and involvement of indigenous parents in decision-making forums other than ASSPA/ATAS.

#### **3. School Management, Administration and Organisation**

*Recommendations:*

- Record as policy the school's IESIP initiatives so as to be a source of future action and direction.
- Closely examine elements of its admin operations/procedures to eliminate barriers for indigenous student participation.
- Instigate a deliberate/co-ordinated strategy to inform students, staff, and parents of role of CEC. A similar strategy needs to occur for the Homework Centre/staff.
- Increase number of indigenous employees, especially to attract indigenous teachers.

#### **4. Staff Cultural Awareness**

*Recommendations:*

- Survey staff to measure the extent of their individual knowledge in indigenous cultures and follow-up accordingly to increase this where necessary.
- Implement professional development activities that improve capacity of all teachers to cater for indigenous students in their classroom.
- Undertake cultural awareness training to gain, increase or review knowledge on indigenous culture.

#### **5. Curriculum and Teaching**

*Recommendations:*

- Undertake a curriculum audit to:
  - a. identify existing indigenous perspectives
  - b. ascertain level of knowledge/ experiences of teachers for the inclusion of indigenous perspectives into subject areas
  - c. Identify existing indigenous resources and how they are used
  - d. Identify curriculum areas where indigenous perspectives should occur

#### **6. Racism**

*Recommendations:*

- Examine existing aspects of structures, operations and practices that combat/allow racism.
- Increase the knowledge, understanding and skill of students and staff on the impact of racism.

#### **7. Quality Assurance practices: Attendance, Truancy and Behaviour Management**

*Recommendations:*

- Provide to parents specific information regarding their responsibility in relation to their child's attendance including rules relating to post-compulsory school age.
- Ensure all indigenous parents and students are familiar with the school rules in relation to exclusions and suspensions.
- Encourage debate on cultural/social factors, which may impact on indigenous student attendance.

#### **October 2001, Case Study**

No. Indigenous students: 165

Data was gathered and comparisons were made with the 1998 environmental scan in mind. It was noted that the 1988 recommendations were still relevant and additional issues were raised.

## **8. Retention to Year 12**

*Recommendations:*

- Establish co-operative partnerships between school, staff, parents and other key stakeholders.

## **9. Teacher Education**

*Recommendations:*

- Review existing in-service and other professional development programs.
- Enhance access to in-service and other professional development programs that focus on indigenous education.
- Undertake training needs analysis for the indigenous education workers to identify their needs.

## **10. Community Capacity Building**

*Recommendations:*

- Review current forums, which facilitate school/community linkages.
- Promote models of best practice in relation to partnerships/community capacity building.