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# *"What is going on here?" Challenges experienced by white teachers in a government school in a remote Aboriginal community*

**Thesis submitted by**
**Tracey Anne EGAN**
**BTeach (QUT), GradDipEd (Learning Support) (QUT), MAppLing (CDU)**
**in August, 2018**

**In fulfilment of the requirements for the**
**Doctor of Philosophy**
**College of Arts, Society and Education at James Cook University**

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*10 August, 2018*

Tracey Egan Date

# Statement of the contribution of others

I acknowledge the intellectual support of my primary supervisor, Dr Jo Balatti, who provided feedback and advice on my research design, conceptual development and data analysis. Jo also provided editorial assistance with this thesis. I sincerely thank Jo for generously sharing her time and energy with me.

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# Declaration of ethics

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Human Research (1999), the Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guideline on Research Practice (1997), the James Cook University Policy on Experimental Ethics, Standard Practices, and Guidelines (2001), and the James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice (2001). The proposed research methodology received ethics clearance from the James Cook University Experimental Ethics Review Committee (approval number: H3691).

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# Glossary

**Aboriginal / Aborigine / Torres Strait Islander / Indigenous**

Defining the term 'Aboriginal' is extremely problematic in Australia (Gardiner-Garden, 2003). The term 'Aboriginal' is an adjective whereas the term 'Aborigine' is a noun. Aboriginal/Aborigine refers to someone who identifies as being of Aboriginal ancestry. The term 'Torres Strait Islander' refers to someone who identifies as being of Torres Strait Islander ancestry. The term 'Indigenous' is a very generic term used to encompass Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

> An accepted definition of an Indigenous Australian proposed by the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs in the 1980s and still used by some Australian Government departments today is; *a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives.* (AIATSIS, 2014)

In this study, the local people of this community with whom I interacted and sought guidance from identify by their specific clan group or, for the purposes of government, as Aboriginal. The Aboriginal people in this community also identify as Binninj (see below). In the literature, the terms Aboriginal, Aborigine, Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous are used according to the group of people to whom they are making reference. Out of respect I try to use the phrase 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' to distinguish between two markedly different groups of people.

When making reference to the literature I make reference to Indigenous people's status as it is portrayed in the literature. When making reference to local people of this community I interchange between Aboriginal and Binninj. When discussing the context of this study I sought guidance from local Aboriginal people who requested I refer to them as Binninj. When making generalisations or trying to include other people who identify as Aboriginal I use the term 'Aboriginal'.

**APIF**

Accountability and Performance Improvement Framework (APIF)

**Assistant Principal**

The Assistant Principal is known in other states/territories as the Deputy Principal. S/he is a member of the Senior Leadership.

**Balanda**

A white or non-Aboriginal person who is typically an outsider of clan groups and the Aboriginal community. The term was introduced "during trade with the Maccassan people of Indonesia" (Ganter, 2013, p. 129). The term Balanda is interchangeable with non-Aboriginal or non-Indigenous person or people.

**Binninj**

A collective term of identity used by local Aboriginal people of middle and western Arnhem Land, and specifically, this community and surrounding homelands. The use of this term is similar to how Aboriginal people in other places refer to themselves: Murri in Queensland; Koori in New South Wales and so forth. This term is used in contrast to the Yolgnu people of eastern Arnhem Land and in contrast to Balanda. The term 'Binninj' is interchangeable with Aboriginal person or people in specific reference to the people of this community and surrounding homelands.

**Ceremony**

An event of ritual significance for Binninj people. Ceremonies have been maintained since pre-colonial times and are a core facet of teaching and learning.

**Clan/clan group/language group**

A term used by Binninj people of this community. A family group who have their own:

> unique language, traditions, kinship systems and governance. They had trading routes for navigating over long distances. They modified, and intervened in, the environment to improve food sources and availability. They had complex kinship systems defining both personal and civic rights and responsibilities. And each [clan] group knew what was their country and what was the country of another [clan] group. (Mundine, 2016, p. 217)

**Country**

The term 'country' is to be understood as the land acknowledged by local Aboriginal people and clan groups as belonging to a particular clan group and specific ancestors. The specific boundaries of this land are passed down through familial generations by walking the land and learning the stories from family members including elders.

**Djunguy**

Within clan culture in this community, a djunguy has authority of their mother's country and ultimate control of the resources assigned to their moiety. A djunguy is both a leader and manager because they hold specific knowledge for their clan group, moiety and totem. Accountable to their clan, moiety and totem, the djunguy's word on the knowledge for which they are afforded this status is final.

**Elder**

An elder can be an old person or a leader of the clan as identified by the clan because they demonstrate a specific talent or set of skills and knowledge. In the context of this study the status of 'elder' is given to old people to whom the clan group seeks advice.

**Homeland**

According to the Department of Housing and Community Development (2015),

> homelands and outstations are small Aboriginal communities where residents live in order to fulfill their cultural obligations to their inherited country and its underlying traditional law. Homelands can provide social, spiritual, cultural, health and economic benefits to residents. They enable residents to live on, and maintain connections with their ancestral lands.

**Homeland Centres**

Homeland Centres, also known as Homelands or Homeland Learning Centres are very small schools comprising one building. Homeland Centres are located on the traditional land of Aboriginal clan groups and are serviced by its nearest hub school, located in a larger remote Aboriginal township.

**Institution**

An organisation founded by a nation-state society catering for a population of over 10,000 people (Diamond, 2012). In this study, the institution was founded by white Australian society and is legitimated by Australian governments. The institution of focus in this study is the institution of education. After establishing I am talking about the 'institution of education' I frequently limit the phrase to 'institution'.

**Malk**

Malk is a term for 'skin name'. Refer to skin name below.

**Moiety**

"The whole of the Binninj world is divided into two halves…the word moiety means 'half'" (Australian National University, 2008b). In this community and surrounding homelands, the moieties are Jowunga (red) and Yirrichinga (yellow). People of the Jowunga moiety do all the work such as land burning, caring for animals, plants and the waterways on Yirrichinga country. In turn, people of the Yirrichinga moiety do similar work on Jowunga country.

**NTDET**

Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NTDET). During this study, NTDET also became known as the Northern Territory Department of Education.

**Outstation**

Refer to Homelands.

**POD**

A group of class teachers, of similar year levels, who are grouped together for school operational purposes. POD 1: Preschool, transition and Year One; POD 2: Year Two and Year Three; POD 3: Year Four, Year Five and Year Six. POD has been capitalised to help distinguish this form of grouping within the thesis. The capitalization of POD also assists to distinguish between POD and such terms as ipod.

**Poison cousin**

The concept of poison cousin is embedded in how people relate to each other according to traditional kinship. The poison relationship is between the parent of the first choice husband or wife and his or her spouse. For a man, the poison cousin is the mother of his wife or potential wife. For a woman, the poison cousin is the husband or potential kinship husband of the daughter.

**Pre-service teacher**

Also known as an undergraduate, a pre-service teacher is enrolled in a Bachelor degree or post-graduate course dedicated to teacher education. Completion of the tertiary degree enables the pre-service teacher to register as a qualified teacher.

**Remote**

According to the State Accessibility/Remoteness Index of Australia Plus (National Centre for Soacial Applications of Geographical Information Systems, 2008), The community context of this study is a very remote location with a SARIA+ value of 11.87 (p. 57). In this paper, the term 'very remote' is interchangeable with 'remote' because both terms indicate geographic isolation and considerable difference from services.

**Skin name**

The name allocated to a person to illustrate how they are related by kinship to others within the clan group. The skin name comes from the mother. Refer to Appendix B.

**Space**

A space is best described as a place or an area, either real or imagined, as it occurs in a particular period or interval of time (Bhabha, 1994; Ikas & Wagner, 2009)

**ST1**

Senior Teacher, level one: A classification within the Northern Territory Department of Education. ST1 is the lowest level of Senior Leadership within a school, positioned beneath Assistant Principals in the system's hierarchy, yet above teachers.

**Totem**

Fauna and flora for which a person is assigned the role of care-taker and manager. The Jowunga and Yirrichinga system guides the selection of the totem. The totem is assigned by the mother and her family at birth. Everything related to the totem and characteristics of the totem come under the care of the person who has been assigned the totem. The totem and the person become one. The totem holder cannot consume or harm their totem. Every time the totem is consumed or harmed, the person is destroyed. This system is enforced to care for Mother Nature so animals and plants don't become extinct (critical friends, 2016).

**Traditional Owners**

Members of the clan or language group who hold the original claim to a place.

**Yolgnu**

A language group from the north-east region of the Northern Territory. The Yolgnu people are closely related to people in the community in which this study took place.

# Acronyms used in this study

| | |
|---|---|
| **AITSL** | Australian Institution for Teaching and School Leadership. |
| **AL** | Accelerated Literacy. It is an approach to teaching reading and writing. |
| **AP** | Assistant Principal (AP). Also known as a Deputy Principal in other states/territory. |
| **AT** | Assistant teacher. In this study, assistant teachers are employed from the local community. Also known as a teacher's aide, this position's task is to assist teachers in the classroom. |
| **BTLP** | Bachelor of Teaching and Learning: Primary. It is a pre-service teacher training course provided by Charles Darwin University. |
| **CDU** | Charles Darwin University. |
| **COAG** | Coalition of Australian Governments. |
| **EAL** | English as an Additional Language (interchangeable with ESL). |
| **ESL** | English as a Second Language. |
| **EYLF** | Early Years Learning Framework. |
| **NAPLAN** | National Assessment Program: Literacy And Numeracy. |
| **NT** | Northern Territory. |
| **NTCF** | Northern Territory Curriculum Framework. The mandated curriculum in place prior to the Australian Curriculum developed by ACARA. |
| **NTDET** | Northern Territory Department of Education and Training. |
| **RITE** | Remote Indigenous Teacher Education. An agreement between Charles Darwin University and Northern Territory Department of Education to enable Aboriginal people to live and study in their community to complete a Bachelor of Teaching and Learning: Primary. |
| **SST** | Student Support Team. Comprised Guidance Officer, Special Education Teacher, Hearing Impairment Teacher, and AP: Primary or AP: Secondary. |
| **ST1: A&P** | Senior Teacher, level one classification. The role focuses specifically on student Attendance and Participation. |
| **ST1: L&N** | Senior Teacher, level one classification. The role focuses specifically on teacher professional development in Literacy and Numeracy. |
| **ST1: Primary** | Senior Teacher, level one classification. The role focuses specifically on supporting the operation of the Primary sector of this school. |
| **ST1: RITE** | Senior Teacher, level one classification. The role focuses specifically on Remote Indigenous Teacher Education (RITE). |

ST1: RITE was seconded from NTDET as a CDU lecturer to deliver BTLP in this community. This position was accountable to CDU and NTDET.

# Abstract

As practitioners at the coalface, teacher voices are critical in conversations about how to improve persistent abysmal education outcomes for remote Aboriginal students. Yet, despite significant interest and research conducted by educators, academics, government and influential others, teacher voices are resoundingly silent. Foregrounding non-Indigenous teachers in situ, this critical ethnographic study sought to identify challenges experienced by primary teachers in a remote Aboriginal community school and ascertain why challenges to teacher practice endure. The site of this study was a government school in a very remote Aboriginal community, where the teachers, including the researcher/practitioner, were white. Eighteen teachers including the researcher, from a possible 19, participated in the two and a half year study. Six pre-service teachers, with support from their families, constituted the advisory group concerning Aboriginal practices in the community.

Teacher practice is critical to student academic achievement (Hattie, 2009). Yet, despite an abundance of funding, research and public critique of Indigenous education, teacher practice fails to deliver the desired student academic outcomes (ACARA, 2016f). This study is premised on a belief there is more going on at the borderline between the institution of education and the Aboriginal community than inadequate teacher practice. This study foregrounds non-Indigenous teacher voice as one voice that is critical to finding out what is going on in this remote Aboriginal community school.

This critical ethnographic study utilised the theoretical lens of Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) to identify the school as an "in-between" Space in which educators from the dominating institution of education and Aboriginal clans from the local community meet at the borderline of each other's culture. Third Space theory conceives of two different cultural groups, such as non-Aboriginal teachers and the Aboriginal community, as being from two different Spaces. From the teachers' perspective, the First Space is the institution of education and the Second Space is the remote Aboriginal community comprising Aboriginal clans. The First Space is most familiar to the teacher while the Second Space is, for most teachers, foreign. Bhabha (1994) recognises the borderline as an enunciative Space in which talk happens between people including "discussion, dispute, concession, apology and negotiation" (Bhabha, 1994, p. x). A Third Space is a hybrid Space of both First Space and Second Space that is

unrecognisable as belonging to either one or the other. Rather, the Third Space is a co-constructed composition of both. In the construction of the Third Space, members from both groups actively destabilise "the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representations" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 245). The shape of contemporary Aboriginal education requires consideration of the historical coloniser/colonised relationship that continues to influence government and Aboriginal clan relationships (Nakata, 2007).

In its current form, the school is unable to address challenges experienced by teachers because the government continues to dominate the social arrangements within the school. Obligated to practice according to institutional demands, teachers find themselves in "borderline engagements of cultural difference" (1994, p. 3) caught between institutional demands and practices and those of Aboriginal students, local employees and families that originate in clan social orders and arrangements.

Third Space theory complements critical ethnography because they both contest existing norms and "move from 'what is' to 'what could be'" (Madison, 2012, p. 5). Data were collected from researcher observations, conversations with teachers during day-to-day teacher practice and a semi-structured group interview involving all participants. Teachers' accounts of contradiction, confusion and conflict provided insight into the conditions contributing to the challenges affecting their practice. Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon's "Practice Architectures" framework (2014, p. 81) was utilised to delve deeply into teacher sayings, doings and relatings to identify the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that shape and are shaped by teacher practice. With a 'sense of what could be', this study identified the conditions currently holding teacher practice in place, practice resulting in student academic failure.

The research found adverse home conditions preclude teacher effectiveness and the institution's regulation of schools and teachers undermines teacher effectiveness at the borderline. Further, the institution's interpretation of 'schooling' locates teachers in the middle of a tug-of-war of legitimacy between the institution and local clans.

In its current form, education in this remote Aboriginal community is untenable for both the community and the teachers. Many challenges reported by teachers have been repeatedly highlighted in the literature in academic research, government reports and

documents produced by Indigenous leaders; however, the emphasis is mostly placed on Indigenous people. Challenges experienced by Indigenous people in remote communities are presented as detrimental to Indigenous people with little consideration to the service providers, including teachers, whose practice is also affected by the same challenges. This study shows that the current shape of schooling in this remote Aboriginal community is problematic for students *AND* teachers rather than the current intimation of being problematic *BECAUSE OF* teachers. Teachers are unable to perform their duties to teacher and institution satisfaction because the institution's insistence of dominance has led to the school being a battleground between two different cultures. In the middle of the battleground, teachers are accused of being the main perpetrator of poor education for Aboriginal students.

As a matter of urgency, this study highlights the need for the school to become a Third Space, a "Space of intervention in the here and now" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 10). 'What is' cannot continue because it is failing both teachers and students and their respective first Spaces, the institution of education and the local Aboriginal community. The school needs to be reconstructed by institution and community leaders as a Third Space to tackle the entrenched challenges reported by teachers. Challenges described by teachers in this study need to be heard in discussions that create new arrangements.

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# Chapter One. Introduction

## 1.1 Background to this study

Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education takes into consideration communities that are remote or very remote. The key difference between remote and very remote communities is geographical location and distance from a large city such as Darwin. Despite efforts to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers in Australian remote and very remote schools, non-Indigenous teachers make up 96.13% of teachers in remote communities and 93.39% of teachers in very remote communities (More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSITI), 2014, p. 20). Almost all teachers in both remote and very remote schools are white. In real numbers, the MATSITI data analysis report (2014) identified approximately 7427 non-Indigenous teachers teach in remote schools in any given year in Australia, comprising 4656 non-Indigenous teachers (p. 20) and 2771 non-Indigenous teachers in very remote schools (p. 20). Within remote and very remote contexts the white teacher is the minority amongst a large population of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. While acknowledging the number of teachers in remote communities fluctuates, the high numbers of non-Indigenous teachers in remote and very remote contexts indicated in the MATSITI report indicates thousands of teachers take up practice in a remote Indigenous context. Yet the white teacher's voice is barely heard in comparison to principals, institutional bureaucrats, politicians, researchers and well-educated Indigenous public figures about issues emanating from remote and very remote communities.

Poor academic outcomes and the continuing achievement gap between Aboriginal students and their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Menzies Foundation, 2010) has implicated teachers in remote communities as a causal factor. Although Indigenous student outcomes indicate improvement in literacy and numeracy (ACARA, 2016f) they are few, far between and slow "highlighting the depth and intractability of educational quality" (Helme, 2007, p. 272). In a political climate of accountability and improvement, numerous government policies and strategies are directed at improving the quality of education in remote Indigenous communities, with particular emphasis on teachers, what they know and what they do. Amid a plethora of literature generated by researchers, activists, state and territory governments and their education departments,

and schools about the current circumstances associated with education for very remote Aboriginal students, the teacher's voice is quiet. The lack of teacher voice in discussions about remote Aboriginal education "leads to a bias of evidence and perception" (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2011, p. 1). This study gives voice to the white teachers working in a very remote Aboriginal community. It investigates their experiences and in particular, the challenges they face.

Significant in discussions about teachers and students in very remote Aboriginal community schools is the difference in cultures between the predominantly white teachers and the Aboriginal students who comprise the vast majority of students. For the purpose of this study, the term 'culture' embraces the norms, values, beliefs, customs and traditions shared by people within a distinctive group (Schein, 2010). The term 'society' is best understood as the population and social structures as the population and social structures that provide guidelines for how people interact with others (Diamond, 2012; Service, 1975). Notions of culture and society form the basis of this thesis because of identifiable differences between non-Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal students. Most teachers who teach in remote Aboriginal community schools are white and originate from urban and rural centres. Within a remote Aboriginal community school, many white teachers experience their first direct contact with Aboriginal people, specifically students, families and local school employees. Teachers, school leaders and education bureaucrats are most familiar with the practices shaping and shaped by the institution of education and least familiar with Aboriginal practices. In a remote Aboriginal community, white teachers, under the guidance of the institution of education and school leaders, interact daily with the local Aboriginal community as they go about their teaching duties.

While themes of difference permeate the literature pertaining to Aboriginal education, white teacher accounts of what happens when they interact with the Aboriginal community within the school space are limited. Drawing on their familiar culture, white teachers find themselves in a situation that is familiar in terms of the institution of education and schooling but unfamiliar, in terms of the Aboriginal clan culture that dominates remote locations.

From my own experiences, which I elaborate on further in section 1.6 of this chapter, most teachers who teach in remote Aboriginal community schools are white and

originate from urban and rural centres. This study asserts Aboriginal clan society is different from mainstream Australian society and teacher practices and their outcomes are heavily influenced by complexities arising from difference. Although the literature is replete with differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, little focus has been placed on the societal differences that impact teachers' work. When people from different societies come together, as in the case of the remote Aboriginal community school in which this study was located, incidences of stereotyping, conflict, confusion and anxiety arise, adding to the pressure experienced in intercultural/societal engagements.

Engagements between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are complex in remote Aboriginal communities. For thousands of years Aboriginal people have been guided by clan practices. These practices have attended to resource management, cultural practices and social and political relationships within and between clan groups. Since white settlement, Aboriginal people in remote communities are "totally confused about dominant culture organisational and legal systems, and the dominant culture is totally confused about [clan group] organisational systems and the law" (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 152). Education is one aspect of society in which tensions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practices are experienced because Aboriginal people in remote communities are obliged to access western education manifested by an institution of education with origins in British colonialism. White teachers entering a remote Aboriginal community school are located within an institution installed by the dominating white Australian culture, yet providing a service to subjugated clan groups who continue pre-colonial practices as part of their identity as one of the world's oldest living cultures. White teachers intent on teaching according to the guidelines and uniformities of the institution of education are confronted by Aboriginal students and families who maintain their clan identity. Within remote communities, white teachers find themselves between two markedly different groups of which the Aboriginal community is unfamiliar and largely foreign.

### 1.2 Theoretical framework guiding this study

In foregrounding the position of the white teacher in a very remote Aboriginal community school, this study seeks to understand the challenges to white teacher practice in a context in which western ideologies rub against Aboriginal ideologies.

According to Bhabha, an important figure in postcolonial studies, when two different cultures come together they enter "borderline engagements of cultural difference" (1994, p. 3). Drawing heavily on the work of Said (1994), a Palestinian cultural critic educated in the western canon who applied his western education and bi-cultural perspective to draw attention to the gaps of cultural and political understanding between the Western world and Eastern world, Bhabha proposed that colonialism does not disappear, but rather, heavily intrudes on the present.

Introducing Third Space theory, Bhabha identifies borderline engagements of cultural difference that occur when people originating and identifying with different cultures come together. Taking a positive view of difference, Bhabha proposed when two different groups interact at the borderline, they come together in-between the two different cultures. He explains that "a site of in-betweenness becomes the ground of discussion, dispute, concession, apology and negotiation through which two different groups come together" (Bhabha, 1994, p. x). Bhabha determines that while the site of in-betweenness can be a geographical site or non-site, it is an enunciative space in which talk happens between people. The space can be real or imagined. It is not the space that is important but what happens within that space between two different groups that provides the basis of Bhabha's Third Space theory. Bhabha's Third Space conceives "the encounter of two groups with two different cultural traditions and potentials of power as a special kind of negotiation or translation that takes place in a Third Space of enunciation" (Ikas & Wagner, 2009, p. 2). Bhabha's Third Space theory (1994) forms the theoretical framework to this study.

Bhabha's Third Space theory (1994) is similar to other theoretical positions in literature pertaining to Aboriginal affairs of which education is one aspect. Nakata's "cultural interface" (2007, p. 199), Luke and Phillips' creation of a "relational space for dialogue" (2016, p. 38) and Maddison's attention to "Intercultural dialogue" (2011, p. 158) all attend to the point of intersection between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This study also focused on the white teacher's interactions at the point of intersection between the teacher and the remote Aboriginal community. However, this study takes a broader view of interactions between these two different groups perceiving teachers and the community as coming from two different Spaces of social practice. Each of the Spaces is discrete with their own social orders and arrangements that influence people's talk, actions and ways of relating to others that remain distinct

until they come together at the borderline (Bhabha, 1994). In this study the two groups are the remote Aboriginal community and the institution of education who each bring their prearranged social orders that inform how people from each group interact with the 'other' (Said, 1994). Additionally, interactions with 'other' also influence practices within their respective Space. This study focuses on the 'coming together' and how it impacts on teacher practice and the impact of 'coming together' on institution practices. Rather than examining both sides of the dialogue from representatives of each Space, the community and the institution of education, this study deliberately isolated white teacher voice. White teacher voice was privileged to distinguish the challenges experienced by white teachers in a remote Aboriginal community and identify the conditions holding challenges to teacher practice in place.

Bhabha intimates that cultural difference is not merely a matter of translating between two homogenous groups. He identifies the problematic nature of cultural ascriptions: that a cultural group is homogenous only in the eyes of the person or group who is an outsider to the group and that "the analytic of cultural difference intervenes to transform the scenario of articulation – not simply to disclose the rationale of political discrimination" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 232). Bhabha argues that the:

> aim of cultural difference is to rearticulate the sum of knowledge from the perspective of the signifying position of the minority that resists totalization – the repetition that will not return as the same, the minus-in-origin that results in political and discursive strategies where adding to does not add up but serves to disturb the calculation of power and knowledge, producing other Spaces of subaltern significance. (1994, p. 233)

In the context of Aboriginal education several concepts need to be understood to ascertain Bhabha's meaning. Firstly, Aboriginal people are not a homogenous group (Folds, 2001; Tatz, 1975; Trudgen, 2000). Rather, Aboriginal people identify with their clan group who devise social arrangements to organise people's relationships with such factors as land, language, history and food. Aboriginal people came to be identifiable as Aboriginal after white settlement increasing their assertions of Aboriginality in quests to overturn discriminatory policies established by white governments, as discussed in Chapter 2. Aboriginal people, displaced from traditional lands overtaken by white settlers developed political and discursive strategies to proffer a counter culture and power to white governance encroaching on pre-colonial practices that centred around

the land. Through tenuous unification, Aboriginal people were able to give voice to their difference to dominating white practices and political structures and "produce other Spaces of subaltern significance" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 233).

Rather than offering a counter-culture or counter argument to cultural and political domination, Bhabha's Third Space theory puts forth a challenge "into the present of a specific cultural performance, the traces of all those diverse disciplinary discourses and institutions of knowledge that constitute the condition and contexts of culture" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 233). In this study, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people shape and are shaped by their respective cultures and societal structures but come together in the shared Space of the local school to engage in the cultural performance of education. Recognising cultural and societal differences forebodes tensions between two markedly different groups of people. These tensions become more complex when taking note of Australia's unkind history towards Aboriginal people and white Australian legislation demanding that all Australian students attend school every day. The lack of consideration of Aboriginal cultural and societal mores creates a situation in which white teachers are on Aboriginal land imposing non-Aboriginal institutionally derived normative practices onto people who have and continue to resist the total dominance of white people.

In accordance with Bhabha's understandings of cultural difference with origins in colonialism, local Aboriginal clan groups create contestation to established institutional norms installed by the institution of education. Bhabha's Third Space theory perceives the cultural differences between Aboriginal clan groups and white Australia with their respective cultural practices pertaining to education as an "opportunity for new forms of meaning, and strategies of identification" (Bhabha 1994, p. 233). From two different cultures coming together at the boundary or liminal Space, cultural contestations offer a possibility to "shift the ground of knowledges" and engage in the "war of position" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 233) to create a critical process that is "disjunctive and capable of articulating…forms of activity which are both at once ours and other" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 233-234). Bhabha's Third Space theory acknowledges colonialism but proffers a way of working together that subjugates normative practices installed by the dominating culture rather than subjugating people. The subaltern, Aboriginal people, are re-positioned as equal partners whose knowledge, understanding and skills are equally valued and valid because they are necessary in ensuring sharedness founded on equality.

In order to maintain social order, governments often utilise gestures of 'adding on' whereby a social arrangement is adjusted to include people who are typically excluded. This gesture of 'adding on' is a familiar element of contemporary society and intended to include people who sit outside the dominant groups ideas of 'normal'. Bhabha argues that adding on, a typical action utilised by the coloniser towards the colonised, is not part of the Third Space process of converting difference (us/them) into unity (us/ours). The creation of a Third Space requires participants from different cultures (Aboriginal and white Australian) to challenge practices implicit in discursive and political practices of the dominant culture (white Australia). Bhabha argues "the difference of cultural knowledge that 'adds to' but does not 'add up' is the enemy of the implicit generalization of knowledge or the implicit homogenization of experience…as the major strategies of containment and closure" (1994, p. 234) of the dominant ideology. Cultural translation, or hybrid sites of meaning (us/ours), is unable to take place and to create a true site of equality, whereby all people are equal, by adding "contents or contexts that augment the positivity of a pre-given disciplinary or symbolic presence" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 234). The dominant group cannot speak or act on the behalf of the minority, nor is it authentic partnership within the shared or Third Space if representatives from the dominant group do not alter pre-given or symbolic practices, policies and other cultural artifacts. The obvious input of the minority group needs to be included such that practices, policies and other cultural artifacts are transformed, suitable to the context in which they are shaped and enacted and therefore, unlike those found in other contexts.

### 1.3 Rationale for the study and research questions

Teacher practice has been confirmed as having significant influence over student outcomes (Hattie, 2003, 2009). Numerous studies, seeking to improve Indigenous students' education outcomes, have identified the importance of teacher pedagogy (Berry & Hudson, 1997; Harrison, 2008; Osborne, 1996; Rose, 2008; Yunkaporta, 2009), teacher effectiveness (Godfrey, Partington, Richer, & Harslett, 2001; Harslett, Godfrey, Harrison, Partington, & Richer, 1999), valuing Indigenous knowledge and perspectives (Christie, 1995; Nakata, 2002; Sarra, 2005; Yunkaporta & McGinty, 2009), and teacher perceptions of and relationship with Indigenous students (Aikenhead & Huntley, 1999; Bishop & Berryman, 2006; Yunkaporta, 2009). Many more studies exist to provide information to teachers about the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait

Islander students they teach (Beresford, 2003b; Buckskin, 2012; Nakata, 2007; Yunkaporta, 2009). Notions of borderline engagement between white teachers and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students have been foregrounded in Nakata's "cultural interface" (Nakata, 2007). Despite numerous trials and tribulations initiated by policy, research, public opinion and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander benefactors, and debates about the best way forward in remote Aboriginal community school, white teachers, now and in the foreseeable future, comprise the majority of teachers in remote and very remote Aboriginal communities (MATSITI, 2014).

This study argues the current importance of white teacher voice as critical in discussions about what is going on in remote Aboriginal community schools where Aboriginal student academic outcomes continue to be well below national benchmarks (ACARA, 2016e). White teachers, as the majority of teachers in remote Aboriginal community schools, are at the coalface of education in remote schools. As the local faces of the institution of education, white teachers are involved in borderline engagements with members of the local community every day. At the borderline, teachers encounter difference. The contrast between white teachers and the Aboriginal community have been identified as two different worlds that are foreign and confusing for teachers (Fryberg et al., 2013; Howard, 2006; Phillips & Luke, 2016) and Aborigines (Folds, 1987; Trudgen, 2000).

The prompt to this study was a desire to explore white teachers' uncertainties: what they worry about, challenges they face, meanings they make and strategies they apply at the borderline of engagement as they teach in a very remote Aboriginal school. As observed by Bhabha, "terms of cultural engagement, whether antagonistic or affiliative are produced performatively" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 3). By listening to white teachers as they teach in a remote Aboriginal community school, insight can be gained into the reasons teachers continue to struggle to improve very remote Aboriginal student learning outcomes.

Two questions shape this study. They are:

1. What are the challenges experienced by white teachers in a remote Aboriginal community school?
2. Why do white teachers experience the challenges they do?

Third Space theory is useful in exploring these research questions because it foregrounds the challenges that often take place when people of two different cultures come together. In this study, cultural differences occur between the white teacher and the Aboriginal community. Bhabha identifies 'borderline engagements of cultural difference may often be consensual as conflictual; they may confound our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign the customary boundaries between the private and the public sphere, high and low; and challenge normative expectations of development and progress" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 3). Further, Third Space theory recognises "the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representations involved in the contest for political and social authority within the modern world order" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 245). Teachers are aligned with the dominating institution of education which directs all aspects of Australian education. Since white settlement Aboriginal people, as a minority group within Australia, and their clan practices have been subjugated by successive government policies. Striving to maintain their Aboriginal identity, Aboriginal people have sought to negotiate Aboriginal practices into the institution's education model with varying degrees of success. Recognising the unequal and uneven forces of cultural representation in the context of a government school in a remote Aboriginal community, this study utilised Third Space theory to define 'what could be'. Utilising Third Space theory, 'what could be' is yet to be determined by the people involved in the project of, in the instance of this study, education and schooling in this remote Aboriginal community. Perusing the literature, what could be is premised on political and social authority about education and schooling being equally shared by the institution and the Aboriginal community. To assist in identifying and interpreting the challenges reported by teachers in view of answering the research questions, I analysed teacher saying, doings and relatings within the potential Third Space of the school (Bhabha, 1994) utilising the Practice Architectures framework (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014) discussed further in Chapter Four. I then drew on descriptions of Third Space practices, the context of this study and the findings from this study to develop my perception of 'what could be'.

### 1.4 Significance of this study

The weight of cultural difference occurs when white teachers, an extension of the institution of education, and members of the local Aboriginal community, students, family members and Aboriginal employees, come together at the borderline in the

shared Space of the school. The concept of difference between white teachers and the local Aboriginal community in this study "focuses on the problem of the ambivalence of cultural authority: the attempt to dominate in the *name* (author's italics) of a cultural supremacy which is itself produced only in the moment of differentiation" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 51). In Australia, authority for student learning is held by the government in the form of the institution of education that is then manifested in state/territory jurisdictions. Although white teachers align with a model of education in which students leave the family for six hours a day, five days a week as espoused by the institution, clan groups, comprising the remote Aboriginal community, legitimate clan teaching and learning practices that revolve around family/clan relationships and have maintained pre-colonial traditions that include but are not limited to ceremonies guided by environmental seasons. Aboriginal people in the context of this study desire to know about white education but not at the cost of existing cultural traditions that shape their clan model of education (Trudgeon, 2000). Teachers are embroiled in this socio-political stand-off between a government who demands "every child, every day at school and learning" (Altman, 2013, p. 114) and clan groups who experience extremely high levels of social dysfunction (Calma, 2005, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Gooda, 2011a, 2011b; Pearson, 2005) continue to follow pre-colonial traditions while simultaneously seeking benefits from white education.

As people from each group come together, "it is the very authority of culture as knowledge of referential truth which is at issue in the concept and moment of *enunciation* (author's italics) " (Bhabha, 1994, p. 51). While white teachers draw on truths associated with teaching as a member of the institution of education, Aboriginal students, families and staff members also draw on truths associated with being a member of an Aboriginal clan group in their community. Interactions between the white teachers and the Aboriginal community at the borderline engagement lead to a destabilisation of the systems of reference and a lack of certainty "in the articulation of new cultural demands, meanings, strategies in the political present, as a practice of domination, or resistance" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 3). The struggle experienced by white teachers in the borderline engagement within the in-between Space of the school is the focus of this study.

Investigating the struggles experienced by white teachers in this remote Aboriginal community school highlights the precise nature of issues preventing teacher

effectiveness and improving Aboriginal student academic outcomes. In knowing the precise nature of the challenges reported by teachers in situ, the institution will acquire greater insight into how to progress the education improvement agenda in this school for this community. Education in remote Aboriginal communities is not achieving the desired results despite numerous attempts to redress inequities and address the very poor academic outcomes achieved by Aboriginal students. Although the 'Closing the Gap' strategy identifies the need for "responsive and appropriate education" (Australian Indigenous Health*InfoNet*, 2015), the institution of education continues to look inwards at what the institution can do to improve student outcomes. By listening to teachers who teach Aboriginal students in a remote Aboriginal community, insight can be gained into challenges they experience in delivering the curriculum; teaching Aboriginal students who identify with local clan groups which are markedly different to mainstream Australian society; interacting with families and the local community; collaborating with locally employed Aboriginal staff; and implementing strategies devised by the institution with little to no input from the local community. Rather than limiting the view of education to the institution, this study, through the lens of the teacher, looks at the teacher, the school, the institution and the community for possible causes of the challenges and possible solutions. In this study, teacher voices have not been censored by a research agenda focused on a discrete aspect of Aboriginal education. Rather, this critical ethnography utilised teachers' experience within the complex terrain of policy, strategy, school leadership interpretation, perceptions of professionalism, a contentious Australian history, community expectation, and societal and cultural differences between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people to enable context specific "responsive and appropriate education" (Australian Indigenous Health*InfoNet*, 2015). This study examined what the challenges are and *why* the challenges exist. Because the perspective was Third Space theory, this study opens up the possibility of new ways of talking, doing and relating (Kemmis, McTaggart, & Nixon, 2014) that holds the potential for more effective learning from the community's and the institution's perspectives.

### 1.5 Research design

While following in the traditions of ethnography, critical ethnography applies a critical theory basis to focus on the implicit values underpinning the culture being studied. Critical ethnography and the critical ethnographer "takes us beneath surface appearances, disrupts the *status quo* (author's italics), and unsettles both neutrality and

taken for granted assumptions by bringing to light underlying and obscure operations of power and control" (Madison, 2012, p. 5). Critical ethnography was selected as the methodology for this study because it foregrounds understanding of 'what is' with an eye on 'what could be' (Anderson, 1989; Carspecken, 1996; Madison, 2012; Thomas, 1993). Often, critical ethnography focuses on unequal power relations such as those between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Australians. As a non-Aboriginal person aligned with the dominant culture, the white teacher could have been positioned as an oppressor in this study. My argument, however, is that the non-Aboriginal teacher in a government installed school in a remote Aboriginal community is similarly, if not entirely, as oppressed as the Aboriginal community for whom they teach. However, as cautioned by Thomas (1993), positioning the institution as the natural oppressor in the dynamics of the remote Aboriginal community school would be remiss. Had I taken the position that the institution was the perpetrator and the teacher and community were the victims I would have overlooked critical information during data collection and my interpretation of the data would have been clouded. This matter is discussed further in Chapter Three. Attending to matters of oppression, Third Space theory acts as a reminder that while power may be distributed unevenly and unequally between the First and Second Spaces, there is an opportunity to restore power balances in the Third Space.

This qualitative, ethnographic study was generated over approximately two and a half school years during which time the researcher was positioned as a participant observer. I was both a staff member of the school in which the study took place and the researcher. To differentiate between student year levels and time periods of this study throughout this thesis, I record student year levels as, for example 'Year One' and study time periods as ***Year 1***. I continued to be a staff member of the school after the data collection period for another 4.25 years and took a leave of absence to complete the writing of the thesis.

During the first three terms of data collection with teachers, I directed a Participatory Action Research Project (PAR) (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000) that focused on improving English and literacy instruction in the classroom. During the PAR project, it became apparent that despite teacher efforts to focus their attention on literacy practices in the classroom, other forces were immobilising their practice. The trusting relationships and robust conversations established between teachers, and me, as both

researcher and colleague, and the teachers during this PAR project enabled me to gain rich data about teacher practice. At the beginning of the fourth term of data collection with teachers, I brought the PAR project to an end due to a change in school leadership. I took this action to protect my research and because the culture of teachers talking to teachers and my inclusion as both a colleague and a participating researcher in teacher conversations enabled me to continue the PAR approach with smaller groups of teachers referred to as PODs. While the PAR project did not continue in its original form, tenets of PAR continued in a more narrow sense that enabled me to participate in conversations about teacher practice and conversations in which teachers and I, with supportive critical friends, whose role I describe in detail in Chapter 2, gave forthright accounts about their daily practice, potential barriers and enablers and personal insights into what was going on within the school, community and classroom.

In addition to enabling me to capture forthright conversations between teachers and me, my involvement with PAR also contributed to how I analysed teacher practice. In the first instance of analysing data, I utilised the Australian Institution for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2012) to interpret teacher talk against the key elements of teacher practice. Once I aligned teacher talk against institutional expectations of the key elements of teachers' knowledge, practice and professional engagement, I returned to PAR (Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014) to further delve into teacher practice. To assist the interrogation of practices, Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon developed the "Practice Architectures" framework (2014, p. 53) that enables researcher and participants to delve deeper into the Space in which the practice takes place. Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon's 'Practice Architectures' recognise the sayings doings and relatings evident in practice are "made possible by cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements found in or brought to the sites where practices actually happen" (2014, p. 3). Close interrogation of teachers' sayings, doings and relatings identified Practice Architectures from both their employing institution and the local community as influencing what was and was not possible in teacher practice.

This study utilises emic and etic perspectives to investigate the challenges teachers experience. In educational research, an "emic perspective attempts to capture participants' indigenous meanings of real-world events" (Yin, 2010, p. 11) and "looks at things through the eyes of the members of the culture being studied" (Willis, 2007, p.

100). The emic perspective is favoured by education researchers because of the belief "it is impossible to truly comprehend and appreciate the nuances of a particular culture unless one resides within that culture" (Olive, 2014). As a teacher within the school during this study I was aptly positioned to gain insider views of the culture of this school. As a participant in this study, I too experienced many of the challenges reported by teachers. However, as the researcher, I was also in a position to perceive of the school more objectively than teachers.

In contrast to the internal view of a culture, the more external view of a culture is referred to as the etic perspective. In education research, the etic perspective is most often associated with the researcher who strives to view the "structures and criteria developed outside the culture as a framework for studying the culture" (Willis, 2007, p. 100). Taking the etic view, I used preexisting Third Space theory in conjunction with Practice Architectures to analyse the teacher accounts about the culture of the school. Also, because teacher practice in this school took place at the borderline between white society via the institution of education and Aboriginal society via the local clan groups, I needed to have the etic perspective to "enable comparisons to be made across multiple cultures and populations which differ contextually" (Olive, 2014). To assist with the etic perspective, I garnered the assistance of locally employed assistant teachers (ATs) who were pre-service teachers enrolled in the Charles Darwin University (CDU) Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Primary (BTLP) during this study.

During the delivery of the BTLP, the pre-service teachers and I frequently engaged in robust dialogue pertaining to remote Aboriginal student educational outcomes; teaching students who did not have city experiences; outsiders (teachers) taking up tenure as teachers in the pre-service teachers' community; and the daily challenges influencing the possibilities of teaching and learning. During these discussions, the pre-service teachers and I perceived of each other as equals. Neither the pre-service teachers or I understood each others' world yet desired to delve into each others' point of view to understand where many misunderstandings between white and Aboriginal people in this school were originating. These rigorous discussions led me to realise the value of the pre-service students' perspectives yet also made me uneasy as I was in a position of privilege as a senior teacher role within the school and the pre-service students' school-based CDU lecturer. After discussing this dilemma with my supervisor, I asked these pre-service teachers to be critical friends rather than participants for my study as many

of the topics we discussed were related to the differences and nuances presented in this study. During our discussions in lectures and tutorials I recognised the insight these pre-service teachers had. I also realised I could not write about the community with any authority as the limited literature that was available was authored and published by white people or government agencies. To truly present the Second Space I needed the insights of these pre-service teachers and I needed to clarify my understandings of what was happening with my tertiary students to ensure I wasn't misinterpreting situations or misrepresenting local people.

Critical Ethnography methodology illuminates unequal distribution of power and authority between historically dominant and marginalised groups which, in this study, relates to the relationship between the institution of education and the local Aboriginal community. Having lived and worked in these contexts for over fifteen years and been involved in numerous strategies to improve remote Aboriginal student outcomes, I recognised the unequal distribution of power between the institution and the community and the very different practices that went beyond linguistic and cultural differences between the non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Australians. Despite recognising differences and supporting teachers to critically reflect on practice, I had yet to delve deeply into the constraints on teacher practice by considering power relations between the community and the institution. By utilising critical ethnography and foregrounding the white teacher in this remote Aboriginal community I was able to include the influence of unequal power relations, if any, on my interrogations into teacher practice in this context.

In so doing, I emphasised the school as a place in which cultural differences between white teachers and the Aboriginal community collide. Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994) complements critical ethnography's what is' and 'what can be' by identifying and critically examining the challenges within the lived experiences of people in the liminal Space. The site of the borderline engagement, in the instance of this study, the school, is the potential Third Space. By emphasising the school as a Space, this study critically examines white teacher practices as reported by the teachers to determine what is going on in this remote Aboriginal community school. The concept of 'Space' is pivotal in this study and requires further explanation.

The term ‘Space’, as utilised in this study, is best described as a place or an area as it occurs in a particular period or interval of time (Ikas & Wagner, 2009). The predominant Spaces influencing teacher practice in this study include the local Aboriginal community where the students live, the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NTDET) which employs the teachers and the school in which teaching and learning takes place. Spaces can be understood as “the total nexus of interconnected human practices” (Schatzki, 2001, p. 2). The field of practices in each Space embodies cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political orders and arrangements that “prefigure and shape the conduct of practice” (Kemmis, Wilkinson, Hardy, & Edwards-Groves, 2009, p. 2) to establish and sustain social order. Teachers, like all people, have membership in numerous Spaces and as such, must navigate and negotiate the orders and arrangements that shape each Space. Spaces in which teachers have had or continue to have membership are many and varied and are not necessarily limited to a physical place. In the new millennium, teachers can have membership to online communities and can maintain contact with members in other Spaces without being physically present. Membership to a specific Space demands an understanding of the orders and arrangements comprising practices that have already been established and are identified by participants as belonging to that Space. When a teacher participates in Spaces that are subsets of their own culture, they are able to draw on similarities to help them learn the orders and arrangements pertinent to that Space. In contrast, when teachers participate in a Space that is dissimilar to their own culture, the orders and arrangements are foreign.

To limit the Spaces a teacher encounters in a remote Aboriginal community context to the school and the community is being over-simplistic. To state that teaching in a school remote Aboriginal community is different from teaching in an urban or rural school is also over-simplistic. However, for the purpose of this study, I use simplistic terms ‘remote Aboriginal community school’ to identify a particular type of school in a particular type of community. All schools are different, but membership to a particular education provider, or institution, intimates common characteristics. Most schools across Australia have readily identifiable orders and arrangements that define them as schools. The average Australian citizen is able to identify a school as opposed to a shop or a hospital. Each of these Spaces is recognisable physically, socially and spatially. Shops have orders and arrangements that make them shops. Hospitals have orders and

arrangements that make them hospitals. So, too, schools have orders and arrangements that make them schools. There are observable sayings, doings and relatings that shape the conduct of practice within each of these Spaces (Kemmis, McTaggart, et al., 2014). The context of this study stands out as being geographically isolated in a community predominantly populated by Aboriginal people.

It is the sayings, doings and relatings within the Space of this remote Aboriginal community school that is of interest in this investigation. As such, the school is the place in which the familiar and the unfamiliar come together with prefigured cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political orders and arrangements that shape the conduct of practice. The school space needs to be understood as a shared Space in which both the familiar (the institution) and the unfamiliar (the community) orders and arrangements meet, and shape and are shaped by teachers.

## 1.6 The researcher

According to Hammersley and Atkinson,

> the ethnographer participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned. (1983, p. 2)

### 1.6.1 Coming to the context of this study

In August 2009, I accepted an appointment at this school as a curriculum support leader. One of the conditions of employment was the principal's support to undertake doctoral study until the end of 2011. For the rest of 2009 I collaborated with teachers and the School Leadership to revitalise teaching and learning with emphasis on curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. During this time I kept a researcher journal to record my reflections. In January of ***Year 1*** of the study, I invited 10 non-Indigenous primary teachers to be research participants. I selected the primary years as this was the school sector I was most familiar with and in which I was employed in this school. I was also further involved in the primary sector of the school after taking on the role of a school-based lecturer employed by both Charles Darwin University (CDU) and NTDET to deliver the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Primary (BTLP) to Aboriginal staff

employed in the school as assistant teachers. From early ***Year 2*** until ***mid-Year 3*** of the study, I collected data in the form of recorded conversations and interviews with participating teachers and a final group interview ustilised to signal the end of data collection with teachers. I stopped collecting data from participants in ***mid-Year 3*** as I recognised I was not gaining new information. For the rest of ***Year 3***, I continued recording my reflections in my researcher journal to ensure I had captured all of the information I required.

Realising the privilege of my senior teacher role as a school-based CDU lecturer supporting local Aboriginal assistant teachers (ATs) to complete their Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Primary (BTLP) I invited these pre-service teachers to be critical friends for my study. All eight accepted the opportunity to be my critical friends and involved their family members. I also ensured my critical friends had final say over the content related to the local community and the glossary. I also reminded my critical friends that I would acquiesce to their requests pertaining to this study as I was mindful of the sensitivity of Indigenous representation, particularly in a white person's thesis, in literature. My critical friends saw an opportunity to add their voice to this dissertation's story.

### 1.6.2 Background of the Researcher

Thomas (1993), a critical ethnographer, identifies the researcher "as part and parcel of the research process" (p. 67). Seeking to identify and interpret the outside forces that contribute to participants' perceptions of what is going on, critical ethnographers are concerned with "unmasking dominant social constructions and the interests they represent, studying society with the goal of transforming it, and freeing individuals from sources of domination and repression" (Anderson, 1989, p. 254). The role of the critical ethnographer is to "systematically and critically unveil" participants and the social phenomena being studied (Anderson, 1989, p. 253). To this end, the researcher engages in self-reflective processes and "reflection on the dialectical relationship between structural/historical forces and human agency" (Anderson, 1989, p. 254). In this study, while the focus is on white teachers, knowledge and understanding of remote Aboriginal communities is a critical component of systematically and critically unveiling white teacher experiences and the social phenomena of them teaching in a government school in a remote Aboriginal community. Knowledge of both the white

institution of education and remote Aboriginal communities positions the researcher to be cognisant of the nuances within the context to enable a depth of critique and analysis that would not be available to someone new to the context.

A white teacher, I came to be involved in education for Indigenous Australians 25 years ago in 1991, in my final year of undergraduate teacher training. Tutoring adolescent boys from the Torres Straits Islands and from a remote Queensland community, I quickly realised general teaching skills were not enough. While I had always been curious about Indigenous Australians, tutoring the boys inspired me to learn more about their backgrounds and to address the blatant inequities they regularly discussed with me. After teaching in England for six months during the mid-nineties, I gained permanency as a registered teacher in a remote Aboriginal school in Cape York Queensland and have since dedicated my career to improving education in remote communities in North and Far North Queensland and the Northern Territory. My roles in remote Indigenous schools have ranged from classroom teacher, learning support teacher, English as a second language project officer, principal, head of curriculum to university lecturer for remote Indigenous students. Residing in Cairns, Far North Queensland in 2007 and 2008, I continued to be directly involved with education for remote Indigenous students as a senior curriculum officer and regional literacy manager allocated to 38 remote Indigenous schools. My desire to make teaching and learning in remote communities more efficient and effective led me to dissect advice from both my employing institution and the community in which I was located. I went beyond the school gate and was rewarded exponentially. Since leaving the responsibilities of classroom teacher and taking on other many and varied roles, the unifying element across my work is that of supporting teachers, particularly those in remote Indigenous contexts.

My first teaching post in a remote Aboriginal school inspired me to undertake a post-graduate Diploma in Learning Support to gain specialist skills my students needed. While this was helpful, my Masters in Applied Linguistics which followed was more beneficial in that it developed my linguistic and interrogative skills. Despite my academic qualifications being developed in remote Aboriginal communities, my experiences in support roles for teachers garnered a much deeper appreciation of the need for something being inherently amiss with Indigenous education.

In 2004 I became involved in the New Basics Project. A Queensland curriculum, New Basics was an initiative designed to renew "our work as educators, returning to the basics of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, with a clear focus on improving students outcomes through increasing the intellectual rigour of their work" (Grauf, 2001, p. 2). Throughout the New Basics project from 2000 – 2006, a number of moderators were employed to support both the implementation of New Basics curriculum and facilitation of moderation workshops to ensure agreement between professionals regarding assessment criteria and standards. In 2004, I was employed as the only New Basics moderator based in and across remote community schools. I found myself working alongside teachers who lamented similar challenges to those I had faced ten years earlier as a classroom teacher in a remote Aboriginal community school. While I had sustained teaching in remote contexts, I had perceived the complexities as something that were present but one just got on with the business of teaching.

As the Curriculum Development Officer with the 'Bound for Success' project, a program designed to increase student attendance, academic achievements and school completion (Department of Education and the Arts, 2006), I was integral to developing a curriculum that addressed the identified desires of the community. The Bound for Success project recognised the high number of white teachers and high teacher turnover in Cape York and the Torres Strait Islands as having significant impact on student outcomes. To support teacher implementation of the curriculum, I created planning exemplars for teachers bringing together theory and practice to address conceptual and linguistic differences between Indigenous students and non-Indigenous teachers. Observing teacher struggles and successes implementing the Bound for Success curriculum, I developed a desire to probe more deeply into teachers' lived experiences in remote communities. I realised it wasn't just me who had struggled as a classroom teacher in a remote community. Further, I realised the issues weren't changing despite new policies and approaches being introduced.

My desire deepened in 2009 after I was invited by Indigenous staff at Bwgcolman Community School, Palm Island, to develop the inaugural Cultural Curriculum to partner the Queensland Curriculum's Scope and Sequence document, ironically adopted from the Bound for Success Curriculum. Bwgcolman Community Schools "2008 triennial review identified the need for the cultural, social and historical aspects of students' lives to be incorporated into curriculum provision at Bwgcolman Community

School" (Egan & Coutts, unpublished, p. 5). Indigenous staff at Bwgcolman Community School, comprising registered teachers and long-term ancillary staff recognised high student absenteeism every Friday as an opportunity to provide focused instruction about Palm Island, calling on the Principal to fund my employment as a consultant to develop relevant curriculum documents. Indigenous staff at Bwgcolman Community School directed the development and implementation of the curriculum. During the process of implementation, Indigenous staff highlighted both the interest and struggles shared by their white teacher partners.

Beyond my formal education and professional life experiences, I have had the honour of being 'adopted' by families in Kowanyama and Palm Island, two Aboriginal communities in Queensland and maintaining long and respected friendships with individuals and families in several other communities. My husband and I have been entrusted with the care of our Aboriginal daughter, a Kokoberra girl from Kowanyama. This has given me even greater insight into the lived realities of Indigenous Australians. Reflecting with my families and friends about why I was allowed in and continue to be included in families' and friends' robust conversations about progressing their respective communities, I have been told it is because I was a 'normal' person who just 'understood' and was willing to listen and learn. Families and friends also like that I 'talk straight' and there is no guessing what is in my head. I have reflected on my conversations and experiences in remote contexts over the last twenty years, and continue to do so as I support teachers who are new to remote indigenous contexts.

I confess to my own struggles, unsure of the next step and wary of upsetting individuals and families. I live in two worlds; I struggle in two worlds; I celebrate two worlds. I have found myself in many pilot roles that require the mutual generosity of spirit and goal chasing of myself, my colleagues and the local Indigenous people seeking to get education right for children and young people in remote contexts. I see the inequities and strive to challenge and address these. At times, I feel that it is all too much but while my colleagues and family maintain momentum, I continue to add my own efforts to improving outcomes for Indigenous

youth and their respective families. Sometimes, I shudder at what I used to take for granted as being 'right'. My lens has been cleared of much black and white thinking, excuse the pun, and I have come to perceive much of what I see in remote Indigenous communities as opportunities for a new and more efficient and effective way of improving the life circumstances for all. To do this, we need current and accurate information. And we need to work together.

My career and my decision to complete this study have been greatly influenced by numerous theorists including the New London Group comprising Courtney Cadzen, Bill Cope, Norman Fairclough, James Gee, Mary Kalantzis, Gunther Kress, Allan Luke, Carmen Luke, Sarah Michaels and Martin Nakata (1996). This group introduced 'multiliteracies' as a new pedagogical approach aimed to make classroom teaching more inclusive of linguistic, cultural, communicative and technological diversity. The multiliteracies pedagogical approach resonated with my own experiences working in Aboriginal communities and the limitations of a system that did not elucidate how my students and the curriculum related. Recognising marginalisation within my work contexts, I took to the streets and began talking to community members about their experiences with school which then broadened to experiences with Australian institutions. People's stories resonated with critics of standardised models of western education such as Peter Mclaren (2000) and especially Paulo Friere (1972; 1974 and 1992). It was when I engaged with Martin Nakata's work about how Indigenous Australians are positioned at the cultural interface in Australian institutions in "Disciplining the Savages, savaging the disciplines" (2007) that I became particularly interested in the non-Indigenous teachers' perspectives at the cultural interface. I reflected on the dominant script emerging from the institution of education and how it did not resonate with what I saw and heard in Aboriginal communities. With this in mind, I became emboldened to imagine the places teachers could take education and the possibilities for improving education for remote Indigenous students if both teacher and

community voices could come together to sort through many of the tensions I experienced as a teacher in discrete communities; tensions that I observed other teachers also having to navigate.

### 1.7 Assumptions underpinning this study

Baron explains that "assumptions usually address limitations that the researcher is aware of that may affect the study but which the researcher will not attempt to control" (2008, p. 7). This study has been influenced by four dominant assumptions. Firstly, education in remote Aboriginal community schools can and must be improved. But, education in remote Aboriginal community schools cannot be improved without local input nor can it be understood without knowing what happens on a daily basis inside the school. It is my unerring position that solutions will not and cannot come solely from white people or the institution to which the majority of Australians ascribe authority. Necessary changes to education in remote Aboriginal communities that produce positive results for students, families, the community and teachers can only come about through a collaborative and negotiated process that directly challenges and usurps normative processes that hold current unproductive and failing practices in place.

Secondly, education outcomes are contextually bound. The community context in which the school is located is just as influential as the institution providing the education service. Neither one, nor the other, has the solution to the complex interplay of a myriad of factors influencing teacher practice and students ability to engage with the institution's model of school. This study is prejudiced by my belief, that resolutions to entrenched issues that impact negatively on the quality of education in remote Aboriginal communities requires equal input from the institution and the community in which schooling takes place. It is my belief, based on my experience living and working in numerous remote Aboriginal communities and maintaining relationships with these communities, partnerships between the institution and the community need to position people equally. Until the institution shares the development of the school with the local Aboriginal community, the issues that continue to plague educators and communities cannot be resolved. Both the institution and the local community have a vested interest in Aboriginal students' improved education outcomes therefore both need to work together to articulate a shared vision that can be achieved by the school community.

Thirdly, the current culture of failure is damaging to students and teachers in remote Aboriginal community schools. Teachers and students do not come to the school to fail. Rather, this study assumes that teachers want to make a positive contribution to their remote Aboriginal students' academic performance and life outcomes.

Lastly, this study is premised on a belief that while teachers do have a significant impact on a student's education, it takes a village to raise a child. This traditional African proverb signals the need for the child to be the focus for improvement BUT draws attention to the influence of a myriad of people on what the child can and cannot do. In a remote Aboriginal community, both the community and the institution need to be in agreement about all matters of schooling, teaching and learning. To successfully raise a child, the village needs to articulate characteristics of the successful child, specify individual and group roles in accordance to raising the successful child to realise his/her full potential.

### 1.8 Limitations of this study

Several limitations are associated with this study. Firstly, this study took place in one remote aboriginal community. No two remote Aboriginal communities are exactly the same. However, remote Aboriginal communities are similar in terms of Aboriginal community and non-Aboriginal teachers coming together in the liminal Space. Many remote Aboriginal communities are identified as being dysfunctional (Pearson, 2009) and government agencies given the task of helping Aboriginal people in these communities to address and improve issues are falling short of the task. Therefore, while this study focuses on white teachers in one remote Aboriginal community school, these white teachers are representative of the many teachers and other government agents who have and will continue to come to community only to be confronted with similar challenges as those presented in this study.

Secondly, this study deliberately foregrounds the perspective of the white teacher. Despite wanting to formally capture local Aboriginal perspectives in this study, I would not have been granted ethics clearance nor did I believe the inclusion of local Aboriginal perspectives to be appropriate as I am an outsider in this community. At the start of this study, I was new to this community and had no research experience. Although I had established long term familial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in remote communities elsewhere in North and Far North

Queensland I had no such relationships in this school or community. I had no one to speak on my behalf from within this school or this community.

Thirdly, by taking the perspective of the white teacher and maintaining my own researcher journal I am privileging white voice. Despite white privilege being quite rightly questioned by Indigenous academics (Martin, 2008; Nakata, 2007; Sarra, 2011a; Yunkaporta, 2009), white teacher voice does give an account of experiences at the borderline between the community and the institution. Literature indicates the teacher voice is similarly silenced as that of the Aboriginal community as will be discussed in Chapter Three. In this study, I consider the white teacher voice as necessary because teachers are in a similar position of subjugation amid a current socio-political climate in which "teachers make the biggest difference" has drawn an onslaught of criticism against teachers and led to increased politically induced standardisations in what teachers can and cannot do (AITSL, 2012; Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2016; Australian Government, 2011).

### 1.9 Structure of this dissertation

This dissertation comprises seven chapters with Chapter One having outlined the rationale, purpose and significance of this study. Providing an overview of the theoretical framework underpinning this study in Chapter One makes explicit the perspective taken in this project which highlighted the significance of difference while striving towards equal and constructive partnerships between the institution of education and the local Aboriginal community. As well as influencing the research design, this perspective influenced the content of the second chapter.

Chapter Two outlines the context of this study, providing insight into dominating Spaces shaping teacher practice: the presiding institution of education, the local community and the school. The context plays a critical role in this study as this study is geographically located in a remote Aboriginal community. Chapter Two begins with a discussion about society and culture as the basis of difference between white and Aboriginal Australians. I then provide an overview of historical relations between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Australians as antecedents to the current situation into which teachers take up practice in this remote Aboriginal community. As much as possible, I describe each Space by providing a brief historical background before outlining current

perspectives guiding each Space. I finalise Chapter Two with my own observations of interactions between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people in this community.

Chapter Three explores the literature pertaining to this study. An in-depth critique of the literature led me to focus on white teachers in remote Aboriginal communities; political emphases to improve Aboriginal education outcomes; the purpose of school; educational success; and leadership and partnerships in remote Aboriginal education. Chapter 4 presents the methodology utilised in this study. This study's design is described, including data collection processes and techniques, data analysis phases and the analytical framework.

Chapter Five presents the findings of this study drawing on transcripts of conversations with teachers, the transcript of the final group interview and other recorded conversations and my research journal. Chapter Six synthesises and discusses the findings (Chapter Five), drawing on the literature review (Chapter Three) and the context (Chapter 2). Finally, Chapter Seven concludes the dissertation by summarising this study, presenting implications for practice in this remote Aboriginal community and the broader context of remote Indigenous education, and outlining suggested directions for further research.

# Chapter Two. The Context

## 2.1 Introduction

In this study, knowing the context in which teachers conduct practice is pivotal to understanding the challenges teachers experience and the underlying reasons for the existence of these challenges. From the perspective of Third Space theory, teacher practice in remote Aboriginal communities is influenced by three dominating groups: the employing institution, the local community for whom the education service is provided and the school in which teaching and learning actually takes place. Each of these groups is made up of people who talk, act and relate in ways to create the psychological, social and physical presence of their group. Membership to a group requires understanding the standard ways of talking, doing and relating that shape and are shaped by the group. Maintaining Bhabha's Third Space theory the three Spaces are described primarily from the perspective of the white teacher: the First Space of the institution of education; the Second Space of the local Aboriginal community; and the potential Third Space of the school.

### 2.1.1 Purpose of this chapter

Each of the three dominant Spaces, from the teachers' perspective, the institution (First Space), the community (Second Space) and the school (in-between Space), are described in terms of the people, cultural and discursive practices, socio-political practices and key foci of each Space at the time of this study. The contextual knowledge outlined in this chapter is drawn on in the Findings chapter (Chapter Five) to make meaning of the experiences relayed by teachers and the observations I recorded over the duration of this two and a half year study. This chapter and the Findings chapter intertwine to contribute to the discussion chapter (Chapter Six). The contextual knowledge provided about the First Space, the institution, and the Second Space, the community, is important in demonstrating and possibly explaining the differences between the First and Second Spaces and how these differences contribute to the challenges experienced by white teachers in the in-between Space of the school.

In accordance with Bhabha's Third Space theory (1990), the school cannot be described as a Third Space. A Third Space is a hybrid Space, co-constructed by two different groups who come together for a specific purpose. It is during the co-construction that cultural-discursive practices and socio-political practices are worked out in such a way

that each discrete group is unrecognisable in the Third Space. Each discrete group is positioned as a political equal in the Third Space and people from each group collaborate and negotiate to draw the most suitable practices from each Space to attend to the needs of people in the Third Space. Instead of the political authority of one Space dominating the Third Space, political authority is shared to ensure equality within the Third Space. In the process of co-constructing shared values and shared goals, cultural differences and stereotypes are addressed through enunciation, embracing a practice of openly discussing differences and ideas about each other in attempts to reach a unified agreement that is understood and enacted by all members. I have named the school as an in-between Space because the institution of education asserts its authority to oversee all aspects of schooling. In contrast, the community is positioned by people in both the institution and the school as consumers of the education service provided by the school. There is little evidence to suggest the school has been constructed by equally drawing on practices and desires and expectations of both the institution and the community.

### 2.1.2 Challenges in writing about the second Space

As anticipated, the Second Space, the community, proved to be challenging to write about because I am an outsider to this community. Furthermore, as a white Australian I am somewhat biased towards the institution of education because I was successfully educated via the model of schooling the Australian institution of education oversees. Thus, the institution of education, for me, is normal as both an urban white Australian and a professional educator. In saying that, I did not enter this context without awareness. Unlike most white educators, I have spent most of my adulthood in remote Aboriginal contexts across northern areas of Queensland and the Northern Territory and have gained considerable insight into differences existing between the First and Second Spaces. Each Aboriginal community is unique and as a newcomer to this context, I lacked experience and authority to write about this community; this Second Space. For this reason, I garnered the aid of assistant teachers who were studying the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Primary (BTLP) with Charles Darwin University (CDU) for the duration of this study, and for whom I provided academic support. Ethical considerations around my positioning of these pre-service teachers as critical friends for this study is discussed in Chapter Four. My critical friends and I engaged in rigorous dialogue about the differences between First Space and Second Space and how the differences between people from these discrete Spaces impacted on practices in the in-

between Space of the school. Together, we sought to understand each other's Second Space (for the pre-service teachers, the institution, and for me, the community) in efforts to identify if and how the two Spaces could come together in our teacher practices in the in-between Space of the school. Although it could reasonably be presumed the pre-service teachers were immersed in the institution of education, further interrogation revealed the pre-service teachers had little understanding about the institution nor were they recipients of an education comparable to non-Indigenous students, having completed Year 10 in the 1980s before the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (Department of Employment Education and Training, 1989). On many occasions, concepts presented in the school's curriculum were foreign and had to be specifically discussed in terms of how the concept was understood, or not, by community members. Discussions drawing on if and how the two Spaces could come together in our teacher practices in the in-between Space of the school drew my attention to the kinds of information required in describing each Space in this chapter.

I will be forever grateful for the opportunity my academic support role to the assistant teachers provided because the tensions our group had to dissemble in our own co-constructed 'Third Space' provided insight into the possibilities that spilled over into my thesis. Because I sought to provide authentic representation of the Second Space in this chapter, I invited my critical friends to both guide my writing and critique the content of this chapter with particular focus on the Second Space.

A defining moment for my critical friends and I was a professional development workshop with Richard Trudgeon in October, 2012. Trudgeon's publication, "Why warriors lie down and die" (2000) provided an intellectually rigorous source of information that represented the Aboriginal perspective of North-East Arnhem Land. During the workshop with Richard Trudgeon, my critical friends endorsed Trudgeon's authority of local Aboriginal (Binninj) culture based on his substantial involvement with a nearby Yolgnu community and kinship (see skin name, Appendix A) to them. Further, my critical friends explained that much of what he discussed in his publication applied in their own community. As I produced drafts of this chapter, the pre-service teachers sought endorsement from their families to ensure accuracy. Feedback from my critical friends and their families guided adjustments to my writing to make possible, accurate representation of the Second Space, this community.

Information provided draws on existing literature, including statistics from the Australian Bureau of Statistics, official reviews, published texts and policy documents; the observations I recorded in my diary; and conversations with critical friends.

### 2.1.3 Organisation of this chapter

The Context Chapter is restricted to providing a broad overview of each of the three Spaces in this study. It cannot do more than provide a broad overview of each Space because the particularities of each Space change moment by moment as influenced by numerous variables that occur in these social sites. This chapter focuses primarily on the Primary years when describing the institution of education and the school because this study focuses on white teachers of students in their first stage of schooling, the Primary years.

In section 2.2, I provide an overview of the First Space, the institution. This section attends to the institution of education including information from other government foci and legislative requirements elements that have been specifically developed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, yet does not fall within the authority of the institution of education. In describing the institution of education, I outline the priorities of Australian education as agreed upon by States and Territories converging on the Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDET), as the government proprietor of the school in which research participants worked. This section outlines the legislative requirements affecting the institution of education; resources allocated to schools; and socio-cultural practices that make the institution of education, First Space recognisable as being directed by the Australian governments.

In section 2.3, I provide an overview of the Second Space, the community. This section presents general information about the remote Aboriginal community in which this study took place. A description of clan society articulates the underpinning principles that guide daily practices of Aboriginal people in this community. Finally, the concerns of modern life, articulated by me, through my researcher journal, critical friends, Richard Trudgeon and successive Social Justice Reports (Calma, 2009a, 2009b; Gooda, 2011a, 2011b) provide insight into the worries about the future of local clan groups and anticipated outcomes of white education that are yet to be realised.

In section 2.4, I provide an overview of the in-between Space, the school. This section provides the background information about the education service provided by the school; the people who work in the school; school-based management structures; school practices; and school priorities. To further provide a sense of the environment in which the white teacher teaches, I briefly describe tensions between non-Indigenous teachers and Indigenous people from the community.

Before describing each of the dominating Spaces, societal differences between the Aboriginal clan groups and the nation-state society directed by Australian governments is briefly explored. It is my contention that the current status quo emphasis on cultural and linguistic differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians masks the more critical matter of societal difference. Societal type governs social practices between people including the purpose of specific activities, the maintenance of socio-cultural practices; and the ways people interact with each other to maintain social order.

### 2.1.4 Different types of societies

Over many years, the terms 'society' and 'culture' have become interchangeable. However, while overlapping, it is the structures of power and authority put in place to attend to the needs of the population that shape a society (Diamond, 2012). In contrast, Schein, a renowned American psychologist interested in organisational culture, describes culture as "both a 'here and now' dynamic phenomenon and a coercive background structure that influences us in multiple ways" (Schein, 2010, p. 3). For Schein, culture is directly related to:

> both stability and rigidity of how we perceive, feel and act in any given society, organization or occupation and has been taught to us by our various socialization experiences and becomes prescribed as a way to maintain 'social order'. (Schein, 2010, p. 3)

Schein explains culture as comprising concepts and phenomena that group members share or hold in common. Further, he argues an understanding of culture requires a deep, complex framework that captures the observable and unobservable aspects of culture. Drawing on anthropological models, Schein distinguishes observables events and underlying forces of culture as:

- Observed behavioural regularities when people interact: customs, traditions and rituals;

- Group norms: implicit standards and values;
- Espoused norms: publicly announced principles and values;
- Formal philosophy: broad policies and ideological principals that guide a group's actions;
- Rules of the game: implicit, unwritten rules for getting along;
- Climate: the feeling conveyed via the way members of the group interact;
- Habits of thinking, mental models and/or linguistic paradigms: cognitive frames that guide perceptions, thought and language used by group members and taught to new members in early socialisation processes;
- Shared meanings: the emergent understandings created by group members;
- "Root metaphors" or integrating models: ways groups evolve to characterise themselves, consciously or unconsciously, but embodied in material artifacts of the group; and
- Formal rituals and celebrations: the ways a group celebrates key events that reflect important values or important 'passages' by members. (2010, p. 14-16)

Culture comprises the norms, values, beliefs, customs and traditions shared by people within that culture. In contrast, society is best understood as the population of an area and structures put in place to guide the ways people interact with each other. Diamond (2012), an American scientist and Pulitzer Prize winner who explored differences between traditional and contemporary societies, highlights that societies are shaped by "population size, political centralization, and social stratification" (2012, p. 14).

Elman Service, an American cultural anthropologist whose sociopolitical typology is utilised by anthropologists and sociologists, argues all societies have a universal problem of maintenance: "maintenance of social order within the community and of the community itself in defense against outsiders" (1975, p. 11). The maintenance of social order within a community comes about through adherence to custom and normative ideology, those values and ideas that have become normalised and taken-for-granted. Central to custom is etiquette, morality and social sanctions. Etiquette refers to behaving politely towards other people in daily social life. Morality is the internalisation of right and wrong as a person's conscience. Finally, "social sanctions are informal, personal-social ways of punishing, rewarding, usually by the subtraction or addition of prestige, or by social repulsion and attraction, as related to the obeying or ignoring of certain social rules" (Service, 1975, p. 11).

Two types of society can be found in a remote Aboriginal community: 'nation-state' society organised into the nation of Australia and its States and Territories, and 'clan' society of Aboriginal people. Teachers are most familiar with nation-state society yet teach students from clan society. Clan society historically comprised less than 50

people, unlike nation-state society comprising anywhere from tens of thousands of people to billions of people. Although significant aspects of a culture can be sustained even as the population increases, social and political structures must be altered to accommodate the changing population because it is impossible for twenty million people to have direct input into decision-making just as it would be nonsensical to hold parliament for a society comprising thirty individuals.

Social order is achieved when people understand the power relationships and do not need to rely on bullying, dominance and violence to compel specific human actions. "Custom, habit, ideas of property, benefits, or other considerations that effectively reinforce and legitimize the power and make it (the power) acceptable" (Service, 1975, p. 11-12) are more conducive to authority than the use of physical power to coerce such as force. While many societies "exercise power both by virtue of hierarchical 'rightness' and by force or threat of it, it is useful to distinguish them because… many societies [are] ruled adequately without using any force whatever" (Service, 1975, p. 12). Within any type of society, the ways in which social order is maintained are grounded in what is and is not perceived as legitimate human practices. Prevailing issues evident in interactions between different groups of people are indicative of a lack of legitimation.

Tensions often arise between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people due to different social norms regarding etiquette, morality and social sanctions. In this study, the social practices used to maintain social order differ greatly between Aboriginal people familiar with face-to-face clan practices and non-Aboriginal people familiar with faceless, hierarchical practices. Structures of power and authority become apparent by dissecting the social landscape of the institution of education, local clan groups and the school.

### 2.2 First Space: The institution of education

Of the three Spaces in this study, teachers are mostly familiar with the institution of education because they have successfully completed schooling via the western education system. Although teachers know they must abide by institutional policies and programs as outlined by their employing jurisdiction, teachers do not become familiar with policies and programs until they take up practice within a school. When a teacher takes up practice in a school, it is the school leadership's role, under the guidance of the school principal to ensure the teacher is familiar with all policies, programs and protocols developed by their government employer.

The institution is governed by Australian and State/Territory governments. The Australian government "plays a leadership role in school education and invests in areas of national educational significance" (Australian Government, 2017), while state and territory governments are responsible for the delivery of education in schools within their jurisdiction. All education ministers from the Australian government and state/territory governments work together to identify and progress national education objectives under the broader agreement between Australian governments, the Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG). Australian ministers establish covenants to direct institutional practices that cater for the majority of Australians. For people who are identified as a specifically targeted group requiring further support beyond the government determined 'norm', specific policies, frameworks and strategies are developed to be implemented by institutions in addition to standard, known colloquially as 'mainstream', foci and practices. Drawing on the Australian curriculum's interpretation of student diversity, the student 'norm' represents the majority of students who are healthy and without disability; not considered to be gifted or talented; speak English as the dominant language or dialect; and are non-Indigenous (ACARA, 2016d, para 4). Despite the institution's acknowledgment, many students sit outside the 'norm' all schools must abide by established conventions of Australian schooling.

This remote Aboriginal school, with a school population of over 90% Indigenous students, was informed by two COAG priorities. In the first instance, the school had to abide by national and Northern Territory education policies directed at education for all Australian students. In the second instance, the school was affected by the Closing the Gap Strategy (Council of Australian Governments, 2009) focused on indigenous disadvantage and known colloquially as 'closing the gap'. To support the institution to meet the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' education the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (ATSIEAP) (Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEDYA), 2010) directly addressed the overlap between Australian education and Closing the Gap.

### 2.2.1 Education directives for Australian teachers

Across Australia, the educational outcomes of young Australians are an ongoing concern. In 2008, the Melbourne Declaration, the third declaration of agreement between Federal, State and Territory governments, determined overarching goals to

direct further policy and government actions. As a formal agreement between Federal and State/Territory Ministers of Education, the two overarching goals of the Melbourne Declaration are:

> Goal 1 Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence.
>
> Goal 2 All young Australians become:
>
> - successful learners
> - confident and creative individuals
> - active and informed citizens. (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7)

From the Melbourne Declaration, Australian Ministers of Education agreed upon the installment of policies encapsulating specifically targeted strategies and commitments to act upon eight inter-related areas:

- developing strong partnerships
- supporting quality teaching and school leadership
- strengthening early childhood education
- enhancing middle years development
- supporting senior years of schooling and youth transitions
- promoting world-class curriculum and assessment
- improving educational outcomes for indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds
- strengthening accountability and transparency. (Ministerial Council on Education, 2008, p. 10)

Australian Education Ministers acknowledged that a commitment to taking action in the eight areas to achieve the two goals articulated in the Melbourne Declaration required the concerted efforts of "all Australian governments, all school sectors, individual schools, parents, children, young people, families, communities and business" (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 4). All policies, frameworks and practices associated with Australian education emerge from the Melbourne Declaration.

Pertinent to Primary teachers in this study were the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) (AITSL, 2014a); the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (Department of Education Employment and Workplace, 2009) for teachers of birth to 5 year old students; and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) (ACARA, 2016c) for teachers of Transition to Year 9 students. Each of these will be described in the next sections.

### *Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL)*

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) "provides national leadership for the Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments in promoting excellence in the profession of teaching and school leadership" (AITSL, 2014a). AITSL has addressed inconsistencies of Professional Standards across the States and Territories by developing numerous national policies that include:

- Australian Professional Standards for Teachers
- Australian Professional Standards for Principals
- Australian Charter for the Professional Learning of Teachers and School Leaders
- Certification of Highly Accomplished and Lead Teachers in Australia
- Australian Teacher Performance and Development Framework
- Accreditation of Initial Teacher Education Programs in Australia: Standards and Procedures
- Teacher Registration in Australia (AITSL, 2016).

The Professional Standards for Teachers were published in 2011, providing definitive guidelines and associated descriptors pertaining to teacher training, registration, employment and performance. All aspects of teacher practice are open for scrutiny with particular emphasis on three domains: professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement. To attain and maintain teacher registration and advance their careers, teachers must supply evidence that they know and can demonstrate descriptors for seven standards, across the three domains at their professional career stages: Graduate, Proficient, Highly Accomplished or Lead (Teacher). The Professional Standards for Teachers were established as a means for quality control to ensure consistency of teacher practice across Australian schools. These Professional Standards for Teachers are examined in closer detail in Chapter Four (Methodology).

### *Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority*

Addressing the need to promote world-class curriculum and assessment, the Australian Government financed the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). ACARA is "an independent authority providing a rigorous, national approach to education through the national curriculum, national assessment program and national data collection and reporting program" (ACARA, 2013). Through collaborations with "teachers, principals, governments, state and territory education authorities, professional education associations, community groups and the general public", ACARA's mission "is to improve the learning of all young Australians through world-class school curriculum, assessment and reporting" (National Assessment

Program, 2016). ACARA is understood and discussed by teachers as the 'curriculum' and 'NAPLAN'. The assessment and reporting element of the curriculum for each year level was introduced after this study was completed.

*Curriculum*

At the time of data collection for this study, ACARA was trialing the Australian Curriculum for English, Mathematics, Science and History, seeking feedback from participating trial sites across Australia as to the content, structure and interpretation of these initial subject areas. ACARA was also seeking feedback from Australian schools and teachers into the three cross-curriculum priority areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia, and Sustainability. Identified in the Melbourne Declaration, these three cross-curriculum priority areas were intended to "provide dimensions which will enrich the curriculum through development of considered and focused content that fits naturally within learning [subject] areas" (MCEETYA, 2008).

During this study, this school was selected by NTDET to represent remote Aboriginal schools in trialing all four subject areas during the ACARA trial. The principal negotiated with the principal of a nearby mainstream school to work in partnership. The principals selected three teachers from their sites to collaborate during the trial to enable rigorous discussions about curriculum interpretation in two very different contexts. During Term Two, ***Year 2***, in my role as curriculum leader, I supported teachers from both schools to trial the Australian Curriculum through a series of front-ended assessment tasks. Front-ended tasks outline what students have to do to demonstrate learning and the tasks are accompanied with a standards and criteria sheet. The tasks developed with teachers were then backward mapped from the due date for assessment, outlining specific teaching and learning topics and smaller tasks to be completed by the end of each week. Teachers were supported in dialogue about the learning descriptors and strategies intended to lead to student demonstration of the learning descriptors outlined in the student achievement standards within each of the subject areas (ACARA, 2016a). I facilitated weekly teleconferences, and face-to-face professional learning sessions in which we brought the teachers together at both sites and a moderation session whereby student work samples were assessed using teacher developed standards and criteria sheets.

At the beginning of ***Year 2,*** NTDET guided principals to transition from the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) to the ACARA Australian Curriculum. Teachers who had participated in the Australian Curriculum trial, were required to redo professional learning about the Australian Curriculum. Rather than be confronted by varying degrees of engagement with the Australian Curriculum from continuing teachers and new teachers who had come from other schools, the second principal and newly instated ST1: Literacy and Numeracy (ST1: L&N), began implementing Australian Curriculum English sessions led by the ST1: L&N. Australian Curriculum Mathematics was introduced in the second half of the year.

*NAPLAN*

ACARA is also accountable for monitoring Australian students' academic performance. The National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)

> is an annual assessment for all students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9. It tests the types of skills that are essential for every child to progress through school and life. The tests cover skills in reading, writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation, and numeracy. (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7)

According to ACARA, NAPLAN data provided timely and consistent data about students' outcomes to enable school improvements and community confidence in school practices (ACARA, 2009). It was anticipated that NAPLAN data could provide schools with information about how they are performing, and help schools to identify strengths and weaknesses that warrant further attention. NAPLAN also provided an external accountability function for Australian families to ensure resources for worthwhile learning were provided consistently to Australian schools (ACARA, 2009).

NAPLAN occurs annually in Term Two of the school year for Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students. Students are given a series of tests over three consecutive days to assess reading, writing, language conventions, and numeracy. Data collected from NAPLAN testing is provided in the form of a report to participating students' parents/caregivers via their school. School data is aggregated and published on an electronic database known as "MySchool" (ACARA, 2016f). Teachers in this study expressed angst at having to put local Aboriginal students through NAPLAN testing when they knew students would not do well. The teachers recognised the data were skewed by non-Indigenous students' NAPLAN results. For the most part, non-Indigenous students

achieved above national benchmarks, a fact teachers could readily identify by comparing school NAPLAN data with year level enrolments. Non-Indigenous students were from English speaking homes and did not experience the same challenges as English as Additional Language (EAL) students; and their parents were conscious of students doing well on NAPLAN tests and therefore provided additional tuition at home. Teachers were frustrated their efforts as teachers were not reflected in NAPLAN results with many believing local Aboriginal EAL students required more time to complete the curriculum. Additionally, teachers maintained NAPLAN should be used to assess student curriculum competence after students had reached the level of competence being assessed. I clarified with teachers that they considered a school year to be different to a curriculum year with a curriculum year requiring longer than a standard school year.

### *The Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF)*

Published in 2009, the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) titled "Belonging, Being and Becoming", in accordance with the three domains of teaching, aims "to extend and enrich children's learning from birth to five years and through the transition to school" (Department of Education Employment and Workplace, 2009, p. 5). This framework was developed "to assist educators to provide young children with opportunities to maximise their potential and develop a foundation for future success in learning" (Department of Education Employment and Workplace, 2009, p. 5). The EYLF draws on the *United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child* to which Australia became a signatory in 1989 (United Nations General Assembly, 1989). The *United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child* states

> all children have the right to an education that lays a foundation for the rest of their lives, maximises their ability, and respects their family, cultural and other identities and languages. The Convention also recognises children's right to play and be active participants in all matters affecting their lives. (Department of Education Employment and Workplace, 2009, p. 5)

The EYLF identifies five learning outcomes: "that children have a strong sense of identity; are connected with and contribute to their world; have a strong sense of wellbeing; are confident and involved learners; and are effective communicators"

(Department of Education Employment and Workplace, 2009, p. 8). Principles guiding teacher practices are "secure, respectful and reciprocal relationships; partnerships with families; high expectations and equity; respect for diversity; and ongoing learning and reflective practice" (Department of Education Employment and Workplace, 2009, p. 10). Teacher practice in the early years of schooling involves consideration of "holistic approaches; responsiveness to children; learning through play; intentional teaching; learning environments; cultural competence; continuity of learning and transitions; and assessment for learning" (Department of Education Employment and Workplace, 2009, p. 10).

At the time of this study, the EYLF was in the beginning stages of implementation receiving support by staff specialising in Early Childhood from NTDET. In this school, the EYLF was implemented by the Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program and the Preschool. In adjacent rooms, the FaFT program focused on teaching families of children under 3.5 years while Preschool focused on children from 3.5 years to 4.5 years using these two years to transition families and children into formal schooling. The FaFT program was introduced in this school in 2009 (Australian Early Development Census, 2014). An "early learning and family support program for remote Indigenous families" (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2016a, para 1), its aim "is to improve developmental outcomes for remote Indigenous children by working with families and children prior to school entry" (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2016a, para 2).

### 2.2.2 Closing the gap

In the 2005 Social Justice Report (Calma, 2005), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma called for Australian governments to "achiev[e] Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health equality within a generation" (Calma, 2005, Recommendations and follow up actions, para. 2) and "progress in implementing the new arrangements for the administration of Indigenous affairs - Ensuring the effective participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in decision-making processes" (Calma, 2005), Recommendations and follow up actions, para. 10). In response, COAG devised the National Indigenous Reform Agreement which set out six closing the gap targets (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). These 'closing the gap' targets are:

- To close the life expectancy gap within a generation;
- To halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;
- To ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities within five years;
- To halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade;
- To halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment rates by 2020; and
- To halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade. (Council of Australian Governments, 2009)

To achieve the closing the gap targets, COAG identified seven building blocks that are "interconnected; address several targets; and adopt a holistic view of health, addressing many of the social determinants that influence and affect health" (Australian Indigenous Health*InfoNet*, 2015). The building blocks to addressing Indigenous disadvantage are: early childhood; schooling; health; economic participation; healthy homes; safe communities and governance and leadership. COAG further recognises "that strategies aimed at achieving improvements in any particular area will not work in isolation – the building blocks must fit together through the integration of policy ideas and an agreed approach to their implementation" (Council of Australian Governments, 2009, p. 4).

### 2.2.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan

Concerted efforts at inclusion in mainstream education and monitoring the education outcomes of Indigenous Australians coincided with the inaugural Hobart Declaration on schooling, a predecessor to the Melbourne Declaration, referred to earlier. The inaugural 1989 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy (NATSIEP) (Department of Employment Education and Training, 1989) outlined 21 long-term goals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education under four main themes: involvement of Aboriginal people in educational decision making; equity of access to educational services; equity of educational participation; and equitable and appropriate educational outcomes (Department of Employment Education and Training, 1989).

The most recent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (2010 – 2014) "seeks to progress the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Policy and the Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals of Young Australians…as part of a broader COAG reform agenda for school education that will contribute to closing the gap between the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait students and their peers" (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 4).

Devised by Aboriginal academics after "extensive consultation with stakeholders in the government, non-government and community sectors" (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 7), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (ATSIEAP) identified national, systemic and local level actions in six priority domains to guide the efforts of educators over five years. The six priority areas were readiness for school; engagement and connections; attendance; literacy and numeracy; leadership, quality teaching and workforce development; and pathways to real post-school options (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 5).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan (MCEECDYA, 2010) clearly articulates actions to be undertaken by the Australian government, education systems, such as the Northern Territory Department of Education, and schools. Each State and Territory government and their associated jurisdiction of education are tasked with implementing the ATSIEAP within their jurisdiction.

ATSIEAP (2009) makes reference to remote Aboriginal education in terms of student "access to high quality secondary schools while retaining links with their communities" (p. 14); "strategies to better record enrolment and attendance of highly mobile students from remote communities" (p. 18); and "teachers working in remote schools with multilingual students are appropriately prepared with English as a Second Language (ESL) strategies" (p. 21). Specific to the Northern Territory:

> The education of Aboriginal …students, the engagement of Aboriginal… families and communities and the policy emphasis on evidence-based planning for improvement in remote and very remote schools are core business for the Northern Territory". (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 35)

ATSIEAP makes no distinctions between remote, rural and urban Aboriginal student needs other than to acknowledge "the more remote the community the poorer the student outcomes" (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 17). As the guiding document specifically attending to remote Aboriginal community education, the priority principle underpinning ATSIEAP is to meet closing the gap targets "endorsed by COAG while being appropriate to local community needs" (MCEECDYA, 2010, p. 17).

Staff awareness of the range of policies directing teacher practice in this school was problematic. During this study, Primary teachers made frequent reference to ACARA

and NAPLAN and the Preschool and the FaFT family educator made reference to the EYLF. Although Senior Leadership made limited reference to Closing the Gap, few teachers knew of its existence. Further, ATSIEAP was not referenced in any teacher discussions. Attendance at NTDET new teacher induction in Darwin, prior to coming to this community and participation in school-based inductions and conversations with colleagues ensured teachers were aware of needing to address the linguistic and cultural needs of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Teachers expressed concern regarding how to attain information about the community, students and students' families.

### 2.2.4 Legislative requirement in Northern Territory communities

#### *The intervention*

Teachers were aware of the Northern Territory National Emergency Response (The Hon Mal Brough, 2007), known colloquially as 'the Intervention'. Prior to coming to this community, the principal told new teachers this community was under the Intervention. She further explained one of the Intervention's strategies placed restrictions on alcohol, advising all staff to refrain from bringing alcohol into the community due to strict legislation and policing. She directed teachers to attain an alcohol permit via the local council. Over time, teachers became aware of the quarantining of family welfare benefits in the form of the basics card. In all, matters pertaining to 'the Intervention' were predominantly the business of the community as teachers were not affected.

#### *Aboriginal land*

Teachers were made aware, through cultural and staff inductions, that all areas beyond the township, were off-limits to teachers unless they gained permission from Traditional Land Owners. Traditional Land Owners could give verbal permission or teachers had to obtain a written permit through the Northern Land Council (Northern Land Council, n.d.).

#### *Mandatory reporting*

Teachers were made particularly aware of legislation pertaining to Mandatory Reporting (discussed in 2.2.3). Under Sections 15, 16 and 26 of the *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007* (NT), it is the legal responsibility of every adult in the Northern Territory to report "a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is likely to suffer harm or exploitation" (Australian Institute of Family Studies,

2014). In the Northern Territory, abuse and neglect to be reported includes "physical abuse, sexual or other exploitation of a child, emotional/psychological abuse, neglect, exposure to physical violence (e.g. a child witnessing violence between parents at home)" (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014). Information provided is considered to be 'in good faith' and is determined by the individual's level of comfort with what they hear or observe in regards to a child's safety and wellbeing. Every adult who works within the school context must comply with the requirements of mandatory reporting. Legal protection is provided to a person making a report and it is not deemed to be a breach of any professional code of conduct. Legal protection is not provided to a person "making a report if they also unnecessarily disclose information to another person, for example a colleague, for a reason other than a professional need to do so" (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2010b). During this study confidentiality was a grey area that impacted on what teachers could and could not be told about their students. This tension is illustrated in greater detail in the Findings chapter (Chapter 5).

***Working with children***

Changes in legislation have also influenced a person's employability in schools. The introduction of the 'Working with Children' police checks resulted in several assistant teachers being unable to continue their employment at the school. Although some of these people were respected by the community for working in the school, legislation required the school principal to dismiss people deemed unsuitable and denied a 'Working with Children' ochre card.

***Mandatory schooling***

Education is compulsory in the Northern Territory from the age of six, at which time students enter the Primary years of education in Transition. The first stage of schooling occurs between Transition (equivalent to Prep in other States/Territory) until Year 6, after which students progress to High School.

Given the context of this study, the lack of teacher interaction with specific policies, legislation and frameworks directed at Aboriginal students and remote Aboriginal communities was surprising. Any attempts by principals to reference these guidelines were, for the most part, disregarded by teachers as not belonging to core business. Due to time constraints, most teachers were more concerned about the practicalities of their

practice and events or information directly impacting on their ability to teach than policies or legislation. For the most part, teachers perceived policies and legislation as school leadership business relying on School Leadership to inform teachers in a timely manner.

### 2.2.5 Northern Territory Department of Education

The Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NTDET) is the governing body for compulsory schooling provided at this school. In fulfilling its role as education and training providers for residents of the Northern Territory, the department has a range of strategic policy, regulatory, delivery and support responsibilities.

#### *Systemic hierarchy and decision-making*

The NTDET is directed by strategic goals and operational objectives. The implementation of education requires "leaders to make the decisions, executives who carry out the decisions and bureaucrats who administer the decisions and laws" (Diamond, 2012, p. 11).

In the context of this study, the institution mostly comprises decision-makers who began their education career in a classroom. However, not all bureaucrats have been teachers, just as not all teachers aspire to leave the classroom for other positions within the field of education. While the teacher remains the public face of education and schools, there are many layers of officialdom in Education. The functional structure of the Department of Education outlines how education portfolios are designated to the departmental bureaucracy (Northern Territory Department of Education, n.d.-b) with little explanation provided. The lack of explanation illustrates the 'taken-for-granted' perspective of the institution that teachers at all levels within the Department of Education have developed shared understandings about how Australian institutions of education are structured and assumes consistency of these structures across jurisdictions. The Chief Executive Officer (CEO) leads a team comprising the Office of the Chief Executive; Organisational Services; School Education; and Education Partnerships. The development and composition of portfolios and teams is at the discretion of the CEO. The Organisational Services team is accountable for Corporate Services, Strategic Services and Early Childhood Policy and Regulation. The School Education team is accountable for all schools that have been arranged as either in the north or south of the Northern Territory and School Support Services. The Education

Partnership Team is accountable for Indigenous Education, Higher Education, International Education and Non-Government schools, which includes Catholic and Independent schools.

*Qualifying expertise in the Northern Territory*

Expertise in the NTDET is generally associated with an individual's position in the NTDET hierarchy. Testament to this is the membership of the 2013 Literacy and Numeracy Panel established to "oversee a renewed focus on teaching and assessing the core competencies of reading, writing and mathematics, including a review of current literacy and numeracy practice" and "tasked with leading the development of key principles for literacy and numeracy teaching" (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2014b, p. 2). Of the twelve panel members, three have doctorates and are employed by the three universities participating in the Northern Territory review of current literacy and numeracy practices. The remaining nine participants on this panel, are NTDET executive directors (3 participants), the president of the Australian Education Union (1), a Senior Teacher from an urban NTDET Senior College (1), a senior program manager (1), an urban NTDET assistant principal (1), an urban NTDET principal (1) and a NTDET education curriculum officer curriculum (1). This panel is dominated by representation from the NTDET (6), of whom three are also associated with other associations: English Teachers' Association NT (1), Mathematics Teachers' Association NT (1), Australian Literacy Educators' Association (1). Non- NTDET employees include Early Childhood Australia, also representing Catholic Education Office (1), Australian Education Union (1) and a representative from the Non-government Schools Ministerial Advisory Committee (1).

As shown in the above example, the training and experience of panel members and decision-makers is not provided in the institution of education. Position in the hierarchy is of more import than qualifications. Of additional concern, is the representation of vulnerable sectors of the community, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Without the representation of minority groups in decisions impacting on teacher knowledge and practice, there is a high risk that minority groups are not considered. This can then lead to strategies and actions determined by decision-makers who frequently refer to school subject matter as a socio-cultural 'norm' that excludes minority groups resulting in a situation that is untenable for teachers of minority students.

### *Institutional response to meeting the needs of remote Indigenous students*

Remote Indigenous students require additional support to access school learning. The institution of education frequently reviews and alters practices in attempts to improve student outcomes and employee practices. Language differences between remote Aboriginal communities and the national vernacular of English influenced the NTDET to support bilingual education and explicit instruction in English. Typical in large organisations, departmental policies for both of these areas frequently leads to changes in teacher and school practice.

#### *2009 Structural Review*

In 2009, Ladwig and Sarra were commissioned by the Northern Territory Government to conduct a structural review of the Northern Territory Department of Education "to refocus the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (DET) to more efficiently deliver the Government's commitments to improved school attendance and levels of literacy and numeracy and meet future challenges in education" (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009, p. 7). The findings of this review identified the need for the department to ensure Indigenous students were supported by appropriately skilled staff. Pertinent to this study, the *2009 Structural Review of the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training* (Ladwig & Sarra) highlighted issues for the "training and mentoring of Indigenous people involved in education" (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009, p. 41) and indicated a lack of confidence in Indigenous staff having the same level of competence as non-Indigenous staff in the same or similar position. Ladwig and Sarra also noted that most staff involved in Indigenous Education were not trained in teaching students for whom English is a second (or additional) language and made strong recommendations that NTDET urgently provide "tailored training programs for all staff on Indigenous Education and culture" (2009, p. 43). Of significance for this school, the review particularly highlighted the need for increased participation of Indigenous personnel; strengthening school governance with improved community participation; and recruitment, induction, reviews and professional support for teachers, to be "closer to the coal face" and to "assist in their timeliness and relevance" (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009, p. 40).

#### *Bi-lingual education*

Students learning English in their local community school is of critical importance to education in remote Aboriginal schools where students interact with English as a

foreign or additional language spoken by government agencies, including schools. Students rely on their English-speaking teachers to learn English. The terms "English as an Additional Language" (EAL) and "English as a Second Language" (ESL) are interchangeable and can be understood as indicating a person who speaks a language other than English. This language can be a print dominant language such as French or Italian or a print minimal language such as many Australian Indigenous languages.

As the dominant language of Australia, English is the language of power for health, economics, politics and education. Bilingual education was introduced after the election of the Whitlam Government in 1972 (Bond-Sharp, 2013, p. 94). While introduced in some remote Northern Territory schools in 1973, bilingual education did not begin in this community school until 1978 (to accommodate English and Ndjebánna) and 1986 (to accommodate English, Ndjebánna and Burarra). The introduction of dominant clan languages led to the increased participation of the community for example, "Its introduction… was instrumental in engaging Kunibídji children many of whom had previously had little interest in school and who attended very irregularly" (Bond-Sharp, 2013, p. 94). There are no substantive records available at the school in this study to indicate the influence of bilingual education on student attendance. Critics of bilingual education maintain "Indigenous 'bilingual' programs have become contentious because they do not deliver literacy and numeracy in any language" (Hughes & Hughes, 2009, p. vii). When I entered this school, locally employed Aboriginal staff proudly pronounced the bilingual status of the school; however, my observations concurred with Hughes and Hughes (2009) noting there was little evidence of effective teaching of English, literacy or numeracy leading to significant student outcomes.

*Supporting Indigenous students to learn English*

Despite acknowledging "Indigenous language speaking students are in the majority" in remote and very remote schools (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2015a, p. 2), NTDET does not provide a specialist teacher of ESL for remote and very remote government schools. Stating "the explicit teaching of Standard Australian English is imperative from Transition onwards", NTDET relies on team teaching between the classroom teacher and the local Aboriginal assistant teacher. In contrast, migrant and refugee students are able to access "intensive English instruction" supported by "specialist teachers of ESL and classroom support" in specifically located schools in

urban areas for up to three school semesters for (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2015a, p. 2).

The Northern Territory Department of Education does not consider geographical remoteness or non-English speaking status as having significant bearing on Indigenous students' ability to achieve literacy and numeracy outcomes. "The Government believes literacy and numeracy outcomes for indigenous Territorians should be on par with those of non-indigenous Territorians and they are not" (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2014a). In efforts to support Indigenous students from non-English speaking backgrounds, NTDET introduced a Commonwealth funded program, English as a Second Language for Indigenous Language Speaking Students (ESL-ILSS) to enable Aboriginal children to receive support equivalent to immigrant children in capital cities for their first year of schooling (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2010a, p. 111). The first year of compulsory schooling is Transition. At the beginning of this study, the ESL-ILSS teacher appointed was a graduate teacher with no ESL or linguistic qualifications. Her inexperience made it difficult for her to provide effective pedagogy and to engage in technical dialogue with colleagues. When she left at the end of 2009, her position was not replaced. I noted a discrepancy between NTDET rhetoric about ESL-ILSS and my observations. According to NTDET "the NT has implemented this program (ESL-ILSS) effectively" (Northern Territory Department of Education, 1999, p. 9). I surmised from this discrepancy that generalisations pertaining to the collective implementation of programs across Northern Territory government schools do not capture the specific situation of individual schools.

### *NTDET school management*

School management encapsulates policies, teacher responsibilities, property and landscaping, enrolment and attendance, voluntary school contributions, accountability performance and improvement, grants and funding, managing the school website and relief teaching (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2012a). Schools are mandated to follow all Department of Education policies, and if unsure, must consult with the hierarchy for policy clarification. Teacher responsibilities, practices with the school community, and liaisons with the broader community are directed by systemic policies and contextualised by school leadership. School leadership is directly accountable to the Department of Education providing data and reports regarding student enrolments and attendance, student progress, budget expenditure, management

of facilities and strategies for school improvement. Enrolment and attendance data are utilised to determine funding the school receives from the Commonwealth Government and the Northern Territory Government. Every four years, the Department releases the Accountability and Performance Improvement Framework (APIF) aimed to support improvement in education outcomes for Northern Territory students (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2016b). While the general public perceives schools as primarily centres for teaching and learning, public accountability requires School Leadership teams to manage schools as businesses with pre-determined goals and performance indicators.

*Monitoring school performance: Strategic plan*

Each school is required to develop a Strategic Plan in alignment with the APIF. The Strategic Plan outlines how the Education Department and its collective employees will deliver the Department's vision for education. As the basis of the government's accountability to Territorians, the Strategic Plan outlines the focus of the Northern Territory Department of Education over a four year period and builds on the work of the previous strategic plan (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2016b; Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2009)

Each year, the principal develops an annual operation plan (AOP) outlining key areas supported by improvement goals, baseline data, key performance indicators, strategies, strategy leaders from within the School Leadership team, the timeframe in which the goal will be reached and reported on, and funding required to enable goal attainment. While some Principals seek staff input this is not a prerequisite for the document's development. The AOP provides direction for all activities within the school including teachers' work.

Domains in the AOP include teaching and learning with an emphasis on improving student outcomes according to NAPLAN data; student pathways and transitions to improve student attendance, transition to work programs and leadership programs for students; leadership including school governance procedures and staff professional learning to strengthen and develop workforce capacity; student and staff wellbeing and engagement; and partnerships with community, government and non-government agencies. The attainment of targets in each domain is then reported in an Annual Report by the principal to the Northern Territory Government, Department of Education.

Teachers and students are the primary targets of a school's AOP. A Senior Leader is assigned accountability for a component of the AOP and is tasked with managing fiscal and material resources to ensure teachers are able to meet the targets outlined in the AOP. AOPs do not consider individual teacher qualifications or experiences. Rather, the AOP is a holistic document that quantifies improvements to staff and student performance using percentages according to foci pre-determined by the Departmental Strategic Plan.

### *Staffing in Northern Territory Government schools*

Across the Northern Territory, approximately 4500 people are employed in education including approximately 3800 teachers, principals and other school staff (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2010a). Public education is provided to approximately 33000 students in about 150 schools and 40 Homeland sites (refer glossary) (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2010a).

#### *Staffing and recruitment to remote Aboriginal schools: Teachers*

High staff turnover and teachers inadequately prepared to teach ESL or remote Indigenous students has led to NTDET strategising ways to attract and retain teachers in remote communities (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2011b). Because the Northern Territory has a small population, teaching staff are recruited to the Northern Territory's remote communities from across Australia. At the time of this study, only one staff member was born and raised in the Northern Territory or had lived there prior to teaching in this school. The department calls for "talented people needed to teach remote in the Territory" who are "passionate, resilient and committed" and acknowledges that teaching in remote schools "can be hard work and the conditions can be tough but it'll be both professionally and personally rewarding" (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2011b). Emphasis is placed on pay and conditions to entice teachers to teach in remote schools. Pay is supplemented with free housing and electricity; a remote incentive allowance and three fares out of isolated localities (FOILS) for teachers and their financial dependents. Conditions include additional professional learning; additional leave at the discretion of the principal; and a guaranteed transfer after three or more continuous years of service in the remote school.

According to NTDET, "professional support for teachers in remote communities includes a five day orientation in Darwin and an induction program into the individual

school" (Association of independent schools of South Australia, 2011, p. 20). Having commenced teaching in this school mid-2009, I was not included in a tailored induction program that occurs at the beginning of each calendar year prior to the commencement of the school year. This suggests NTDET's policies to support teacher entry into remote schools does not consider teachers who are employed mid-year, thus excluding nine of the eighteen participating teachers in this study from the induction process.

Teachers employed in this school were registered with the Northern Territory Teacher Registration Board, an employment requirement. Teacher registration is a quality assurance process to employers that teachers have the appropriate qualifications to teach in any Australian school. This quality assurance process becomes problematic when teachers take up tenure in remote Aboriginal community schools. Teaching in a school with which you share similar societal, cultural and linguistic backgrounds with students and the broader community is very different to teaching in schools in which the teacher does not share societal, cultural and linguistic backgrounds with students and the local community. White teachers inherently bring understandings of the institution of education but lack understandings of the social orders prevalent in remote Aboriginal society. Further, the social orders and arrangements of Aboriginal clan groups in remote Aboriginal communities, including this community, take years for an outsider, such as a white teacher, to understand. According to the Forrest Review "in the Northern Territory, teachers last an average of seven months in a remote school before leaving" (Forrest, 2014, p. 95). This pattern was not observed during this study with most teachers staying in this school between one to four years.

*Staffing and recruitment of remote Aboriginal schools: Leadership*

Promotional positions are published on the Northern Territory Government Employment Opportunities site. All promotional positions outline key responsibilities and essential and desirable selection criteria that applicants refer to as a means of demonstrating their ability to fulfill the position. Applications for school-based leadership positions are sent to the School Leadership team who establish an interview panel comprising a school leader, usually the principal or an AP, a union member and a local Aboriginal employee who represents the local community. The employment of a principal generally includes Executive Directors from within the Northern Territory Department of Education hierarchy. It is common practice for Senior Teacher (ST1)

positions to be recruited from within the school and their previous teaching position to be filled through teacher recruitment procedures.

*Staffing and recruitment to remote Aboriginal schools: Ancillary staff*

Ancillary staff are employed at the local (community) level and these positions do not come with accommodation. In this and other very remote schools, local Indigenous people are employed as assistant teachers, attendance and participation officers, cleaners and grounds-staff. While personnel with training and experience are sought, many locally sought employees in this remote community have not successfully completed primary or secondary schooling and, as such, lack the English, literacy and numeracy required to fulfill basic tasks normally associated with these positions in urban and rural settings. Local Indigenous employees are expected to provide their employing school with local cultural knowledge in addition to their ancillary duties. According to NTDET, Aboriginal Assistant Teachers, "are skilled and knowledgeable for help [to teachers] on ways to manage classrooms" (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2011b). Aboriginal Assistant Teachers are frequently students' family members and share students' language, culture and current life circumstances.

In this school, there is a core group of assistant teachers who have maintained employment in this role for over 10 years, with several assistant teachers having over 20 years' experience. The duties of an assistant teacher in this school include identifying students and their families and where they live, conveying cultural knowledge such as student skin names and clan groups and translating between English and Aboriginal languages. Each class is assigned an Aboriginal assistant teacher although some classes that have predominantly white students have been known to have a white English speaking assistant teacher.

In 2009, a revision of Indigenous Education in the Northern Territory's remote schools considered the difference between teacher aides in mainstream schools and assistant teachers in remote schools. A review of Indigenous education conducted by Hughes and Hughes (2009) identified numerous facets of non-performing Indigenous remote schools included untrained assistant teachers.

> Untrained helpers are termed 'Assistant Teachers' if they have 'traditional cultural knowledge.' Some Assistant Teachers have had rudimentary literacy and numeracy courses at Batchelor College, often many years ago, or have attended other short

> courses. Most Assistant Teachers are thus semi-literate and numerate or totally illiterate and non-numerate. They have been neglected and inequitably treated for years. (Hughes & Hughes, 2009, p. 13)

Hughes and Hughes (2009) highlighted that assistant teachers in remote Northern Territory schools were from previous generations of poor performing remote schools. The people now employed as assistant teachers were among the "almost 100% of children at remote schools in the Northern Territory [who had left] school unable to read, write or count" (Hughes & Hughes, 2009, p. vii). My observations of the school in 2009 concurred with Hughes and Hughes' (2009) findings. Assistant teachers were unable to complete reading, writing and mathematics activities in classrooms and required assistance to complete forms, including time sheets.

### 2.3 Second Space: The Aboriginal community

Aboriginal people in this remote community talk, act and relate to each other and outsiders in accordance with the norms of their clan groups who call this community home. This section has been written as much as possible from the perspective of the community, the Second Space. In accordance with Third Space theory, the Second Space is the Space most foreign to white teachers. To write about this remote Aboriginal community as it existed during this study, I consulted locally employed Aboriginal teaching assistants and their families. The information provided in this section comes from conversations with a small sector of local Aboriginal teaching staff, texts identified or validated by this group and my own observations. My advisors within the local Aboriginal assistant teachers told me the Western world cannot know any more than the information provided in this section as it is against Aboriginal law. Women cannot convey men's business even if they know it and vice versa. It is forbidden and the consequences for breaking this law include ostracism from the clan group as a strategy for silencing. I also draw largely on Trudgeon's work with the Yolgnu people (Trudgen, 2000), who are this community's geographical neighbours and extended family, to outline the community's concerns about the future of the clan groups in this community.

I was advised by my critical friends to utilise Trudgeon's work as he was directed to write and publish this book on behalf of Rev Dr. Djiniyini Gondarra OAM, Yolgnu clan leader. My critical friends had both read this text and participated in a workshop based

on “Why Warriors lie down and die” (2000) with Trudgeon and a Yolgnu clan elder and determined this resource reflected what they had been trying to explain to me about their First Space, my Second Space. Raymattja Marika (1999), an Australian Yolgnu Aboriginal leader, educator, linguist, translator, and cultural advocate, also identified the differences between Arnhem Land Aboriginal culture and society and those of broader Australia. For the purpose of describing the Second Space of the Aboriginal community, Trudgeon’s (2000) work provided more succinct descriptions of local Aboriginal perspectives.

In this section about the Second Space, Aboriginal people connected to this community are referred to as Binninj, their term indicating an Aboriginal person in Arnhem Land (north east of the Northern Territory). Non-Aboriginal people, predominantly white, are referred to as Balanda, also a term particular to Arnhem Land.

### 2.3.1 Clan society

The smallest and simplest type of society is clan society. It generally consists of a few dozen individuals with familial relationships. Clan numbers “are sufficiently few in number that everyone knows everyone else well, group decisions can be reached by face-to-face discussion and there is no formal political leadership or strong economic specialization” (Diamond, 2012, p. 14). A significant feature of the clan society in the context of this study is the division of families and individuals into kinship groups “which may exchange marriage partners with other clans” (Diamond, 2012, p. 15). Prior to white settlement, wealth and political power of individuals and families were relatively equal “except as a result of individual differences in ability or personality and as tempered by extensive sharing of resources among band members” (Diamond, 2012, p. 15). Unity and survival of the clan is paramount and enabled by social practices reproduced by subsequent generations to maintain social order and decrease the ability of one person or event to bring about the demise of the clan.

### 2.3.2 Origins of this community

One of the last places to be settled by white people in the Northern Territory, this remote, coastal Aboriginal community is located in Central Arnhem Land. Several places near this community had already been established as missions but a settlement at

this location was not considered until after World War II. Continuous contact between white people and local Aboriginal clan groups began in this community in 1957.

In 1957, after a failed attempt in 1947, the Northern Territory Government negotiated with the Kunibídji people to establish a white settlement on land traditionally held by the Kunibídji people. Established as a permanent Welfare Department, clan groups of Central Arnhem Land slowly made their way to the place of this community while maintaining traditional homelands in the land and waters surrounding the settlement.

Clan groups who eventually took up residence in this community maintained the traditions of their ancestors as custodians of specific sections of Central Arnhem Land. This community identifies approximately 11 clan groups although this number changes depending on who you talk to and the literature does not agree on a specific number of clan groups or languages. The main clan groups within and associated with this community are Kunibídji, Kunbarlang, Na-kara, Burarra, Gunnartpa, Gurrgoni, Rembarrnga, Eastern Kunwinjku, Djinang, Wurlaki and Gupapuyngu. Except for the Kunibídji — people who speak Ndjebánna, the namei of the clan group and the language is the same. Prior to settlement, clan groups traversed all corners of their traditional lands now linked to this community. Socio-cultural practices such as hunting and gathering for survival and interacting with other clan groups for purposes such as trade, marriage and the maintenance of song-lines and ceremonies were sustained for hundreds, if not thousands, of generations. Life was governed by the seasons that dictated travel to places of significance and the availability of food. Aboriginal culture is an organic culture in that it has adapted to, rather than manipulated, the environment in which people live. Underpinning the social, political, economic and cultural affairs of clan groups in Arnhem Land is *Ma<u>d</u>ayin*.

### 2.3.3 The way: Underpinning principles directing clan groups

The way to live for Binninj in all clan groups who have settled in this community and its surround homelands is directed by *Rom*. Critical friends from this community liken *Rom* to what Trudgeon has outlined as *Ma<u>d</u>ayin* for Yolgnu people of central to north-east Arnhem Land (2000). *Rom* has only recently been expressed in print, having traditionally been passed between generations through songlines, ceremonies and cultural artefacts. For this reason, I have been directed by my critical friends in

consultation with their families to refer to *Maḏayin* as outlined by Trudgeon (2000). Herein, the term *Maḏayin* is replaced with *Rom* as directed by my advisors.

*Rom* has no equivalent in English. To compare it to the Australian constitution is more to support Balanda understanding than to provide a firm political designation. Although both *Rom* and the Australian Constitution provide direction to social order in their respective societies they differ in scope. The Australian Constitution "establishes the composition of the Australian Parliament, and describes how Parliament works, what powers it has, how federal and state Parliaments share power, and the roles of the Executive Government and the High Court" (Parliamentary Education Office, 2014). In contrast to the Australian Constitution's emphasis on governance structures and authorities, *Rom* "encompasses a whole system of law and living" (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 13) directing all aspects of life as interconnected and holistic.

According to Trudgeon, *Rom* includes:

- All the property, resource, criminal, economic, political, moral and religious laws of the people;
- Ŋärra (restricted chamber of law) and other lesser councils;
- The objects that encode the law;
- Song cycles that tell of legal agreements;
- The trading highways that criss-cross Arnhem Land;
- The embassy sites on close and distant clan estates that give travellers and traders protection at law;
- The protected production sites (hatcheries and nurseries) for different animals, fish and birds;
- The correct conservation and production of plants and food such as yams;
- The husbandry of fish, turtles, animals, birds and so on;
- The restricted places for dangerous country, eg. cliff faces or tidal whirlpools;
- Protection of the clan's assets;
- Controls to regulate trade and production; and
- Set diplomatic rules and regulations throughout all the clans and nations (2000, p. 13).

*Rom* provides the basis for social order for the clan groups of this community just as the institutions of Australian society shape social order for Australian citizens. Further, *Rom* guides arrangements between people within a clan group, between people from different clan groups, between clan groups and outsiders and between people and their environment. Apart from the difference in scope already mentioned, there are several other key differences between *Rom* and the Australian Constitution. First, *Rom* is not written down. Rather, it is inherent in the social fabric of Aboriginal people such that it is taken-for-granted that all people understand the content of *Rom*. Second, the

unwritten *Rom* does not have political weight in the broader, white Australian society; that is, even though Binninj social order is directed by *Rom*, it is not recognised by Australia's legal or political systems and is therefore easily ignored by the dominant society. Third, *Rom* does not have a precise English equivalent therefore linguistic differences make translation and shared understandings difficult. For Binninj and Balanda to develop shared understandings, careful translations would need to take place over a significant amount of time to allow for confusions, misunderstandings and confirmation of translations. According to critical friends and their families, translations have not occurred. Rather, Binninj attempt to explain *Rom* to specifically identified Balanda, based on individual qualities or roles, to help them understand why Binninj regulate access to certain geographical areas and to share stories of the 'old days' before white settlement. According to critical friends, Binninj desire Balanda, particularly government institutions, to understand *Rom* as the basis for understanding why Binninj act, talk and think the way they do.

While the Australian Constitution directs the broader legal framework of how Australia is governed, *Rom* provides the basis for social-political arrangements, cultural-discursive arrangements and economic-material arrangements. When tensions arise between family members or clan groups, clan leaders turn to *Rom* for guidance.

### 2.3.4 Relationships

Relationships, or social bonds, are a critical element of clan society. Of significance to this study, as directed by my critical friends, relationships are considered as being between people and country; between people; and, with settlement, between clan groups.

#### *Moieties: The relationship between people and country*

Everything in the local world-view is made up of two moieties. One is Yirrichinga and the other one is Jowunga. The term 'Yirrichinga' is interchangeable with 'Yirritja'. The term 'Jowunga' is interchangeable with 'Dhuwa'.

> The whole of the (Binninj) universe is divided into two halves or 'moieties'. The word moiety means half. People, animals, plants and even the different winds are either Dhuwa [Jowunga] or Yirritja [Yirrichinga]. Binninj people introduce themselves by their skin names and moiety. (Australian National University, 2008b, p. para 1)

The concept of the moiety (Appendix A), Jowunga/Yirrichinga, is best considered in terms of balance. Children belong to their father's clan and moiety which is different from their mother's clan and moiety. When the father is Jowunga, the child is also Jowunga but the mother is Yirrichinga. During Jowunga ceremonies, only Jowunga people can attend just as Yirrichinga people can only participate in Yirrichinga ceremonies. Each moiety abides by specific rules.

> Each moiety is associated with particular colour and proportions: [Jowunga] colours are darker (red and black) and associated with shortness. [Yirrichinga] colours are lighter (yellow and white) and associated with tallness. For example, the black cockatoo is [Jowunga] while the white cockatoo is [Yirrichinga]. The short neck turtle is [Yirrichinga] and the long neck turtle is [Jowunga] (Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation, n.d., para 3-4).

Binninj are the traditional owners of their father's country and the managers of their mother's country. A Djunguy has authority of his/her mother's country and ultimate control of the resources assigned to his/her moiety. If a Djunguy does not carefully manage the resources of his or her mother's country then that resource can become locally extinct leaving people without the valuable resource and reflecting badly on the Djunguy as a leader and resource manager. Historically, any clan member whose lack of knowledge or undesirable behaviours threatened the existence of the clan group and the maintenance of *Rom* was ostracised from the clan group.

In ensuring the greatest care is taken in managing land and resources, clan members align their identity with 'country'. Country is the land and water for which clan members must care for every component of what is and is not visible.

> Clan members own areas of land and waters in common. The relationship is, however, much more complex than just 'owning', or even 'caring for' the land. [Binninj] often say that they 'come from' the land or that they *are* the land – a difficult concept for non-Aboriginal people to grasp. (Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation, 2015, para 4)

All clan members are managers and land owners who learn their roles through a complex education system that continues throughout a person's life. Clan members learn about their mother's country and their father's country by residing on country for specific parts of their lives directed by ceremonies and requests from their mothers and

grandmothers and fathers and grandfathers. The requirement to live and fulfill duties on mother's and father's country begins at birth and continues until death.

***Relationships between people***

Similar to white Australian family structures, local family structures are bound by marriage rules. The rules for marriage are broken into sixteen social divisions commonly referred to as 'skin'. A person's skin name (Appendix B) "is inherited from the mother and has a cycle which continues through several generations and provides comparable inherited links between mother and children for other skin groups" (Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation, n.d., para 8). Each clan group follows the same kinship structure although clan specific terms are used. Binninj from all clan groups are able to locate their skin name on a skin chart, explain where each family member falls in the chart and what their correlating skin name is. A concern of the local community is children's decreasing knowledge about their moiety and skin name.

Kinship rules are particularly important between males and females. Kinship "rules were to regulate social interaction, cement kinship relationships and ensure there was no marriage between biologically close relations" (Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation, n.d., para 12). Appendix C provides detailed explanation about 'poison cousins', a term that quickly becomes known to teachers but continues to be misunderstood. Teachers' lack of understanding of 'poison cousins' has led some teachers to think someone has been poisoned; to dismiss the concept as an example of 'black superstition'; or to think cousins cannot be in the same room as each other. Time constraints and teachers lacking confidence or wanting to hide their ignorance often lead to misunderstandings going unchallenged.

***Relationships between clan groups***

The land on which this community is located is traditionally owned by the Kunibídji people, one of the smaller clan groups. The Burarra people are the largest clan group in this community followed closely by the Kunwinjku people. While other clan groups can travel out to their traditional homelands, the Kunibídji people as the traditional owners of community land do not have traditional homelands. Rather, the Kunibídji people are located in 'bottom camp', an area off limits to non- Kunibídji people unless they have express permission to be there. Some Kunibídji people have taken up residence in other parts of the community because of the growing population of Kunibídji people and the

limited number of houses. Critical friends of the Kunibídji clan lamented they do not have homelands to go to for a break from white society.

Largely dependent on the maintenance of positive relationships and marriages between clan groups, permission can be sought to visit another person's homeland. Reciprocity is shown through the gifting of flour, sugar, tea or meat and other resources caught or harvested on the owner's homeland. Balanda who demonstrate reciprocity are respected and invited back to homelands and/or onto other homelands. Balanda who do not demonstrate reciprocity are labeled negatively amongst Binninj and are often denied access to any homelands. Binninj respect for Balanda is largely based on Balanda willingness to share their resources including money, food, cigarettes or other resources Binninj need. If Balanda offer the resources without being asked greater respect is garnered. However, Balanda have to be aware that some Binninj perceive Balanda as an endless supply of resources without Binninj having to play their part in the act of reciprocity. These Binninj become known to Balanda either through continual requests or by other Binninj or Balanda telling Balanda to stay away from the inappropriately behaving Binninj.

***Relations between Binninj and Balanda***

As indicated earlier, relations between Binninj and Balanda can range from highly respectful to hateful. One old man related to several critical friends commented on relations between Binninj and Balanda over his over 60 years of life. He said Balanda had gone from shooting and killing Binninj when he was a child out hunting with his father, to giving money for anything now he is an old man. During this old man's youth, Binninj believed their existence was threatened by the encroaching Balanda. Trudgeon supports this old man's assertion.

> It became clear to the Yolgnu that because of their greed the Balanda intended to wipe out all Yolgnu. Many warriors vowed to fight to the death to save their womenfolk and children. And any Yolgnu who joined these lawless murderers would be treated in the same way as these Balanda. (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 35)

Historically, the gradual arrival of white people on Aboriginal land has been told from the perspective of the conqueror - white people. Increasingly, revelations about interactions between Aborigines and whites, including pastoralists, explorers, missionaries and governments, have challenged colonial histories by acknowledging

Aboriginal resistance revealing violent actions taken by white people to subjugate the original land owners (Attwood, 2003; Dafler & Callaghan, 2005; Elder, 1992; Perkins, 1992; Reynolds, 2000; Tatz, 1975; Trudgen, 2000). Although knowledge of Australia's hidden history is increasingly becoming available to most Australians, historical interactions and incidences in specific communities, such as this community, are unknown to the general public and are usually revealed over time. As noted by Trudgeon (2000), "the trauma …Yolgnu have experienced has had a deep and lasting effect" (p. 192). Further, "although in many instances the events occurred long ago, their traumatic effect has been passed from generation to generation. As children were told of the disgusting deed perpetrated by the dominant culture, the Balanda and other Aboriginal people who took part were portrayed as monsters and the Yolgnu warriors as heroes" (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 193). In many instances, Balanda have been internalised by each generation as something to fear; "an image that is used to control young Yolgnu children to this day" (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 193). Trudgeon argues that "negative experiences of dealing with the dominant culture" (2000, p. 194) combined with family historical recounts and threats of Balanda coming to get Binninj contribute to continuing personal and familial trauma and distrust of Balanda.

Since white settlement and under ever-changing policies directing how Aboriginal people were to be treated, significant shifts in white people's attitudes and opinion of Aboriginal people have led Aboriginal academics, such as Professor Mark Rose, to recognise "Australia has been founded on a surfeit of contradictory philosophical ideas including at times delusionary principles of democracy in pursuit of an exclusive compartmentalised utopia" (2012, p. 68). One old man in this community noted white people went from shooting Aborigines to giving them 'sit-down' money. Pearson (2009) and Trudgeon (2000) conclude that the changing relationships between Balanda and Binninj have resulted in confusion, hopelessness, disappearance of knowledge and skills, loss of mastery, loss of land, loss of language, and loss of culture. At the start of this study, Binninj in this community maintained strong links with land, language and culture but recognised that the continuing control of government was threatening Binninj practices.

From an Aboriginal perspective, the comings and goings of Balanda people could be compared to the movement of ants. In this community, people are overwhelmed by the high number of visiting outsiders who expect interaction. Ma Rhea estimates that "very

remote communities are visited by about 30 administrators per week over 40 weeks of a year – about 1200 per year in a mix of new and old faces" (Ma Rhea, 2015, p. 277). Multiply this by an average of 50 years of outsider visitations easily leads to approximately 60, 000 visits. Given this community was only 52 years old at the start of this study, more outsider Balanda have come to this community than the approximately 2300 locals who call this community home (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011b). White teachers are among the mix of new and old faces.

*Confusion underpinning formal negotiations*

Differences in Balanda and Aboriginal communication and societal organisational structures cause confusion during consultation processes preceding agreements between these two different groups of people. When a decision needs to be made about something, Balanda look to the head of the organisation or group to make the decision. Authority is granted to the position making the person in the position a secondary matter. The position is prioritised over the person. There is also a long-standing assumption by Australia's general population that the leader has the requisite knowledge and skills to fulfill their duties effectively and/or has advisors who offset any lack in knowledge. In contrast, when problems arise in daily life in this Aboriginal community, Binninj people hold a meeting where all members who will be affected by the decision can have a say regardless of age, gender or role in the group. These meetings do not pertain to 'closed' knowledge that has been passed between Djunguys. The final people to summarise the group discussion are the people (or person) who know the most about the subject for which a decision must be made. When Aboriginal people believe they have made an agreement with Balanda, they expect it will be upheld regardless of the change of person in that role. However, when new Balanda takes on a leadership role, except for legislation and institution policies, they are not necessarily bound to decisions and agreements made by the previous position holder.

### 2.3.5 Contemporary life in this remote community

When white settlement brought new social orders to the township, schooling and business practices disrupted ceremonial practices. The ceremony education cycle that continued throughout the year in accordance with seasonal and lunar cycles could not take place alongside the ways Balanda conducted business and education in the township. Attempts to enable Balanda and Binninj social orders and practices to co-

exist are confronted by societal time arrangements. Ceremonies are governed by lunar and seasonal cycles while businesses are governed by daily business hours and the organisation of work/holiday within a calendar year. To accommodate new Balanda ways, Djunguy have adapted their educational model to ensure the fulfillment of the most important smaller ceremonies throughout the year and the larger ceremonies approximately every five years. In this way, clan groups attempt to adjust their practices to accommodate living in both Balanda and Binninj worlds.

***Residents***

The estimated population of this community and its outstations in the 2011 Census was 2,292 people, of whom 2036 people (88.8%) identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Of the 2036 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, 2033 people (99.8%) identified as Aboriginal and 3 people (0.2%) identified as both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2011a). People in the community believe the population is closer to 3,500 people. The transient lifestyle of community members who travel between Darwin and surrounding homelands makes it difficult to calculate the precise population.

Although Binninj residents (locals) may present as a homogenous group to outsiders, the individuals are firm in identifying with his/her clan group and links to maternal and paternal country. Balanda are either employed in the community or related to those employees. Few Balanda come to this community except for work. This community is not accessible to the general public and is geographically isolated along the Arnhem Land coast. It is not possible to reside in or visit this community without a permit as per the Northern Land Council (NLC) rules and regulations (Northern Land Council, n.d.). Clan group members do not require a permit as the lands comprising this community are their traditional lands, their home.

***Geographical isolation***

The nearest urban centres (with a large shopping centre) are Darwin, approximately 510 km to the west and Nhulunbuy, approximately 250 km to the east. There are two dominant seasons – the wet and the dry. The wet season occurs between October and May while the dry season happens between May and September. The wet season cuts all road access to and from this community so that road travel to urban centres and most homelands is impossible. During the dry season, roads between this community and

surrounding homelands, including the Arnhem Highway, are closed by Traditional Land Owners at various times for the purpose of ceremonies. Participation in ceremonies is carefully directed and restricted to specific Aboriginal people for whom the ceremony is intended therefore access to locations in which ceremony activities take place is blocked. Within the community, logs, wheelie bins and other large objects physically block the road as a signal to all that this area is out of bounds to all but participants. To enter into out of bound areas is to breach local protocol and results in heavy fines and the removal of the vehicle (including all private, business or government vehicles) until the clan group decides reparations have been made.

The only bitumen sealed roads are located within the township with all other roads, including the Arnhem Highway, comprising gravel and dirt that is graded over a period at the beginning of each dry season. People tend to purchase four-wheel drives (4WD) for travel on these harsh roads although short-lived attempts are made to use two-wheel drive cars. Most 4WDs are Toyota Land Cruisers purchased by families with royalty money. According to the Northern Land Council, "royalty payments are derived from income from land use agreements and funds must be paid to or for the benefit of Traditional Owners" (Northern Land Council, 2015, p. 105). Road conditions are harsh and quickly take their toll on the condition and drivability of vehicles. The use of trucks is limited because of the damage they do to the general condition of the roads and the multiple water crossings. Road access and the condition of the roads around this community and to Darwin are always of significance because families frequently visit homelands and Darwin during the dry season. In attempts to reach homelands and Darwin, the more courageous drivers risk driving at the beginning and end of the wet season.

Public transport is unavailable in this community. There are no trains, buses or taxis. The school has a school bus to transport students and their families and employees to and from the school. Additional 4WDs within the fleet of vehicles owned and managed by the school are used to transport members of the school community on excursions to surrounding homelands, Darwin and other mainland communities. Transport within the community, including from the airport to home, is reliant on previous arrangements made with colleagues, family or friends.

While a coastal community, few Binninj own boats. Most boats are owned by outsiders employed within the local community. Most families have boats in their homelands located on creeks, rivers and the coast. Although only a few families have boats within this community, most families are able to access fresh seafood from Balanda who go fishing most weekends. Personal relationships and respect for traditional land owners lead most Balanda to share their fishing harvest amongst the community.

Although many people travel to Darwin by 4WD the most reliable transport is by airplane. A Darwin based company provides two flights a day Monday to Friday and one daily flight on weekends. Small planes, averaging 4 – 8 seats, can be chartered from Kakadu, Darwin or this community. Many government agencies charter planes from Darwin while many locals use the local charter planes available from other communities to travel around the northern parts of the Northern Territory, particularly for such business as funerals and meetings. Airfares are costly with the lowest priced ticket from Darwin to this community costing approximately $270 one way in ***Year 2*** of this study.

Unlike urban centres, travel to the next community/suburb involves careful planning and communication with people at both ends of the journey as a matter of safety. Water, fuel and food are precious commodities in this part of Australia because the distance between shops is usually hundreds of kilometres. People who do not consider these matters carefully put a strain on both their own survival and that of others.

***Communication in the community***

English is considered by many locals to be the language of government. Parents and children primarily use the traditional language of the clan group in their family home. Some children learn the languages of both parents and grandparents thus further supporting positive relations between clan groups. At the time of this study, the daughter of one of my critical friends was proficient in a mixture of four traditional languages and five dialects. It is rare for students to speak English at home, therefore English continues to be a foreign language that is learned at school and used in Darwin, for employment with English speaking colleagues or with government agencies.

Relations between Balanda and Binninj are reliant on a small number of Aboriginal people who know enough English to engage in dialogue with Balanda about housing, justice, welfare management, education, health and arts management. Very few Balanda

learn a clan language for many reasons, including Balanda are not in the community long enough; there is no disadvantage for not learning a clan language; work commitments make personal desires like learning a local language virtually impossible; or there is no opportunity to learn a clan language. Local languages are not known or taught on the broader Australian linguistic landscape.

When clan groups come together for community meetings, speakers use several languages to convey their meaning. Concepts emerging from western society are expressed using English. Aboriginal people continually find themselves in a position of having to explain how Binninj culture works in English to the ever-changing Balanda population. As English is not the language used in the social orders and arrangement of Aboriginal culture, much conceptual understanding is lost in the translation to English. Numerous concepts in both Balanda and Binninj societies and their respective cultures do not readily translate leading to much confusion on the part of both Balanda and Binninj.

It is common practice in this community for a small group of locals to master English to a level that enables navigation through government processes. Within families, members who have developed some mastery of English are expected to act as translators and ‘workers’ for other family members. These English speakers are expected to conduct the business requiring English on behalf of a family member; accompany family members to government agencies and act as interpreters; and complete government forms. As the years progress, most family members with mastery of English are aging and passing away leaving households and clan groups without a reliable translator or ‘worker’. For most people under fifty years of age, education has not included complex English with which to understand and communicate complex ideas and processes emerging from government institutions.

Most Balanda learn a few words for social interaction and to demonstrate their willingness to learn Binninj ways. Balanda tend to modify their English to enable simple conversations with Aboriginal friends and colleagues. Both Binninj and Balanda lack conceptual and linguistic resources to tackle complex issues such as preventative health care to address health issues prevalent in the community, including rheumatic heart disease, trachoma, mental health, and kidney disease. Both Binninj and Balanda rely on the chance visitation of someone, either Balanda or Binninj, who can explain

these complex concepts. Significant amounts of time are needed to scaffold the concept and language to enable understanding of complex concepts. Lack of time and communication and conceptual differences maintain social distances between Balanda and Binninj.

Most household do not have access to the internet. Critical friends explained cost effective access to the internet is reliant on a landline telephone connection. If family know you have a landline in your house they will bring their own phone to your house to make phone calls. One critical friend told me she had received a telephone bill for thousands of dollars because people had used her phone line without permission and without her knowledge. Because the bill was in her name she had to pay the bill. Most people, including children, have a prepaid mobile phone. Phones are often broken, lost or stolen so a person's contact phone number frequently changes. At one time, I had five phone numbers for one critical friend. I was loathe to remove them because every now and then I would get a call from one of the numbers I had been led to believe was no longer being used. There is also a high chance someone will continually call your number to 'humbug' or make repeated requests such that he/she is a nuisance. It is better to have someone's number so you can ignore it than to answer the phone and be put in a position of feeling obliged to give that person money or food or, drive him/her somewhere. Teachers tend not to give Binninj their phone number until they know that person well.

***Issues dominating the community***

Successive Social Justice Reports (Calma, 2009a, 2009b; Dodson, 2014; Gooda, 2011a, 2011b) produced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioners indicate Indigenous Australians, particularly those in remote communities, experience a worse living situation, overall, than their non-Indigenous counterparts. The precarious nature of everyday life in a remote community is captured in the "Little Children are Sacred" report:

> The classic indicia of children likely to suffer neglect, abuse and/or sexual abuse are, unfortunately, particularly apparent in Aboriginal communities. Family dysfunctionality, as a catch-all phrase, reflects and encompasses problems of alcohol and drug abuse, poverty, housing shortages, unemployment and the like. All of these issues exist in many Aboriginal communities. (Wild & Anderson, 2007, p. 7)

The “Little Children are Sacred” report and the 2005 Social Justice Report influenced the Northern Territory Emergency Intervention which is active in this community. Concerns outlined in Social Justice Reports between 2008 and 2011 are outlined in Table 1 to provide an overview of the issues impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Both Binninj and Balanda in this community frequently identify the issues outlined in Table 1 as areas of significant concern. Further, they highlight the domino effect of these concerns indicating the need to address numerous concerns simultaneously.

Binninj in this community are involved in the struggle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be included in the constitution (Gooda, 2011a) and the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous People (Calma, 2009a; United Nations General Assembly, 2008) for which Australia became a signatory in 2009 (Macklin, 2009). Community leaders, particularly Traditional Land Owners, frequently interact with government leaders seeking to influence the way government structures can sustain homelands and maintain their culture and languages. Leaders frequently lament being ignored and often predict a program will fail because of the degree of local Binninj input in the content and delivery of the program.

As outlined in Social Justice Reports, lateral violence is prevalent in this community. Fights between clan groups and households and individuals can be rapid and violent. Physical and verbal attacks are often the way problems are addressed. Children observe these patterns of behaviour and replicate this response to frustration and anger, often

Table 1 Social Justice concerns about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

| Year | Concerns outlined in the Social Justice Report |
|---|---|
| 2008<br>(Calma, 2009a) | • An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander human rights protection framework<br>• The challenge of delivering a quality remote Indigenous education service<br>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing from historic and intergenerational trauma<br>• A reform agenda to achieve health equality for Indigenous peoples within a generation |
| 2009<br>(Calma, 2009b) | • The over-representation of Indigenous Australians in the criminal justice system<br>• The perilous state of Indigenous languages<br>• Sustaining Aboriginal homeland communities |
| 2010<br>(Gooda, 2011a) | • Promoting better relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the broader Australian community |

| | |
|---|---|
| | • Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution<br>• A governance structure to bring community and government together in dialogue and cooperation |
| 2011<br>(Gooda, 2011b) | • Lateral violence – harmful behaviours between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples collectively as part of an oppressed group: within families, organisations and the community.<br>• Cultural safety and security |

defending family members at school through threats and acts of physical violence. If a person feels outnumbered or in a situation he/she is unable to handle on his/her own, he/she quickly goes and gets other family members to enter the fray whether it be at home, in the community or at school. Respected clan leaders call community meetings where clan groups come together to address issues to stop clashes. Local stores are often asked by clan leaders to close down until issues are resolved.

Services are asked to close down on the day an employee or respected clan leader has passed away. Balanda and Binninj are encouraged to pay their respects to the family and are invited to view the body. Binninj must wait until their family leader, usually the eldest person of their immediate family (such as mother, father, grandmother or grandfather) to visit the deceased's family before they can pay their respects. When the funeral for the deceased takes place families across the community provide food for the funeral place. The area around the funeral place, usually a person's home, is cordoned off with something large like bins or logs to signal this as a 'no go' zone except for people involved in the funeral. Funerals can go for several weeks until important people arrive to pay their respects. When a person passes away, no one is allowed to say his/her name or any word that starts with the sound of that person's name. For example if 'Winnie' passes away, we cannot say such words as 'win' or 'window'. It is believed that by saying the person's name, the spirit is unable to go free.

This community experiences alcohol and drug abuse, and very high levels of rheumatic heart disease, kidney disease and heart disease. Otitis media is prevalent such that classrooms have 'redcats', sound amplification systems to support students to hear the teacher. Students often present with large infected sores from boils, scabies and head lice. In attempts to address head lice infestations, children's heads are shaved. Girls are often seen with a shirt covering their shaved head which remains on the head at all times to reduce shame. Many health issues can be prevented through household and

personal hygiene but overcrowded housing and a lack of understanding about the relationship between health and hygiene leads to a vicious cycle which is yet to be broken.

In this community, health and wellbeing problems are further exacerbated by other factors such as a lack of household resources and the custom of having dogs as integral members of a household. Most households lack white goods such as refrigerators, washing machines and freezers and furniture such as beds. Frequently, mattresses are placed on the floor where they absorb damp and mould in the wet season and are often shared with dogs to keep warm during the dry season. Most people have a blanket and pillow that is difficult to keep clean due to the lack of washing machines.

Dogs are perceived as key members of the household and are utilised for protection, hunting, warmth and companionship. This community does not have by-laws related to the care and ownership of dogs resulting in numerous dogs associated with a house. Dogs frequently accompany family members as they walk through town. Households without at least two dogs are very rare in this community; most houses have numerous dogs kept in unfenced yards. Illnesses from dog faeces and skin conditions such as dog scabies are also readily transmitted to family members and are a frequent subject of awareness campaigns by Animal Management in Rural and Remote Indigenous Communities (AMRRIC, n.d.).

Many services found in non-Indigenous townships of a similar size are non-existent within this community. Although people are able to purchase clothing, white-goods and other household items at a significantly higher cost for poorer quality, services including but not limited to a veterinarian, furniture stores, or social venues, such as sporting clubs, are non-existent. People in this community find it is generally more cost effective to purchase goods in Darwin and have them sent out to the community. For most Aboriginal residents, this arrangement for acquiring goods is usually unavailable due to money management issues. Immediately prior to this study, the Department of Business Economic and Regional Development (2009) highlighted differences between this community and a similar sized non-Aboriginal community. Gundagai, a similarly sized community in the state of New South Wales, has numerous private businesses operating within the community: 15 whole trade services, 39 retail trade services, 30 transport and storage businesses, 57 property and business services, six cultural and

recreational services, 15 accommodation, cafe and restaurant services, and 51 construction services (Department of Business Economic and Regional Development, 2009, p. 2). Significantly, this remote Aboriginal community had no private businesses directed at electric, gas and water supply, wholesale trade, communication services, property and business services, or health and community services, because almost all services are provided by government. Although located in the heart of Arnhem Land, a significant Australian tourist area, only one private business was involved in the agricultural, forestry and fishing industry compared to the 237 in Gundagai (Department of Business Economic and Regional Development, 2009, p. 2). Comparatively, Indigenous Australians residing in remote and very remote locations lack access to services and resources that would be found in non-Indigenous communities of similar size and have come to be expected as part of the contemporary society's fabric.

The way Binninj acquire, care for and use household goods places pressure on households and individuals reliant on specific equipment for schooling and employment. Employed Binninj, who are a minority group in the community, purchase household goods to help them meet the demands of being work-ready. In the course of daily life however, fights in the house and incorrect usage result in many white goods and mechanical devices, including vehicles, finding their way to the local dump after a few months. Minor repairs cannot be made due to a lack of skilled labour in the community; an inability to access spare parts; and general ignorance of when something is not working correctly and what to do with faulty equipment. Equipment is also used in ways not generally considered by white Australians. For example, televisions are often taken outside the house during the dry season where more people can see the television and where the temperature is cooler. Having never seen this in an urban setting, I was initially startled to find this to be a standard practice across numerous communities. Washing machines are a precious commodity because they are expensive and cannot be repaired within the community. Most washing is done by hand and hung over fences or laid out on the ground in grassy yards. Many families have opted out of landline phones having fallen victim to paying off telephone bills costing thousands of dollars incurred by other family members not necessarily residing in the home.

Food is shared between families and households. For example, a large pot of food is usually cooked in a household to provide for numerous family members from other households. The pot of food is kept on the stove until the food has been eaten. If a stove

is unavailable, an outdoor cooking area is built similar to a camping fire and billy-cans (similar to a small metal bucket) and pots are placed directly onto the fire. One critical friend cooked for her very large family of six children and other family members on a fire outside the house because she did not have a stove inside her house. She commented on the additional workload this placed on meal preparation. This critical friend had been living in her mother-in-law's broken down house waiting for a house for her family for seven years despite being a chronic asthmatic, having a large family who could not all sleep in the one house, and being employed as a full time assistant teacher for several years. This assistant teacher was at school every day despite these challenging life conditions.

Most non-Indigenous people used to the ready access of resources in urban settings are ignorant of access issues experienced by remote residents. Indeed, it is common for urbanites residing within the community to quickly become frustrated at the lack of availability of everyday resources. Additionally, the lack of access to resources reduces an individual's or family's ability to prepare for the unexpected such as a bout of influenza as medications quickly go out of date and common urban services such as chemists are non-existent in remote communities.

***Education in the contemporary community***

Contemporary life for Binninj in this community attempts to maintain culture and language utilising clan societal structures while learning nation-state societal structures and western culture and English to navigate government agencies and Australian services.

Clan group education continues to be directed by *Rom* and led by the Djunguy who has authority of specific knowledge, who is frequently an adult but not necessarily an old person. A person becomes an adult when they have reached puberty and gone through the appropriate ceremonies. *Rom* provides the basis for teaching young people the knowledge required to fulfill their role as manager in their mother's country and to understand the responsibilities of being the land-owner of their father's country. The Djunguy teaches through ceremony and provides guidance in daily life practices. Historically, ceremony was one education cycle made up of lots of smaller ceremonies beginning on the first new moon during Djimuuru season that aligns with the western world's December/January and continued all year. Ceremonies occur day and night and

in shifting locations depending on what is being taught. Ceremonies are used to teach survival practices, management of the country and to ensure the ongoing maintenance of *ROM*. Women's business is taught by women, men's business is taught by men and general business is taught by both men and women simultaneously. Education is delivered as people go about their daily business, in context and in-situ.

*Rom* is learned from a young age through participation in ceremonies, dances, stories and learning to read country and artworks. Just as curriculum directs the content of what Australian students learn in Australian schools, *Rom* directs what Aboriginal students learn. Aboriginal lives are dependent on *Rom* as a matter of life and death. *Rom* has been successfully sustained by this community's clan groups.

Conceptual difference is not only expressed in classrooms and schools, but also in how people live their lives. State society and clan society rules and mores are so different, local people are still learning to make adjustments in how they live their lives. The old people, who have always played a role in guiding the clan groups, have not had the opportunities or experiences to fully digest all of the newly instated elements brought into the community by outsiders, the Balanda. Clan groups are now having to translate between Aboriginal and white classification systems in a world where the white classification systems dominate all processes and determine what is and is not permitted in contemporary Australia (Trudgeon, 2000). The classification systems are commonly perceived as world-view and the ways in which concepts are understood and discussed. The clash of classification systems is particularly apparent when Balanda and Binninj try to understand each other's kinship laws. Numerous locals have come to interpret differences between Yolgnu and Balanda as whites having "dominant knowledge (that) is of a superior, mystical quality and unattainable" (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 129). In turn, drawing on their knowledge traditions and observing the processes instated by institutions, many Aboriginal people believe that they are observing Balanda accessing "mystical forces" through these rituals and thus they need to learn the rituals (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 130). My critical friends attested to this phenomenon.

For most of the local community, daily decisions must consider navigating the social orders that are acceptable to both Balanda and Aboriginal people. Families and individuals frequently blunder through the acceptable social orders of mainstream Australian society guided by well-meaning people who lack pertinent information. At

times, actions deemed acceptable in white Australian society can lead to trouble within the clan when social orders have been disregarded or corrupted, bringing disorder to clan groups.

Adults in the local community are greatly concerned that they are losing their traditional culture which is being replaced by a culture they do not understand. The community elders are concerned with "problems with premature death and preventable diseases (and) learned helplessness" (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 165). Where once clan groups were strong, healthy and proud, the community now lives with the "ongoing effects of ineffectual education" (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 124). Binninj in East Arnhem Land argue that if Balanda education was effective, then people would understand the Balanda world and the Aboriginal community would be able to find some balance between both worlds (Trudgeon, 2000).

Traditional roles within clan groups have been replaced with western institutional programs and people. While Binninj people have benefitted from the services provided by western institutions, most do not sufficiently understand what Balanda professionals are talking about and they don't have the academic English to do their own research and discuss the new ideas. Serious medical conditions, such as cancer and diabetes, are being down-played by the community who use their Aboriginal communication mores and traditional knowledge to understand the conditions (Trudgeon, 2000). Medical professionals use non-Aboriginal communication mores and knowledge that has developed in the western world over hundreds of years (Trudgeon, 2000). Differences in communication mores and knowledge bases frequently lead to misunderstandings as the people involved rely on key English terms that do not have shared meanings. Additionally, medical conditions that have no historical basis are unable to be discussed with family members who have had had contact with the condition and the ways in which the condition has been addressed. Local Aboriginal people cannot consult their own traditional doctors because diseases in the modern world require new medicines which traditional doctors do not have, cannot access and do not fully understand. Ironically, there are several medical conditions in the local environment that traditional doctors are able to address more effectively than modern medicines.

Elders are also concerned about the negative effects brought about by introduced foods and technologies. New foods such as junk food, softdrink and alcohol have brought

heart disease, tooth decay, malnourishment, obesity and diabetes to the community. Prior to western food, families had to subsist on food that was hunted by the men and gathered by the women. Food was acquired seasonally and cooking methods were limited to ground ovens and fires. In today's society, sweet tea (loaded with sugar), tobacco and damper are the main goods demanded by families.

Technological advancements in the western world have brought motor cars, toys, white goods and other resources made of plastic, metal and synthetic materials that are non-biodegradable. Where once all resources were bio-degradable, the landscape is now dotted with broken down vehicles and white-goods that are left where they break down. Human waste of disposable nappies, packaging and general litter is spread across the community although many efforts are made to relocate rubbish to the local rubbish tip.

Increasing numbers of mobile phones, ipads, ipods and other mobile devices in the community are causing elders to be fearful of how these new technologies are used by the younger generations. New technologies are sometimes used for inappropriate activities such as pornography. However, because the old people don't understand the new technology used by young people, they are unable to control what the young people are doing with it. There are increasing accounts of young men and women using new technologies to share private information that belongs to couples or families with the outside world without regard for cultural or personal safety. In keeping with traditional practices, elders maintain knowledge is power and take great care to ensure knowledge holders manage their knowledge carefully to maintain their authority.

According to my critical friends, many local people do not understand the internet is accessible by the world at any time. Rather, the general perception is that information published on computers and phones used every day is only accessible to the person with whom they are communicating. Many young people and Balanda do not consider the long-term ramifications of uploading cultural information onto digital devices that enable anyone to have access to confidential and sacred knowledge.

Additionally, younger generations and Balanda do not understand the socio-political implications of Aboriginal knowledge in the wrong hands, leading to situations where the potential for an economic future for clan groups is undermined. For example, knowledge of bush medicine is increasingly being accessed by the health industry

across the world. A seemingly harmless video uploaded to the internet has the potential to undermine economic relationships between the holder of the knowledge and the health industry. Elders are also frustrated at how often their knowledge is handed out without reciprocity.

Elders have accepted that "Balanda and their law are here to stay. But the shape and content of this law is a complete mystery to them" (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 150). Because Binninj don't understand how Balanda law works, people believe "there is no real process of law in this country and therefore no protection for its citizens" under the Balanda system of law (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 150). High levels of Aboriginal incarceration (Pearson, 2016) attest to Binninj belief. Further, Binninj feel "caught between two systems, one based on a clear 'rule of law' and the other seemingly capricious, vague and incomprehensible" (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 150). When powerful politicians come into communities and talk about a concern and then a policy or law is instated to enforce a change in behaviours, such as the Northern Territory Intervention, Aboriginal people perceive that one person speaks and the police and others do as they are told. Not having insider knowledge of government bureaucracies, "they [see] no rule of law in Balanda culture – only a rule of powerful individuals who can change the rules of the game as they want" (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 150).

My assistant teacher 'critical friends' used the term 'confused', similarly to Trudgeon, by recognising Balanda ways came along after Binninj ways, believing Balanda should explain themselves more thoroughly so Binninj can understand. Clan arrangements for addressing matters such as health, trade, law and education, which have maintained social order for thousands of years, have been usurped by arrangements from a State society (Diamond, 2012) without the necessary education required for success. Binninj are further confused and frustrated that efforts to work with Balanda as two equal nations, are not treated with the respect or sincerity by which Binninj continually make the offer (Trudgeon, 2000).

Trudgeon highlights Balanda do not understand that Binninj are confused by Balanda education "and just continue to push mainstream [education] activities in the hope that somehow [Binninj] will learn" (2000, p. 234). Education does not meet the real learning needs of Binninj because it does not address "*basic* [author's italics] conceptional [sic] understanding of how the dominant culture works or the [western world] around them"

(2000, p, 235). Parents and teachers are unable to fill in the missing links for young people because they themselves do not know what the missing links are nor have they had the opportunity to sit together to work through the conceptually complex terrain between Binninj and Balanda cultural and societal differences. Further, complex concepts belonging to either Binninj or Balanda can only be explained using Binninj language for Binninj concepts and English for Balanda concepts. As Trudgeon notes,

> while dominant cultural professionals are unable to communicate meaningfully to [Binninj] even the most basic concepts affecting their life and well-being, [Binninj] in turn can neither explain what is happening in their lives nor share with the dominant culture the wisdom which has been part of their culture for thousands of years. (2000, p. 77)

Disillusionment has not been able to be addressed or offset by rigorous intellectual discussions between knowledgeable Balanda and Binninj to unpack complex concepts; develop a shared language around concepts; and mutual understandings about how complex concepts relate to real life in and beyond the community.

Trudgeon maintains "present programs need assessing to see if they are part of the answer or *part of the problem* [author's italics] (2000, p. 245). Further he argues Balanda official and unofficial beliefs that Binninj are to blame for their predicament

> subtly controls the thinking behind many programs devised to resolve the crisis, rendering them useless before they leave the drawing board. And when these programs are implement they are actually making things worse by adding to the burden and responsibility that [Binninj] are already carrying. (2000, p. 61)

As noted by critical friends, the community is trying to assert their Indigenous rights as determined by the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (United Nations General Assembly, 2008) to develop a governance structure to bring community and government together (Gooda, 2011a) to address the complex issues experienced by Binninj. Like Trudgeon (2000), critical friends believe education is the starting point but the current model of education provided in the local school does not address issues but rather adds to the complex terrain that does not understand Binninj culture, language, people or society.

### 2.4 In-between Space: The school

This section provides an overview of the current social orders and arrangements between the institution of education, including white teachers, and the local clan groups in this school from August 2009 until December 2011. According to Third Space theory, the school would be describe as a Third Space if the social orders were co-constructed by members of NTDET and the local clan groups to construct an unrecognisable hybrid belonging to "neither the One nor the Other but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 41). In this school, Binninj social orders are unfamiliar to teachers. Teachers look to NTDET and school leaders for guidance while Binninj look to clan social orders. In the school Space, the ways in which these two different societies and cultures come together are problematic resulting in numerous challenges affecting teacher practice.

As a government school, the social orders are comparable to other government schools. Binninj have had little input into how the school has been shaped. Teacher and school practices are directed by AITSL, ACARA, NAPLAN, EYLF, ATSIEAP and Closing the Gap, as outlined in the First Space, the institution. While attempts have been made by the local community, NTDET and white teachers to collaborate, a culture of seeming arbitrariness, confusion and conflict of purpose in encounters between members of the First Space and the Second Space continues to affect education in this school.

This school is classified by MySchool, "a resource for parents, educators and the community to give readily accessible information about each of Australia's just over 10,000 schools and campuses" (ACARA, 2016e) as a very remote government funded Aboriginal community school (ACARA, 2016f). According to ACARA, the School Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) value for this school was 553 in ***Year 2*** and 596 in ***Year 3*** (ACARA, 2016f) indicating social improvement. ICSEA is calculated according to parents' occupation, parents' education, geographical location and proportion of Indigenous students (ACARA, 2014). The average ICSEA value assigned to Australian schools/communities is set at 1000. The low ICSEA value assigned to this school indicates the disadvantage faced by most students in this school and which was explored earlier in this chapter.

### 2.4.1 School provision

This school provides education to families via FaFT (birth to 3.5 years), and students from Preschool (aged 3.5 – 5.5 years) through to Years 11-12, also referred to as Senior years (average ages 17-18 years). The school also provides an educational service to 12 surrounding Homeland Learning Centres that vary in accessibility depending on seasons and cultural activities. There are four Homelands teachers who service the 12 Homeland Learning Centres located in 12 homeland sites, four days a week. On average, each Homelands teacher provides an education service for two to four sites, providing programming for Assistant teachers based at each Homeland. Homelands education continues to be a contested area within the field of education, but because my study did not pertain to homelands education, I have not included details about homelands in the context chapter.

The school year is divided into two semesters which are then divided into two terms. Teachers provide student reports to families at the end of Semester One, at the end of June, and Semester Two, in December. The four school terms are ten weeks long: Term One - January to April; Term Two – April to June; Term Three – July to September; and Term Four – October to December. Term One takes place during the wet season when road access is closed. Roads are usually open from Term Two until the end of Term Four enabling travel to homelands, Darwin and other sites across Arnhem Land. The school is closed during cyclones, public holidays, weekends and school holidays. Teachers have access to the school at any time during their tenure.

School begins at 8:35am and finishes at 3:00pm, Monday to Friday. Like other schools in the Northern Territory, the standard school day is 6 hours and 20 minutes, with one hour a day provided for morning tea and lunch time breaks when teachers can be seen on playground duty supervising students. The morning session occurs between 8.35am and 11:00am followed by the middle session from 11:30am until 1:00pm and the afternoon session from 1:30pm until 3:00pm.

Balanda students and the very few Aboriginal students whose academic performance is comparable to non-Indigenous peers enroll in either boarding school or Katherine School of the Air to complete Year 7 onwards. I only provide information pertaining to preschool to Year 6 because this study focuses on teachers in the Primary sector of schooling.

### 2.4.2 Determining matters of priority

The school is guided by NTDET's strategic plan (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2009). Policies produced by governing bodies within national and territory jurisdictions of education, such as ACARA, NAPLAN, and AITSL, are interpreted by NTDET bureaucrats as they develop NTDET's strategic plan. NTDET's strategic plan is then interpreted by the Principal with support from School Leadership, and aligned with key data about the school's performance to develop the school's AOP. The AOP directs teacher practice in such matters as teaching and learning, professional development, parent and community engagement, student engagement and wellbeing, and student assessment and reporting.

School performance is determined by such data as student NAPLAN results (ACARA, 2016f), enrolment and attendance data (ACARA, 2016f), school-based data as outlined in the previous AOP, student/staff/parent opinion survey data, student destination surveys and additional data as determined by the principal. Transition students were monitored using the 'Assessment of Student Competencies' (Northern Territory Department of Education, n.d.-a). Data from these sources enables the Principal and School Leadership to monitor strategy effectiveness. This data also enables NTDET to monitor the school's performance by comparing school data from previous years and making comparison to data from other schools in the Northern Territory.

In 2009, NTDET funded an independent review of this school's performance seeking input from staff, students and the broader community. The Rogers' School Review (Rogers, 2009) found the school was "providing a basic level of educational opportunity for students, both in [this school] and in the adjacent homelands centres" (p. 3). Further, this school was "operating at an unsatisfactory level in a range of areas. Attendance is poor, student outcomes at all levels are totally unacceptable and staff cohesion is questionable" (Rogers, 2009, p. 4).

### 2.4.3 The principal's authority

The principal is able to exert discretionary powers over most matters that arise within the school. Departmental policies are clear about when Principals can apply their discretionary powers and when they cannot. An example of principal discretion is outlined below:

> Where a teacher undertakes a high level of other duties or activities involving voluntary or discretionary effort, the Principal may reduce the face-to-face component. Similarly where a teacher has a lower face-to-face teaching component e.g. no home group, reasonable additional duties may be assigned by the Principal. (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2012b, p. 4)

The use of the modal verb 'may' gives the principal discretion to attend to contextual factors unique to their school. The principal's discretionary powers do not extend to legislative requirements such as delivering the Australian Curriculum and attending to 'Working with Children' clearance notices and criminal history checks (Northern Territory Government, 2016a) or Mandatory Reporting (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014). As the leader of the school, principal directives must be followed by all school staff. Failure to do so can result in a breach of the code of conduct and possible further action by the departmental hierarchy. Whether a staff member agrees with the principal's decision or not, even if the staff member has greater knowledge and experience than the principal, unless there is a policy or legislative guidelines contrary to the principal's directive, staff must abide by the principal's decisions.

### 2.4.4 NTDET directives

Like all government schools in the NT, school activities are guided by a range of policies published on the Northern Territory Government, Department of Education and Training website. Schools access legal documents such as legislation and forms from this website and use the policies to develop school specific policies. During this study, there were no school specific policies requiring all policies to be accessed directly from the government website.

#### *Code of conduct*

All staff are expected to comply with the Code of Conduct for School Policy (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2011a) established to provide a safe and positive school environment. This community is a prescribed area therefore teachers must abide by local laws pertaining to alcohol purchasing and consumption, and the development and use of publications, films and computer games. Teachers at this school are expected to comply with the same code of conduct as teachers in other schools in the territory. Breaches of the code of conduct may lead to appropriate disciplinary action by the Northern Territory Department of Education.

### *Mandatory reporting*

Under Sections 15, 16 and 26 of the *Care and Protection of Children Act 2007* (NT) it is the legal responsibility of every adult in the Northern Territory to report "a belief on reasonable grounds that a child is likely to suffer harm or exploitation" (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014). In the Northern Territory, abuse and neglect to be reported includes "physical abuse, sexual or other exploitation of a child, emotional/psychological abuse, neglect, exposure to physical violence (e.g. a child witnessing violence between parents at home)" (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014). Information provided is considered to be 'in good faith' and is determined by the individual's level of comfort with what they hear or observe in regards to a child's safety and wellbeing. Every adult who works within the school context must comply with the requirements of mandatory reporting. Legal protection is provided to a person making a report and is not deemed to be a breach of any professional code of conduct. Legal protection is not provided to a person "making a report if they also unnecessarily disclose information to another person, for example a colleague, for a reason other than a professional need to do so" (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2010b). During this study confidentiality was a grey area that impacted on what teachers could and could not be told about their students. This tension is illustrated in greater detail in the Findings chapter (Chapter Five).

### *Attendance and Absenteeism*

One month after this study began, the principal negotiated with NTDET to change the ST1: Primary position to ST1: Attendance and Participation as part of the school's attendance plan to address chronic student absenteeism and take advantage of the knowledge and skills of a teacher who had been in this school for 11 years. During the time in which this study took place, the School Leadership team enlisted local adults employed as attendance and participation officers, class teachers and the School Leadership team to visit students' homes frequently to talk to parents about their child's school attendance.

One entry in my researcher journal identified the positive response of a targeted attendance strategy directed at students, staff and households and enduring challenges associated with student attendance. The entry has been divided into two parts with the first part focused on attendance awards and the second part highlighting ongoing issues.

> Attendance awards - if students attend five out of five days they receive a power card or grocer bag or toiletry bag to the value of $20. I have mixed feelings about this. Children are proud to contribute to their household. Parents are encouraging kids to go to school. BUT now parents are sending kids to school for material goods not for learning. Numbers have gone up. This is good. The look of pride on children's faces when they get their prize! (Part one, Episode 421, Researcher's Journal)

The newly instated roles of the ST1: Attendance and Participation and attendance officers were well publicised by Senior Leadership, particularly the Principal. Student attendance became a key focus of the school's conversations with families and the broader community. School staff often reminded students that school attendance was good for learning and helping to provide their households with important household necessities. The relationship between student attendance and academic achievement became lost amid the provision of household rewards for students attending school every day. Conversations with teachers and assistant teachers revealed students frequently commenting that parents had requested one of the three rewards as per the needs of the household.

> Admin do drive-arounds (I help out with this) to visit homes and remind parents to send kids to school. If you do, then you get attendance award of grocery, toiletry or power card. Families' eyes light up at this. Chronic non-attenders still don't tend to come. When we drive around we ask parents why they don't send their kids to school. Reasons include: No clothes, don't want to, someone is picking on the child, sore foot, sick, We try to negotiate solutions with parents but feel like it is all empty air Space being filled by words not actions. Sometimes, we don't get a reason; we just get told 'tomorrow, tomorrow'. I really enjoyed the camaraderie between [Attendance and Participation Officer 1], [Attendance and Participation Officer 2] and myself as we drove around. Mind you, sometimes these ladies aren't at work either…. Do as I say not as I do.
>
> (Part two, Episode 421, Researcher's Journal)

Attendance and Participation Officers were often verbally abused by families when they enquired about children. In response, the ST1: Attendance and Participation coordinated a home-visit schedule for the School Leadership team and Attendance and Participation Officers to visit homes together because authority came from the School Leadership team. These visits took place between 9am and 10am with reasons for absence recorded

on notes and returned to the ST1: Attendance and Participation for review with the principal.

### *Curriculum*

The two curriculum frameworks influencing teaching and learning during this study were the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) and the Australian Curriculum (ACARA) for Transition to Year 6. At the time of this study, the NTCF was the curriculum in this school. Eight months into this study the principal involved this school in NTDET's Australian Curriculum trial. This school was included as one of a few remote Aboriginal community schools involved in trialing the Australian Curriculum English, Mathematics, Science and History. The principal negotiated with teachers to teach a combination of English, History, Mathematics and/or Science and provide feedback to ACARA. To trial the Australian Curriculum, I worked with staff in this school and our partner school, as negotiated by the principal, to create front-ended assessment tasks that were delivered during the ten-week trial, and assessed and moderated at the end of the term in a moderation session involving both schools.

In my role of curriculum coordinator, I saw an opportunity to build closer relationships with the community and develop a culturally relevant curriculum. I negotiated with teachers to select topics that integrated local knowledge with the Australian Curriculum. The tasks were designed by me, drawing on my skills as a New Basics moderator trained to develop front-ended assessment tasks guided by the work of Wiggins and McTighe (Wiggins & McTighe, 2007) and incorporated local Aboriginal knowledge and practices as requested by YuyaBol, the school's Aboriginal advisory group, pre-service teachers and other community members who had taken a specific interest in student learning in the school. For example, the Year 4 teacher was interested in science so I suggested his class examine survival science. This task required students to explore familiar survival practices utilised by local clans through the western lens of science outlined in the Australian Curriculum Year 4 Science. The senior teacher linguist for Burarra assisted me with the development of this task to ensure relevance and accuracy. As much as possible, students were given an assessment task, designed by me, the Burarra linguist and/or the classroom teacher that integrated several subject areas of the curriculum and prioritised local socio-cultural knowledge.

Teachers from both schools were supported with professional learning sessions about how to teach English, and were supported to implement the task via collaborative planning sessions that occurred throughout the ACARA trial. All participating teachers reported developing greater insight into making assessment requirements more visible to students and in using an exemplar (teacher developed 'A' standard example of the task) as a specific teaching and learning tool. Teachers from both schools reported being clearer about what they had to teach and what students had to learn. During and after the ACARA trial utilising these tasks, teachers from both schools felt the students were more engaged with the curriculum and teachers learned a lot more about their students, commenting that students and family members who supported class learning during the assessment tasks were positioned as experts which teachers believed to be an empowering process. During the Australian Curriculum trial, visiting members of the Australian Curriculum team acknowledged our integrated assessment tasks that foregrounded assessment and local Aboriginal knowledge as a positive reinforcement of Indigenous perspectives and accurately delivered on the requirements of the Australian Curriculum.

After the trial, the partnership with the other school ceased. Teachers in both our school and our partner school were unable to continue using the Australian Curriculum for English, History, Mathematics and Science due to NTDET's stance that it was a trial and did not align with NTDET's current processes that had been established around NTCF. Staff who participated in the Australian Curriculum trial were disgruntled about NTDET's decision, but had to abide by the department's decision.

Three months after the Australian Curriculum trial, a new principal arrived at this school. Immediately, the new principal did not engage with curriculum and assessment documents and moderation processes created during the Australian Curriculum trial despite teachers expressing interest that the school continue practices from this trial as soon as NTDET processes were adjusted. After three months in the school, the new principal removed the front-ended assessment tasks, diagnostic maps and moderation professional learning sessions installed by the previous principal. In consultation with the newly instated ST1: Literacy and Numeracy, the principal introduced Accelerated Literacy and sanctioned the morning session from 8.30am – 11am for literacy instruction.

During this study, two curriculum initiatives specific to the preschool were introduced. The Early Years curriculum and the Families as First Teachers program (FaFT) were implemented in Term One, 2011. Both the Preschool teacher and the FaFT family educator were completing their Bachelor of Teaching and Learning In-service (Early Childhood) at this time. Separate to the rest of the school, the Preschool teacher and FaFT family educator supported each other in the daily operations of the preschool and FaFT, child and family enrolments and resourcing for this sector of the school.

***Families as first teachers (FaFT)***

The family educator and community liaison officer coached parents and significant adults to support their child under the age of 3.5 year to learn using the Abecedarian Approach. The Abecedarian Approach comprises "Conversational Reading, Learning Games, enriched caregiving and Language Priority" (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2016a). Since ***Year 2***, the FaFT family educator, a white teacher with two years teaching experience in this community prior to the FaFT position, successfully developed relationships with the parents, carers, and a range of agencies in the community such that health, adult education, and other government agencies utilise the FaFT facility to deliver programs to families for improved health and wellbeing. Local employees under the guidance of the FaFT family educator and community liaison officer are heavily involved in supporting families for school readiness and parent engagement activities. The reference group, comprising respected community members identified by local employees, directed the name of the new "Manayingkarirra Child and Family Centre" (Maningrida College, 2016). This Child and Family Centre is attached to the school but can only be entered from another road entry rather than via a gate between the school and the centre. The Child and Family Centre "respond[s] to child and family needs in a seamless holistic manner" that focus on "building community capacity" through dialogic relationships with parents, carers and the community (Maningrida College, 2016). Although I have described the school as an in-between Space, the Child and Family Centre, building on its strong FaFT program, displays the traits of a Third Space.

### 2.4.5 The school community

The school community comprises school staff and students and their families. Staff are arranged into seven core groups: the School Leadership team, teachers, specialist

teachers, assistant teachers, cleaners, tuckshop staff and grounds-staff. For most of this study, the School Leadership team, the teachers and specialist teachers were all Balanda. Eighteen months after this study began, an Aboriginal teacher began teaching at this school. I did not invite this teacher to participate in the study as she had much greater insight into this community than non-Aboriginal teachers and did not fit the participant profile for this study.

The principal is the school leader and is supported by senior leadership comprising two assistant principals (AP), a number of senior teachers (ST1), a school counselor and numerous classroom teachers. Positions directed at school business management, such as the business manager and administrative assistants, are also filled by non-Aboriginal people.

***Registered teachers***

Consistent with all education jurisdictions, the School Leadership team and teachers were all registered teachers who had the minimum qualification of a Bachelor of Education (four-year tertiary trained). All registered teachers were employed from outside the community and were housed in school allocated government housing. At the time of this study there were 10 full time primary teachers teaching Preschool to Year 6 in ***Year 1*** of the study and 11 full time primary teachers in ***Year 2***. An additional primary class was required to accommodate an increase in student numbers.

Teachers come to be at the school in one of two ways. The principal has the authority to recruit and employ teachers to the school or teachers can be transferred into a school once they have secured permanent employment status with the Department of Education. This process begins at the school level and is approved by the school principal and the Human Resources Manager who is located in Darwin,. Most teachers recruited by the principal during this study were employed on a contract. The principal has the authority to renew or not renew contracts. The non-renewal of a teacher's contract requires the teacher to vacate the teacher accommodation and NTDET pays for a flight to Darwin. The principal can identify teachers to gain permanent teacher status by initiating a probation process, which can take three to twelve months. Once permanent teaching status is attained, teachers can apply to be transferred to an urban school within the Northern Territory after teaching in this community for three years.

Teachers who maintain continuous service in this very remote school for four years can access six months study leave with full pay or take 12 months study leave at half pay.

Teachers come to this school with varied amounts of teaching and community experience. In the first term of tenure, primary teachers are inducted into the school via a general induction program led by the AP: Primary and a cultural induction program coordinated by ST1: Attendance and Participation. The general induction program take place weekly and teachers generally supplement this support with support from self-identified mentors they get to know during the first few weeks. The cultural induction workshops takes place one hour a week when new teachers are not required to participate in other meetings unless local employees are unavailable. While rare, incidences such as funerals and impending store closures at the request of traditional land owners can draw local employees away from the school. Very few teachers who participated in this study had experience in another remote community. A number of participants indicated this school would be their only tenure in a remote Aboriginal community. No teachers identified the Northern Territory as their home base citing other States and the Australian Capital Territory as the place they went to for school holidays.

Teachers are responsible for their classrooms, students and all teaching and learning activities for their class with the exception of specialist lessons. Primary teachers, the participants in this study, are supported by a ST1: Primary and the AP: Primary. A student support team comprising the school counselor, ST1: Attendance and Participation, and special needs and hearing impairment teachers support teachers to develop education adjustment plans for students with diagnosed learning disabilities and provide advice to class teachers regarding strategies to support student learning. The special needs teacher focused particularly on learning disabilities including autism, visual impairment, intellectual impairment, speech and language impairment and physical disabilities. the school was allocated a hearing impairment teacher because many students experience hearing loss at some point during their education due to infections, blocked ears and/or perforated ear drums. The hearing impairment teacher supported students with permanent total or partial hearing loss, teacher understanding of conductive hearing loss and ensured Redcat classroom audio systems were working and used by classroom teachers. Because the Student Support Team maintains close

relationships with a number of families, they often have additional and up-to-date information about events in the community.

Teachers' work comprises face-to-face teaching, assemblies, assessment of students work, preparation for teaching and learning, meetings with families and professional colleagues and reporting. Teachers also have to manage resources in terms of collecting and organising resources shared across the school, caring for resources allocated to classrooms and ordering new resources required throughout a school year. A school year usually comprises activities such as school camps, sports day, end of year concert and excursions for which the teacher has to plan, deliver and clean up at the end of the event.

Teachers access professional development that aligns with the school's Annual Operation Plan (AOP). Most professional development is provided at the discretion of the principal. Most school-based professional learning is facilitated by a member of the Senior Leadership team. Senior Leadership are perceived as having expertise or experience although staff member qualifications and experiences are rarely disclosed to the school community. Locally employed Aboriginal staff provide cultural induction for new staff with the support of the Senior Teacher: Attendance and Participation. While these workshops are not mandatory, teachers are strongly encouraged to attend and most teachers do.

Teacher turnover is high and fluctuates due to illness, transfers, teachers moving interstate and changes to NTDET staffing allocations. During this study, teacher turnover occurred throughout each school year. Although the majority of teachers began with the new school year, several teachers arrived at the start of Terms Two, Three and Four as teacher contracts concluded, or teachers took study or sick leave. Table 2 indicates changes in school leadership and teachers, and changes in classroom arrangements. In 2009, classes were arranged according to the dominant languages of the community, Ndjebánna, Burrara and English. The English class consisted of Balanda students and Kuningku students whose families wanted their children to focus on English rather than Ndjebánna or Burrara.

After the Rogers Review (2009), the Principal ceased arranging classes according to language group and year level, creating classes according to age group/year level and

Table 2 Teaching staff turnover and arrangements

| Term/ Year | School Leadership | Teachers | Teacher arrangements | NTDET influenced staff changes |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Term 3, ***Year 1*** | New<br>• Principal<br>• AP: Primary<br>• ST1: Families as First Teachers<br>• Curriculum Coordinator | | Burarra T-1<br>Burarra 1-3<br>Burarra 4-5<br>Ndjebbana T-1<br>Ndjebbana 2-6<br>English T-2<br>English 3-5 | |
| Term 4, ***Year 1*** | ST1: Primary changed to ST1: Attendance and Participation | New Burarra T-1 teacher | | Loss of 2 ST1: Teacher linguists at end of Year |
| Term 1, ***Year 2*** | New<br>ST1: Families as First Teachers | New teacher:<br>• Preschool<br>• Transition-Yr 1<br>• Yr 2/3<br>• Yr 3-4<br>• Yr 6 | Preschool<br>Transition<br>T-1<br>2-3<br>3-4<br>4-6 | ST1: RITE |
| Term 2, ***Year 2*** | New<br>ST1: Families as First Teachers | Transition teacher moved to preschool<br><br>Yr 6 teacher moved to Yr 2/3<br><br>New teachers:<br>Transition<br>Yr 6<br>Year 2-3<br>Year 3-4<br>Special Needs Teacher | | |
| Term 3, ***Year 2*** | New<br>• AP: Primary<br>• ST1: Homelands | New 5/6 teacher<br>New Librarian | POD 1: Preschool, Transition and Year 1 teachers<br>POD 2: Year 2 and Year 3 teachers<br><br>POD 3: Year 4 and Year 5 teachers<br><br>POD 4: Year 6-10 teachers and Year 11 | |
| Term 4, ***Year 2*** | New principal | | | |
| Term 1, ***Year 3*** | New<br>• ST1: Primary | New teachers:<br>• 3 x Yr 2-3<br><br>Yr 3-4 Teacher moved to Yr 1-3<br>No Home Economics teacher | | ST1: Literacy and Numeracy |
| Term 2, ***Year 3*** | | New teacher:<br>Year 4-6 | | |
| Term 3, | | New Hearing | | |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Year 3*** | Impairment teacher<br>New ST1: ICT | and 12 teachers | |
| Term 4, ***Year 3*** | As above | | |

attendance. Higher attending students were grouped together to enable higher levels of learning.

In the first two years of this study the school experienced two new Principals and two new assistant principals in the Primary school. These positions impacted teachers and the Senior Leadership Team. The school had three attempts at employing a Senior Teacher (ST1): FaFT. The first FaFT teacher took leave and the second FaFT teacher ceased employment to move to Darwin. The third FaFT teacher was employed in Term Two, ***Year 2*** of this study and continues in her role. The ST1: RITE position began in ***Year 2*** for four years. A new ST: Primary began in Term One, ***Year 3*** along with a new position of ST1: Literacy and Numeracy. Each change in the leadership team resulted in changes to staff line managers and individual leader's roles and responsibilities. When the two ST1: Teacher Linguist positions were removed from staffing allocations at the end of ***Year 1***, the attached assistant teachers were re-allocated to classroom teachers. Of the school terms, Term Four in ***Year 2*** and ***Year 3*** were the most stable in terms of teachers in classrooms. Not noted in Table 2 was the fluctuating nature of assistant teacher attendance which proved too difficult for teachers to monitor.

At the end of Term Four of this study, teachers were grouped into PODs. Senior Leadership were aware of historically low student attendance in second half of the school year, during the dry season, and recognised the potential for teachers to work collaboratively to support high fluctuating student numbers during Term Three. The POD structure was well received by teachers and Senior Leadership and was expanded as a means to group and support students to attain the highest academic results possible in consideration of student attendance and academic achievements.

Significantly, PODs enabled teachers to discuss similar concerns pertaining to their sector of the school including curriculum, pedagogy, parental engagement, behaviour, student wellbeing and assessment and reporting. POD 1 included Transition and Year 1 teachers and their assistant teachers, and the Preschool team as necessary; POD 2

included Year 2 and Year 3 teachers and assistant teachers; POD 3 included Year 4 to Year 6 teachers and assistant teachers; and Year 7 to Year 12 High school teachers and assistant teachers were allocated to POD 4. A member of Senior Leadership team was assigned allocated to each POD to ensure there was a direct link between teachers and Senior Leadership.

As much as possible, teachers within each POD shared planning, assessment and teaching for the students within their POD. Although assistant teachers were strongly encouraged to participate in POD meetings as valued members of the POD, only the pre-service teachers participated in POD meetings. Pre-service teachers were involved in POD meetings according to the year level they were assigned to for their school practicum. Pre-service teachers were initially told to participate in POD meetings as part of their Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Primary (BTLP) requirements however after several school terms, their attendance became a self-directed professional activity. During this study, conversations that took place between teachers during POD meetings provided the majority of the data. Pre-service teacher involvement in analysed episodes of teacher talk have been noted accordingly in the Findings chapter (Chapter Five).

At the start of ***Year 2***, teacher turnover resulted in Year Two and Three students having no familiar teachers within POD 2. Although POD 2 had the newly instated ST1: Primary within their team, this teacher lacked the confidence and experience required for POD leadership. To ensure POD 2 teachers were supported appropriately, the AP: Primary supported the ST1: Primary, while the ST1: RITE ensured POD 2 teachers had experienced assistant teachers. Early in their first term at this school, the POD 2 teachers approached other teachers from POD 1 about various questions regarding teaching and learning for their students. These POD 1 teachers asked me to hold a mentor session with the POD 2 teachers because I had been the curriculum leader in the previous year and I had been going in to all primary classrooms for the previous 18 months in my curriculum and lecturer roles. I did so as an informal, general conversation about teaching very remote Aboriginal students. Feedback to the AP: Primary resulted in the AP: Primary asking me to provide ongoing support for planning, assessment and teaching.

During the first 18 months of this study all teachers were Balanda. In ***Year 3*** an Aboriginal teacher and an Indian teacher began teaching in this school in POD 3. These two teachers had little professional contact with POD 1 or POD 2 teachers.

***Locally Employed Indigenous staff***

Assistant teachers (including pre-service teachers), cleaners, grounds-staff and the Literacy Production Centre (LPC) trainee are employed from the local Aboriginal community. The employment process involves local people approaching the school and asking for a specific role within the school. At the insistence of the local employees, auxiliary roles within the school are gendered. Men are employed as grounds-staff, hence 'groundsmen' while women are employed as cleaners and tuckshop assistants. In the primary sector of the school, most assistant teachers are women with several men taking up assistant teacher roles in upper primary and high school. The school rarely advertises a position because the potential employee pool is quite large. Locally sourced staff are historically unreliable, prioritising family and cultural matters ahead of employment obligations. High levels of illness and bereavement within the community also contribute to staff absences. During ***Year 2***, clinic staff reported approximately 52 deaths within the calendar year (in a population of approximately 3000 people).

During this study there was a core group of approximately eighteen assistant teachers; four in the preschool; one in each of the Transition to Year 12 classes; others to support such subjects as library, art, music lessons. Ten assistant teachers in the Transition to Year 6 sector of school were enrolled in the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Primary (BTLP) via the Remote Indigenous Teacher Education program which began six months after my arrival in this school. When an assistant teacher was absent for a significant period of time due to illness or incurred leave, other local people were employed to fill in assistant teacher positions. In some instances, potential assistant employees with high levels of education and skill were unable to take up a position within the school due to housing issues. These people may have recently returned from living in Darwin or they were unable to maintain

employment due to crowded housing. Housing is not provided for assistant teachers, cleaners, grounds-staff or the LPC trainee.

Senior Leadership expected locally employed Aboriginal staff to translate between students and teachers as required. As much as possible, within the restrictions imposed by kinship and clan boundaries, assistant teachers help teachers to identify students' families and supply additional information such as where students live and, if possible, their whereabouts on any given day. Most local staff are very helpful providing general information about the community, answering most questions asked by 'outsider' teachers. If local employees are asked questions they are not permitted to answer, according to clan rules, they either state this fact or ignore the question by changing the subject or pretending not to hear the question. Most teachers are respectful of local employee responses, although they can develop a sense that a local employee has hearing or English problems, not realising ignorance is a useful avoidance strategy.

***Students***

Three student factors stand out to teachers when they begin teaching at this school: student aboriginality, low use of English and very low academic outcomes.

The majority of students in this school identify with a clan group although this information is not usually provided in NTDET or school generated student profiles, unless a culturally conscious teacher adds this information. Table 3 outlines student enrolments, attendance rates and percentages of students.

In ***Year 2***, 96% of students enrolled in this school were Indigenous and 97% of students had a language background other than English (ACARA, 2016f). In ***Year 3***, the percentage of Indigenous students remained stable while there was a decrease in students with a language background other than English (90%) (ACARA, 2016f).

Table 3 Student enrolment, attendance and background information during this study

| | ***Year 1*** | ***Year 2*** | ***Year 3*** |
|---|---|---|---|
| Total enrolments | 389 | 470 | 626 |
| Girls | 189 | 228 | 294 |
| Boys | 200 | 242 | 332 |
| Indigenous students | 95% | 96% | 97% |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Language background other than English | 95% | 97% | 90% |
| Student attendance rate | 39% | 38% | 46% |

Students speak their traditional clan language and usually one or two other languages or dialects at home, in the community and at school. Each language has an everyday dialect, an academic dialect and 'high' dialect equivalent to our language of the judicial system. For many students, an awareness of the need to use English with white people occurs through schooling and interacting with other Balanda in other agencies. Some families use English in the home to support English development but most families use clan vernacular for daily life. For most Aboriginal residents, English is a foreign language that is used by government agents. Families make the conscious decision whether to learn and use English or not at home. While English is the instructional language of the classroom, students rely on the assistant teacher and other students to translate teacher language. Conceptual differences are rarely understood or tackled by teachers. Appendix D provides an example of conceptual differences between Balanda and Binninj.

The rhetoric within the school is that teachers are often the only person from whom students can learn and practice English. Some teachers believe that students need to conceptualise in their language first then learn the English that accompanies this concept, while others believe that English should be the only language of the classroom. During this study, a philosophical disagreement about linguistics in the classroom developed between teachers and pre-service teachers. One of the pre-service teachers was told by her mentor teacher to refrain from using Burarra and Ndjebánna within the classroom. The pre-service teacher was upset because she had been told by the first principal in this study, the RITE lecturer and other visiting Charles Darwin University staff that one of the key purposes of the RITE program was to produce local teachers who shared the language and culture of the students to enhance education within the school/classroom. The rules and practices of linguistics in the classroom were never resolved during or after this study. Each time a potential resolution was discussed, teachers and school administration would counter argue that their assistant teacher did not know all of the languages students used in the classroom and/or that there was only five hours in the school day in which students could learn English. Some teachers argued that if students were in Darwin, they would have to learn and use English at

school as English was the only language of the school and classroom. Other teachers suggested that students speak to teachers only in English even in the playground. Their insistence was not heeded by either students or assistant teachers who continued to use their dominant language, not English, in the playground. While some students attempted to code-switch between English and home language according to their interlocutor, the students' limited ability with English and teachers' limited ability with any of the local languages makes communication difficult.

Between 2009 and 2011, the statistics indicate that there was a reduction in the percentage of students who had a language background other than English. This reduction can be explained by an increased number of Balanda, English-speaking students attending the school. These Balanda students are the children of teachers, clinic staff, and other Balanda employed in the community. Many Balanda parents expect their child to be provided with and maintain urban standards of education. For this reason, within each POD Balanda students are found in one class. The remaining classes comprise local students.

The significant change in enrolments can be attributed to the number of students located in the school at the date the census was collected. The census is collected in all schools on Day 8 of the school year. It is important to note that an additional 156 students between ***Year 2*** and ***Year 3*** were enrolled after the school attendance team conducted enrolment sweeps in the community. Enrolment sweeps involve attendance officers visiting homes and checking student names against enrolment lists. These sweeps did not include students residing in homelands. Homelands students are enrolled when the homelands teachers visit their homeland school sites. Throughout the school year, student enrolments fluctuate significantly and are, historically, higher in the wet season when the community is landlocked and lower in the dry season when ceremony business and high four-wheel drive travel is enabled by open roads. Each year, a small number of students enroll at the school without records of previous enrolment in this or other schools. Also affecting attendance and enrolment, students often accompany their families to homelands, Darwin and other communities where extended family reside and can be away for days, weeks or months without prior notice given to the school. A small group of students alternate attendance between the main school in the community and the homeland school at their outstation. They can attend both schools within the same week.

In ***Year 1***, ***Year 2*** and ***Year 3*** of the study, Years 3, 5 and 7 students' NAPLAN results were 'substantially below' their Australian peers in reading, narrative writing, spelling, grammar and punctuation and numeracy (ACARA, 2016f). While individual gains were evident between a student's performance in Year 3 and Year 5, students consistently failed to reach national minimum benchmarks (ACARA, 2016f). During this study, teachers at this school correctly anticipated all Aboriginal students would fail NAPLAN and some Balanda students would reach benchmark levels. Consistently throughout this study, white teachers argued the lack of validity of NAPLAN within this remote Aboriginal school as it did not provide precise data about what the students could and could not do in the curriculum. In Term One, ***Year 3***, the principal introduced the Weschler Individual Achievement Test (WIAT) (Weschler, 2009) to provide more precise data about the academic achievements of Year 1 to Year 12 students. A standardised test, it seeks to identify student academic achievement levels in reading, writing, math and oral language. The WIAT test was implemented over four weeks by selected non-classroom teaching staff, including the School Leadership team. WIAT results revealed that the vast majority of local Aboriginal students from Year 1 to Year 12 had achieved Year 1 to Year 2 levels across all four areas.

Before the first meal break, two students from each class are sent to the tuckshop to get their classroom tub of lunches. A hot meal or sandwich is provided for first lunch and a snack of fruit, cheese and biscuits, chips, egg, drink or other such snack is provided for second lunch. For some children, this may be the only food for the day so they often ask or take left over food from the tub. Teachers often accommodate this in lunch numbers sent to the tuckshop early in the school day. For teachers, requested lunch numbers must cover the number of students at school at 9am but also late students who may arrive right up until the lunch bell. Some teachers allow students to eat inside the classroom to protect them from dogs stealing lunches. During this study, staff agreed that all students were to eat lunch either in class or in the caged tuckshop area to protect them from dog fights over food and dogs stealing lunches. This decision had to be policed by teachers at the tuckshop cage gate to stop dogs coming into the eating area and students going out into the playground where they could not be guaranteed safety. Boys of all ages often play football in the school grounds, although some girls join in. Many students leave school grounds in lunch breaks to seek out family members with money so they

can go to the bottom shop or local takeaway that are across the road from the school. Many students do not return to class or return late.

If teachers express annoyance to late students, these students will often leave the classroom and go home or not come back to school for any number of days. Also, if a student is reprimanded in front of the class, other students can perceive this as an opportunity for teasing. The situation usually escalates leading the reprimanded student to retaliate in hostile words and/or actions. If a student leaves the classroom it can go unnoticed if the class is involved in particularly vigorous activities away from their desks. Students quietly leave the room when the teacher's attention is averted, either hanging out within the school grounds to be found and returned by another staff member, or going home. Younger students usually wander around the school while older students tend to hide in toilets or behind buildings or sit under trees at outdoor tables. If students do not wish to return to class, they ignore requests citing any number of reasons as to why class is not the place for them.

Students seek teacher support for first aid that is frequently not available in the family home. Teachers frequently replace first aid equipment such as bandaids and ice packs. Soap and tissues are supplied by the school to support personal hygiene practices which the teacher is expected to explicitly teach. If the request for help is beyond the teacher's classroom resources, the teacher sends the student to the office with another student and/or a note. Earaches, fevers, weeping sores, boils, headlice and scabies are commonly suffered by students and teachers learn, over time, how to recognise the various symptoms. Teachers are not permitted to hand out scabies ointment or other such medications so they rely on Senior Leadership for help. Teachers often use their personal phones to contact School Leaders for support and to ensure students make it to where they were sent.

***Family involvement***

Adult family members, usually the mother and/or grandmother, stay with younger children during the school day. Family members frequently accompany their children to school to ensure their child's safety and protection from both teachers and other students. Family involvement in classrooms is typical in classrooms from Preschool to Year One although older students up to Year Six also have been accompanied to school by family members. Most family members have limited English and are reluctant to

engage with English speaking teachers. Families quickly come to classrooms if prompted by a family member concerned with teasing, swearing (in language or English), or perceived unfair treatment from school staff or other students. For many students, a family member works in the school. When students and Balanda staff engage the help of locally employed ancillary staff to solve issues the extra demand takes the staff member away from their employed work.

Unlike mainstream school, there are no appointments made to enrol a child into the school. A family member accompanies a school-aged child within their family at any time during the day or the child simply turns up at the school and is enrolled by the attendance team. The attendance team also contact the local clinic to find out information such as date of birth, allergies, medical conditions, how to spell surnames and family relatives. Other information is garnered from families when the attendance team or other school staff member, such as the teacher, visit the child's home.

Families are typically mostly involved in large events such as the end of year school concert or culture days. Both these events provide a free meal for the attending community members and are frequently used for making contact with families. While parent/teacher meetings are scheduled each semester, few families visit the school resulting in teachers visiting family homes. When the school needs to provide information to families, a newsletter or note from the teacher is usually sent home with the students. Often these notes can be seen all over the community flying around the streets therefore it is unclear how many of these notes are actually received by families. It is necessary to note that most families have limited English literacy so the school frequently publishes notes and newsletters that rely heavily on images with minimal print. Word of mouth continues to be the dominant mode of communication between school and the community. Families often send messages to school via local employees or pass on messages when the attendance team visits homes.

***Other Balanda staff***

Other positions that require people with particular professional experiences and expertise are the school business manager, the literacy production centre (LPC) manager, the grounds manager, the cleaning manager and the tuckshop manager. The school business manager oversees school finances (the budget) and ancillary staff while the literacy production manager supports a pre-service completing a graphic arts design

Cert III course with an outside course provider and the development of local language resources and other resources requested by staff. Local Indigenous staff chose to have a white manager to lead grounds and cleaning staff to reduce the political turmoil that arises from clan group inter-relations and the dominance of one person over another in accordance with clan and community roles and status. A Balanda is employed as the tuckshop manager because local tuckshop employees are unreliable and disrupt the production and distribution of meals that are provided to students every school day. When they don't come to work or leave work during meal preparation, meals are not made on time. When local tuckshop employees have low literacy and numeracy skills, they are unable to read notes sent by teachers who identify the number of meals required for the class and other requests such as a meal for a late student. Meal provision is an essential part of this school community because many students do not have access to regular meals or nutrition. None of these positions come with housing and they are frequently filled by the partners of teachers, nurses or other Balanda employed elsewhere in the community who have housing.

### 2.4.6 School infrastructure

This study focused on the Primary sector of the school to the exclusion of the High School. At the time of data collection, there were 18 classrooms shared between Primary and High school. In ***Year 1***, seven rooms were allocated to Primary, increasing to 10 classrooms in ***Year 2*** and 11 classrooms in ***Year 3***. Primary teachers also had access to Art, Music, Home Economics and Science classrooms. Primary classrooms comprise a registered non-Aboriginal teacher, an Aboriginal assistant teacher and a cohort of students. Also considered as part of the Primary sector of school, the Preschool is located in an area behind classrooms and separated from the main school by eight-foot fencing and a lockable gate. Between the Preschool and the main school is an open area where grounds-staff park school vehicles to be cleaned or cart rubbish to the dump.

The school has a small library and a designated Literacy Production Centre used to produce resources for bilingual education. In ***Year 3***, the new library replaced the small library that was subsequently altered to become a classroom. According to NTDET and Northern Territory Emergency Services, the new library was classified as a cyclone shelter. The school utilised this very large two-storey Space as the school library with a

teacher-librarian on the ground floor. On the top floor, the new library housed teacher literacy resources, professional reference materials, and provided a Space for the BTLP course and cultural resources. Learning resources for teachers were stored in the old library and in storage rooms attached to numerous classrooms. In ***Year 2***, mathematics resources and reading books were relocated from classrooms to a central area within the school to ensure resources were shared across classrooms. Reading books were grouped into Reading Recovery leveled sets to align with the reading assessment tool utilised across the school. Teachers were encouraged to regularly change reading books.

All rooms and buildings were secured at all times, accessible by keys issued to registered teaching staff, an administration officer, the head cleaner, tuckshop manager and head groundsman. No keys were distributed to locally employed staff. During ***Year 2***, a set of keys was used to remove food and resources from the home economics room. School Leadership reported lost/stolen keys required the school to be re-keyed at a cost of approximately $60, 000 due to remoteness and the high number of rooms and keys.

Most buildings are constructed using mud bricks from the now nonoperational local mud brick factory. Increasingly, demountable buildings have been incorporated into the school to provide additional, much needed, space for teaching and learning. As a central government agency with substantial infrastructure, some school buildings are allocated as cyclone shelters in the event of a cyclone. Resources in these 'cyclone shelters' are pushed to the periphery of the room unless they can be moved to another room. The cyclone shelters within the school are made available to the community, including teachers, who do not reside in cyclone coded houses.

The staff room has pigeon-holes (a compartment for written communication between staff members and a mail service) prioritised to teachers and higher attending assistant teachers. Tables and chairs are provided for staff and visitors in the staffroom and in a covered area outside the staffroom within view of playground areas. Female and male staff toilets are located at the far end of the building near the staffroom and are only available via key access. Key access was changed to pin-code access at the end of 2009 after complaints from staff that assistant teachers did not have access to keys, doors were left unlocked and young children were using the facilities and leaving them in poor condition. Students are forbidden to use staff toilets although this rule is ignored when student toilets are locked. White staff often allow their own children to use staff

toilets after school hours when students wait for their parents to finish meetings and after school duties.

At the back of the school, behind the Administration building, and out of sight of the classrooms and play areas, is a homelands building. This space can be used as a classroom during the wet season when homelands' students are in town. This room also has an office and storage areas for the vast number of resources that are taken out to homeland schools each week. The homelands' building also has a carpentry area utilised to teach all Year 5/6 and high school students simple carpentry.

There are three male and three female toilets for high school students located in the high school area of the school, and four male and four female toilets for Transition to Year 6 students. These facilities service the enrolment of approximately 600 students and their families. The primary toilet block is separated into two separate buildings, boys' toilets and girls' toilets, and is located behind the tuckshop away from most classrooms and out of view from both classrooms and the office area. The primary school toilets are made of mud-bricks with poor lighting and poor ventilation. Toilet roll holders are padlocked to stop people stealing toilet rolls. Frequently, the toilet blocks smell of urine and faeces due to students urinating anywhere in and around the toilet block, smearing faeces on the walls, and overfilling the toilet bowls with toilet paper rendering them non-flushable. Within the primary boys' and girls' toilets, there is a shower that has not been used for several years. Toilet blocks are unlocked at the discretion of grounds-staff and School Leadership and are frequently requested to be unlocked in the mornings after school has begun. Toilets are often locked by 4pm as unlocked toilets are frequently vandalised during and after school hours.

Vandalism is a constant concern for businesses in this community, including the school. In attempts to decrease if not obliterate vandalism, school buildings are secured using steel mesh wire and heavy steel frames. These 'cages' are built at the front of buildings where pathways and doors provide access to classrooms. The walls of the cages are topped with an overhanging security barrier to prevent people from climbing onto the roof of the buildings. The gates to the cages are locked with heavy chains and padlocks out of school hours to decrease and deter break-ins. When I first saw these cages, I was confronted by their presence. Having experience in numerous community schools across North and Far North Queensland I was familiar with the burden and

disheartening effects of break-ins. Seeing these cages, I vacillated between considering them a good way to reduce break-ins and acknowledging that they were cages and cages did not belong in schools.

The local community is dominated by red dirt and sand evidenced by the persistent layer of dust and sand in all school buildings. Most classrooms do not have outdoor mats so dirt and grass are frequently tracked into the rooms. Within the classroom, synthetic carpets provide a barrier between students and bare concrete. Although vacuum cleaners are bought, they regularly break down resulting in teachers having to sweep classrooms. During this study, teachers constantly reported flea and mice infestations with teachers becoming frustrated at the smell of mouse faeces and urine. When mouse and rat traps were used to reduce rodent infestation, teachers had to find someone to remove the dead animals although many teachers did this themselves.

### 2.4.7 Partnerships between the institution and the community

Several strategies have been instigated to address socio-cultural differences between the institution of education and the community. Of greatest significance, each classroom teacher is allocated an Aboriginal assistant teacher and local Aboriginal employees are invited to participate in the YuyaBol advisory group.

#### *Classroom partnerships*

Primary teachers and assistant teachers are expected to work in partnership to address aspects of the classroom such as linguistic differences between teachers and students and their families, student behaviour problems; planning the classroom curriculum, teaching students and assessing student academic progress. Although the classroom teacher takes the lead role in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, the assistant teacher is a fundamental part of communication with students and their families in the classroom and in the community.

Assistant teachers go with their classes to specialist art, library, music and physical education lessons while the classroom teacher has non-contact time. During non-contact time, the teacher plans, prepares resources, attends meetings and performs other professional activities that cannot be conducted while teaching the students.

### *YuyaBol*

YuyaBol is the name given to Aboriginal staff comprising cleaners, grounds-staff, Literacy Production Centre trainee, assistant teachers and pre-service teachers. YuyaBol meet with the principal regularly to provide advice about local Aboriginal matters, as a forum for Aboriginal staff to air concerns and to give voice to the local community in matters pertaining to the school. Findings from this study did not make reference to YuyaBol as a group. As an advisory group, YuyaBol do not come into direct contact with teachers. Within the Findings chapter, reference is made to teacher practices with individual Aboriginal staff or groups of staff according to their role within the school.

### *Teaching and learning*

Teachers strive to include local Aboriginal perspectives in teaching and learning activities. This proves problematic due to the teacher's lack of knowledge about the local community, clan society, clan groups and clan languages. In the event a teacher is unsure about how a curriculum concept relates to the clan culture and has been unable or unwilling to find out from a local employee, he or she will usually avoid references to clan life. Teachers tend to limit connections between curriculum and students' lived experiences to what teachers have observed in the local community. This can be helpful when the teacher's observations are accurate and problematic when the teacher's observations are inaccurate or insufficient to make strong connections. Many teachers perceive clan life as something that happens out bush and make assumptions that Aboriginal households are similar to teacher households until they hear or observe something to challenge that assumption.

Teachers also try to utilise local services and places in curriculum delivery. For example, teachers might invite a health clinic worker to class; make regular supported visits to the local nursery; or work with rangers to meet curriculum outcomes in ways that are relevant and interesting for students. As indicated earlier, local staff are encouraged to have input in planning and teaching although this is very problematic due to staff capacity, time constraints and cultural and language differences.

### *Communication*

Teachers and school leaders go to great lengths to communicate school activities and student learning progress with families. Teachers are strongly encouraged to visit homes and to share student work with families. Similarly, assistant teachers go to great lengths

to ensure school leadership are aware of significant events in the community such as a big fight, a death, or other tensions that can impact on school business. Local employees usually explain clan society or culture to outsiders when asked but rarely volunteer the information. Words often cause altercations between families so local employees must have a trusted relationship with someone before they give information. Topics that concern the local community are usually discussed in either Burarra or Ndjebánna if an English-speaking teacher is nearby.

### *Tensions between Binninj and Balanda*

Upon my arrival to this community, I noted numerous incidences where lack of understandings about 'other' resulted in difficult situations that were confronting and difficult to resolve.

Ceremonies occur during the dry season so people can travel to specific locations. As noted in my researcher journal,

> Ceremony occurs throughout the year although mainly in the dry season: Roads are closed; areas are closed. Balanda are not permitted to be in these areas unless invited specifically by a traditional owner. There are severe consequences for breaching this protocol. One person had the government vehicle they drove into a closed ceremony area removed and now that agency is trying to get it back. Student and Aboriginal staff attendance is very low due to cultural obligations
>
> (Journal, 29 August, 2009).

The dry season occurs from approximately mid-April until early December. At the time of this journal entry, there were very few students or local Aboriginal employees in the school. It was not unusual for teachers to have two or three students in a class and to not have seen their assistant teacher (AT) for several weeks. In most cases, teachers did not know where the students or ATs were with many teachers becoming increasingly cynical about the local community's commitment to learning as time passed.

Another matter causing tensions between Balanda and Binninj is related to dogs. Many community dogs are mangy and hungry and have worked out the school is a place for food.

> Dogs are everywhere in this school. I have wondered out loud about this with teachers and most just say that's how it is in [this community]. They make such statements as

> ‘They (the community) have dog dreaming. We can’t keep dogs out because the dogs go everywhere with family’. This is interesting. What I ***see*** is dogs hovering over very small children, teenagers and adults, waiting for food to be dropped on the ground. I am struggling with dogs in school for a few reasons: child safety; scabby dogs bringing disease directly to children; children touching dogs and not washing hands afterwards; dogs fighting right where children are standing; dog faeces in the school yard – easy to walk in the long grass then it gets trekked into classrooms with carpet. There are no carpet cleaners in town
>
> (Journal, 30 August, 2009).

Dogs in both the school and the community (beyond the school gate) were an ongoing issue during and after this study. During my time in this community, several teachers were attacked by dogs. In Term One, ***Year 2***, the preschool teacher was bitten so badly by a dog while inside the preschool she had to resign.

Many tensions between Binninj and Balanda occur when Balanda lack knowledge of local protocols. Regardless of how long a Balanda is in this community they are expected to know basic protocols including the avoidance of funerals and ceremonies. Additionally, they are expected to provide reparation to locals because this community sits on Binnij land. I note the seriousness of breaching protocols or upsetting Binninj. Ways to appease upset Binninj are unpredictable to Balanda and are often dependent upon the status of individual Binninj and the activity that was taking place.

> If you go into Sorry business (funerals), ceremony, run over a local’s dog, offend someone, or your car bumps into someone who walks in your pathway after you have checked – SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES: lose car, pay big money - $300 - $6000. This puts fear in you as you aren’t sure what is going to upset people. You feel like the police won’t do anything except ship you out on the first plane
>
> (Journal, 23 November, ***Year 1***).

Prior to my arrival at this school, a teacher had accidentally driven into a ceremony. Out of fear, the teacher handed over the school vehicle when angry Binninj demanded they be given the car until they no longer required it in reparation for the teacher’s error. In another incident, a teacher was attacked by a pack of dogs outside a teacher’s house when she went to the aid of a puppy. This teacher was hospitalised for several weeks and received ongoing medical and psychological therapy. Teachers were constantly on

alert for upsetting people, particularly outside the school grounds where a local employee was not nearby to offer advice. Numerous situations arose in which teachers made critical errors leading to criticism from the community. These situations included talking about female 'private' business to men; probing family members to find out the name of a deceased person; going into sacred areas the teacher had not been made aware of; speaking in child language to adults in an attempt to simplify English; pushing in front of people in a shop because the teacher hadn't read the context correctly; and questioning people who were in the middle of funeral ceremonies and had only gone to the shop quickly for a cold drink. However, as noted in my journal, there was "no transparency about language and cultural protocols: roads being closed, places people can/can't go. There is a reliance on outsiders understanding the context and how information is acquired/passed on [so they can explain it to other outsiders]" (Journal, 7th September, 2009).

Distrust and fear of reprisal between Binninj and Balanda continue to affect interactions between the two groups. For the most part, Balanda and Binninj live separate lives with each group keeping much of their business to themselves. Many Balanda and Binninj do not understand each other's world because of people keeping to their own group. Binninj frequently perceive Balanda as providing services and resources for Binninj, a belief further confirmed by all agencies and businesses being managed by ever-changing Balanda.

Every time a change in leadership occurred Binninj had to renegotiate the terms of agreement hoping the new person would continue with previously negotiated arrangements. In this school, the Principal changed twice in two years and the Assistant Principal: Primary changed three times. Most people are civil towards each other although frustrations can and do lead to arguments between individuals from the two distinct groups. One incident during this study involve an assistant teacher throwing a computer at a teacher and demanding the teacher be removed from the community. Because the assistant teacher was an irregular attender and the teacher was making academic gains with the students, the incident was quickly addressed through mediation. Mediation occurred between the assistant teacher and the teacher with the support of school leadership and between the assistant teacher and another assistant teacher. This other assistant teacher sought to support the assistant teacher by speaking out on her behalf because she knew the history underpinning this assistant teachers'

actions and had an awareness of potential consequences that could develop from this incident; school leadership could demand the assistant teacher's resignation which would lead to the school losing an outstanding practitioner when she was engaged and a community leader who frequently defended the school in community conversations.

Differences in the social orders and arrangements between Binninj, who are guided by clan societal practices, and Balanda, who are guided by state societal practices, underpin many of the conflicts between the two groups (refer to Appendix E).

***Tensions between Balanda***

Teachers live and work very closely. While most people make the effort to get along, when tensions do arise between teachers, matters can quickly escalate to arguments and overwhelming dislike. Teachers tend to organise themselves into groups in both the public world of the school and the private world of the home. Some teachers maintain their privacy through minimal interactions with teachers while others frequently engage with social events at teacher houses. Aboriginal education is particularly fuelled with different opinions that arise from lived experiences, formal training, the media, discussions with locals and other staff, or a combination of these. Living in a community has been colloquially compared to living in a fishbowl meaning it is a small place with little changes and if too many fish are in the bowl, tensions will arise.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Societal, cultural and linguistic differences between the institution of education and the Aboriginal community are significant. Teachers coming to teach in the school in this community, as representatives of the institution of education quickly realise they are positioned between the demands of the institution and the demands of the community. Teachers are confronted by Binninj behaviours that are difficult to understand but there is little to no time to have the necessary discussions with learned Binninj to develop understanding. Pressures from the institution of education compel teachers to make difficult decisions about what is and is not possible in the classroom, and is and is not possible for students to learn when they are at school. As noted by one research participant, PF, who had lived and worked in numerous remote communities over 12 years, students in remote Aboriginal communities require support that goes beyond the school. PF had pondered the situation in remote community schools in comparison to

mainstream schools leading him to recognise the disparity between mainstream students and remote Aboriginal community students.

> It's the 95/5 model. In mainstream society 95 per cent of the children in school are from everyday households where you tick all the boxes. Five per cent aren't from everyday households but that five per cent don't really show in the school data because it's a minority. You go to remote areas and that 95/5 is completely switched flipped the other way around. Five per cent are from standard everyday households while the other 95 per cent aren't. Therefore the results of those schools are going to be completely different because you have a high percentage of kids in that lower bracket. In some ways I don't know if there's an answer because in some ways it may not matter what you do for those children in that classroom they are still part of that 95 per cent outside of that classroom in their household in their environment. The household and community environment has to be addressed as well as the school otherwise the situation will not change.

(Transcript 3, Episode 19)

The institution of education does not consider the consequences that complex home and community environments place on student learning and teacher practice in its resource allocation to schools. Cultural and linguistic differences are considered in teacher practice and by employing local Aboriginal people from the community to act as liaison between school and home. School leadership, attendance and participation officers and teachers with the support of their assistant teacher connect with families to encourage school attendance and participation but there are no other avenues of support for families to learn about schooling. Efforts to maintain cultural ceremonies and customs force families into a position of choosing between school and ceremony because no agreement has been reached to enable families to access the full benefit of both. The challenges of daily life in households and the community make daily school attendance difficult for most students. When students do attend school, families do not see the immediate benefit of education on health and wellbeing or understanding the Balanda world.

Tensions arising between Binninj and Balanda indicate more than linguistic and cultural differences. Despite the long-term inclusion of local Aboriginal languages and culture in this school (Bond-Sharp, 2013) and confirmation of this practice in the Australian

Curriculum (ACARA, 2010b), issues of authority affecting custom, habit, ideas of property, and the 'rightness' by which a person bases their decisions (Service 1975) can be found in teacher narratives that elaborate on teachers' repeated lament - 'what is going on here?' Issues of political power, governance and social stratification are not addressed by including indigenous perspectives in the curriculum. Rather, the institution of education, as an establishment of 'nation-state' society, maintains absolute authority, through structures of power and authority of what is and is not permissible in the education of all Australian students.

# Chapter Three. Literature Review

This review of empirical literature pertaining to Indigenous education pays particular attention to the literature concerning non-Indigenous teachers and remote Indigenous communities. In reviewing literature about white, non-Aboriginal teachers, successes achieved by Indigenous education reforms with particular emphasis, where possible, on remote Aboriginal community schools, are investigated followed by an examination of why the reforms have experienced limited success with Indigenous students in remote communities. Successes achieved by Indigenous education reforms have contributed to school and teachers' practices that have become acceptable institutional practices. This review then explores how the non-Aboriginal teacher is positioned in remote community schools and is prepared for teaching in remote schools. Finally, the review scans the literature to identify factors that impact teacher practice in remote Indigenous communities, factors that appear to be within the control of the teacher and those that are beyond the control of the teacher.

## 3.1 Varying successes achieved by education reforms

Researchers and educators have contributed significantly to many educational improvements for Indigenous students, particularly for urban students. Some areas that have seen improvements for Indigenous students include policy (Department of Employment Education and Training, 1989; Education Council, 2015; MCEECDYA, 2010), pedagogy (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Henry & McTaggart, 1991; Nichol, 2011; Yunkaporta, 2009), curriculum (ACARA, 2010b; Harris, 1990; Harrison, 2008), teacher training (Hickling-Hudson, 2005; Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolopenuk, & Robinson, 2012) and school relationships with Indigenous communities (Department of Education, 2015; Lowe, 2011). The literature suggests that improvements to education for Indigenous students can be attributed strongly to people's capacity and the institution of education to respond positively and sympathetically towards Indigenous students, their families and communities.

Teachers' cultural responsiveness is one factor that contributes to students' academic success. Despite concerted institutional efforts, the majority of teachers in remote contexts continue to be non-Aboriginal, and predominantly white, people who do not share the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their students. The term "cultural responsiveness" was made popular by Ladson-Billings' work with African American

students in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 1995) but has since been adopted by teachers of Maori students in New Zealand (Bishop, 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2011), First nations students in Canada (Lewthwaite, Owen, Doiron, McMillan, & Renaud, 2013; Lewthwaite & Renaud, 2009) and Australia's Indigenous students (Perso, 2012). Central to cultural responsiveness is the teacher's cultural competence and her/his ability to positively engage with students' cultural heritage. This includes being able to comprehensively use "cultural resources to teach knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes" (Gay, 2010, p. 32). Culturally responsive teachers apply teaching practices and evaluation strategies that aim to liberate students from the dominant discourse synonymous with Australian education and to empower students into "academic competence, personal confidence, and the will to act" (Gay, 2010, p. 34). Proponents of culturally responsive education argue it is transformative because it enables teachers and students to defy education traditions and the status quo that has traditionally under-served them (Gay, 2010; Lipman, 1995).

This literature review focuses on several recent successes in Indigenous education, paying attention to remote Indigenous contexts. The four initiatives or programs explored in this section that have achieved success are culturally responsive pedagogy, improving attendance, Learning on Country and the Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program. The focus on these four initiatives is not intended to dismiss other successes achieved in the broad field that is Indigenous education. These four have been selected because they are particularly pertinent to remote Aboriginal students and/or their communities.

### 3.1.1 Culturally responsive pedagogy

Culturally responsive pedagogy has proven effective in improving student education outcomes in classrooms (Gay, 2010; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Osborne, 1996; Perso, 2012). One curriculum area that has utilised culturally responsive pedagogy to improve student outcomes is mathematics. One such mathematics program is "YuMi Deadly Maths" (Sarra, 2011) which has been implemented across more than 240 Australian schools, including a remote context, since 2009. This mathematical approach draws significantly on the work conducted by Matthews, Cooper and Baturo (2007) and identifies new ways for Indigenous students to engage in the abstraction of mathematics by drawing on their existing mathematic experiences to develop student agency in their

mathematics learning. An evaluation of the YuMi Deadly Maths (YDM) program (Spina, 2017) indicates YDM-trained and YDM active schools outperformed their "non-YDM trained like-school counterparts in the NAPLAN numeracy domain" (p. 1). Spina (2017) also found the mathematical gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students had closed such that Indigenous students are now able to access non-compulsory advanced senior secondary mathematics subjects. YDM has also contributed to a significant increase in student engagement with mathematics and raised the knowledge and expectations of teachers from early years to senior secondary and special school such that mathematics became more hands-on and engaging for students (Spina, 2017). YDM has proven particularly beneficial for building the capacity of non-mathematics teachers, teacher aides and Aboriginal support workers and has produced a significant amount of teaching resources and materials used across Australian schools (Spina, 2017). Further, YDM has improved public perception of mathematics teaching and learning (Spina, 2017).

Teachers' ability to be culturally responsive has proven beneficial to students who have a different race, colour or ethnic or national origin presumed in school curriculums (Aikenhead, 2001; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Kanu, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 1995; Yunkaporta, 2009). Thelma Perso (2012), an Australian academic, notes that teachers need to demonstrate cultural responsiveness in all aspects of professional practice yet identifies the lack of articulation of characteristics pertaining to teacher cultural responsiveness in the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2012). Perso (2012) demonstrates the alignment of culturally responsive teaching principles with the AITSL Professional Standards (p. 63) significantly emphasising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives must be localised and acquired by teachers through constructive relationships with members of the local community.

### 3.1.2 Improving attendance

In attempts to improve remote Aboriginal students school attendance, the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, implemented by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet (DPMC) to complement the 'Closing the Gap strategy', introduced the Remote School Attendance Strategy (RSAS) (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2014). The RSAS is a flexible community based initiative where local community

members are employed as the RSAS team to support families and children to get children to school every day. The initiative seems to be having success. Although the 2015 interim report acknowledges data were provided by a small sample, reasons cited for high attendance included attendance rewards for either students or family such as vouchers for household resources; initiatives directed to children to encourage attendance such as the provision of breakfast or lunch; and effective transport to school (Australian Government, 2015).

One remote Northern Territory school, Yarralin School, developed an attendance strategy to get school aged children interested in coming to school. By providing holiday activities such as arts and crafts in the morning and sport in the afternoons and visiting a nearby outstation (homelands) as part of their RSAS, Yarralin School reached "above 75 per cent attendance for the first five weeks of the second term, peaking in week five at 85 per cent attendance" (Australian Government, 2016, para 4). MySchool, the online database, reports this attendance was not sustained. However, overall, attendance remained higher than 57%, reported in Term 3, 2015 (ACARA, 2016e).

Yarralin School's RSAS team identified a "great working relationship they built with the school, local police, Night Patrol, Community Development Programme (CDP) members, Australian Government representatives, stakeholders and community members as the key to the programme's success" (Australian Government, 2016, para 7). Although accolades have been given to the RSAS team for their innovative approach to improving student attendance, there is no data to determine its academic impact. What this strategy does show is a community-driven attempt to create a Third Space to address a shared issue – getting children to school.

### 3.1.3 Learning on country

In attempts to provide a more culturally relevant curriculum with employment pathways, one program producing early academic success is the Learning on Country (LoC) program (Fogarty, Schwab, & Lovell, 2015). Established in 2013 and delivered in four sites in Arnhem Land, the LoC program has been developed through a collaborative process involving the Australian Government, community development practitioners, educators, local Elders and senior Indigenous Rangers. This program aims to deliver a culturally responsive secondary school curriculum that "integrates Indigenous knowledge and western knowledge systems, with particular reference to

natural resources and cultural management" (Fogarty et al., 2015, p. 16). Further, the LoC program involves specific practices including Indigenous ownership and authority; inter-generational transmission of Indigenous knowledge and customary practice; and participatory planning and management systems (Fogarty et al., 2015). Outcomes achieved by the LoC program include increased school attendance, course completion and retention to Year 12 or its equivalent; and increased transition rates to further education, employment or training (Fogarty et al., 2015). As a high school program, interested teachers are able to participate in the LoC program requiring them to collaborate with elders, other teachers and rangers to plan and implement specific lessons that incorporate environmental science, complete with science, literacy and numeracy demands. In its early stages, the LoC has demonstrated its capacity to involve teacher consultation with community members (Fogarty et al., 2015b, p.103) indicative of cultural responsiveness and community engagement. To design and deliver engaging activities that realistically reflect contemporary Aboriginal living and employment, teachers and community members, namely rangers and elders, collaborate to draw on intergenerational Aboriginal and western knowledge. As a pedagogical approach, LoC models new ways of working with both knowledge sets consistent with Third Space theory. Further, early successes achieved by the LoC program indicate the merit of Third Space theory to change school and learning practices to be more inclusive of the local community such that the school and the community share accountability for improving student educational outcomes.

### 3.1.4 Families as first teachers

In efforts to re-establish families as providing the foundation for developing children's capacity to be healthy and school ready, the Families as First Teachers (FaFT) program is an Indigenous parenting support service program implemented in 21 remote communities across the Northern Territory since 2009. The FaFT program provides quality early childhood programs emphasising literacy and numeracy foundations for Indigenous children aged birth to three years of age and their families. To build the capacity of families and community members to support the healthy development of young children, the FaFT program is a well-funded program which provides culturally appropriate activities that includes parent engagement and early learning groups (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2016a). The flexible delivery approach includes "cooperative partnerships with agencies and other local services, including

local Aboriginal community representatives and families" (Australian Institute of Family Studies, n.d., para 11) to identify and respond to the specific needs of each community and individual families. An evaluation of this program showed the program was well supported by the school and community and demonstrated "efficacy of the program in engaging local families" (Australian Institute of Family Studies, n.d., para 23). School teachers observed outcomes including "an increasing number of children enrolling in preschool, higher attendance at preschool and enhanced readiness for children to attend preschool" (Australian Institute of Family Studies, n.d., para 24). Overall, FaFT consultations involving the wider community built healthy relationships and trust across the community enabling the effective delivery of culturally relevant programs that addressed early childhood and family health and wellbeing and literacy and numeracy (Australian Institute of Family Studies, n.d).

Each of the success stories described in this section indicates positive changes can and do occur in remote Aboriginal education. Successes indicate the need for clearly articulated collaboration between government schools and the local community, a factor indicative of the school working in a Third Space. Cultural responsiveness plays a pivotal role in the uptake of successful programs and strategies but this can only occur when teachers are equipped with highly developed professional, cultural and relationship building skills. But the reality is that positive changes for remote Indigenous students have not been sustained for many reasons (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017; Wilson, 2014).

### 3.2 Reasons for reforms having limited success

For Rose (2012), an Aboriginal academic, the inadequate provision of education for Indigenous students is primarily influenced by the continued segregation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Rose (2012) observed that schools and teachers find it difficult to collaborate with Indigenous Australians because of the "silent apartheid and the abyss in which silent apartheid resides" (2012, p. 69). The continued segregation, is maintained between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in all political and institutional matters and is largely a result of Australia's collective guilt and denial of the ongoing colonial project. Rose argues that the silent apartheid inherent in Aboriginal education continues because of an abyss "consumed by misnomers, untruths and stereotypes in the absence of legitimate Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander knowledge" (Rose, 2012, p. 70). The silent apartheid is difficult for non-Indigenous Australians to recognise due to an intangible ignorance of Indigenous Australians that misappropriates Indigenous rights and sustains non-Indigenous ignorance by limiting Indigenous to knowledge, culture and tradition (Rose, 2012). Indigenous political, economic and social systems, including education, have been lost amid the emphasis on Indigenous knowledge, culture and tradition and supplanted by western systems and dominated by non-Indigenous people who know little to nothing about Indigenous people. Rose (2012) recognises the silent apartheid separating Indigenous and non-Indigenous and maintaining non-Indigenous dominance over important aspects of Indigenous people's lives stops non-Indigenous Australians working with Indigenous Australians. Most significantly, the silent apartheid disables informed personal, political and professional decisions pertinent to support Indigenous Australians to achieve the very goals ascertained by government reforms. Literature resonating with Rose's view of a silent apartheid provides insight into the reasons for educational reforms having limited success. These reasons can be categorised into four themes: the ongoing colonial project in Australia's political and institutional context; conflicting understandings of the purpose of schooling; schools acting in isolation from the community; and institution and teacher preponderance for quick fixes.

### 3.2.1 The ongoing colonial project in Australia's political and institutional context

The well-intentioned efforts of many professionals associated with Indigenous affairs are often acknowledged in research, politics and the media. Lea (2008) and Maddison (2011), experts in the politics associated with Indigenous affairs, agree that many professionals, including educators, are well-intentioned in their efforts to make a difference. However, "good intentions while necessary for opening up new dialogue can never be enough and on their own can in fact result in further damage" (Maddison, 2011, p. 92). Although successive reforms since colonisation reflect non-Aboriginal Australia's changing attitudes towards Aboriginal people, Australia's colonial roots have yet to be completely addressed and resolved. Maddison argues the current political and institutional context will continue to undermine policy because Australia's collective guilt regarding Aboriginal affairs and the obtuse "denial of the ongoing colonial project" (2011, p. 93) have not been addressed. Since white people took over Australia, a process known as colonisation or invasion, Aboriginal people have been

subjected to annihilation or displacement from traditional lands, marginalisation by dominating non-Aboriginal people, and subjugation under policies intended to assimilate Aboriginal people into white Australian society (refer to Chapter Two).

Australia's historical treatment of Aboriginal people has brought into question the basis of Australian society. Pearson, a prominent Aboriginal leader believes "there is a basic democratic problem in our country" (Pearson, 2016, p. 268) in which dominating white ideals and aspirations continue to override Aboriginal needs and aspirations. In terms of education, when the majority of teachers, school leaders and institution leaders are non-Indigenous and not directly linked to Indigenous peoples for whom the curriculum is enacted, the politics of culture and authority over who, what, when, where, and how become one-sided. For Pearson (2016), the one-sided transactional nature of government interactions with Indigenous peoples is non-democratic. In his arguments for Indigenous recognition in the Australian constitution, Pearson argues that the sustained belief by non-Indigenous people in the inferiority of Indigenous peoples undermines Indigenous people's ability to be equal partners with non-Indigenous people. He describes this as a continued "torment of powerlessness" (2016, p. 321). Pearson argues that the "recognition of rights, respect, co-operation and partnership" (2016, p. 321) is critical in developing the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Australian state. His call for rights, respect, co-operation and partnership resonates with Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994) that determines two different groups, Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, collaborate for a specific purpose and are equally valued and included in decision-making processes. Pearson favours the term "first nations peoples" (2016, p. 266) when referencing Australia's Indigenous people to highlight discrete clans and tribes who were nations in their own right and in place before the new nation, now called Australia, was established.

Mundine (2016), an Australian Aboriginal leader and the former National President of the Australian Labor Party, also asserts Pearson's (2016) notion of first nations. Mundine (2016) maintains there is "unfinished business" (p. 219) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous, predominantly non-Aboriginal Australians. He concurs with Pearson (2016) explaining that the unfinished business is related to how Indigenous people are positioned undemocratically in a democratic nation. A key reason for Mundine's (2016) and Pearson's (2016) assertions of Indigenous people being positioned undemocratically in Australia harks back to colonisation.

White settlement in Australia occurred in a time when European empires, such as the British Empire, sought to extend their power by acquiring other territories (Benton, 2010). The territories acquired, or invaded, were located in Asia, Africa, the United States of America and Australia. It was believed white people had qualities and abilities superior to those of the people from these areas, a belief that was utilised to justify economic expansions by a few nations such as Great Britain. Because Australia's first inhabitants were not white, in an era of colonialism, they were positioned by the dominating colonists as inferior and unable to make decisions for themselves. While this view continues to exist covertly if not overtly in the institutions of white Australia, Indigenous Australians are increasingly challenging previously unquestioned powers and claims made by Australian governments. Examples of this are the Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976 (Australian Government Federal Register of Legislation, 2016) and the High Court's Mabo decision (Secher, 2007). Known as the Mabo case, a group of five Meriam men brought an action against the State of Queensland and the Commonwealth of Australia, claiming native title, that is, ownership of land prior to white settlement. Noted by Secher (2007), a barrister of the Supreme Court of Queensland,

> the doctrine of *terra nullius* served the purpose of legitimising the acquisition of sovereignty in international law and the 'desert and uncultivated' doctrine served the purpose of ascertaining the law which is to govern a territory on colonisation at common law. (para 4)

The five Meriam men proved they were the traditional owners of the land enabling the High Court to identify "Australia as a new class of settled colony at common law" (Secher, 2007, para 8) thus making appropriate adjustments how British law could be applied to the colony of Australia. That is, the Meriam men proved Meriam people had pre-existing land rights in place before white settlement. Mundine (2016) draws attention to the High Court's Mabo decision as confirming Indigenous people, as the first inhabitants, belonged and belong to clans and/or tribes; a collective of people with social orders and arrangements shaping and shaped by factors such as shared language, beliefs, traditions, customs, habits, norms of behaviour and histories.

The Australian government's reluctance to acknowledge Aboriginal clan groups as nations and the prevailing conceptions of race and racial difference between Indigenous

and non-Indigenous Australians continue to influence what is and is not possible. For Mundine, ongoing colonial attitudes "underpin policy and engagement at all levels" (Mundine, 2016, p. 225). Mundine's point is evident in the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2010a) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (Education Council, 2015), that supersedes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014 (Ministerial Council on Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs (MCEEDYA), 2010) in place at the time of this study.

The Australian curriculum describes the cross-curriculum priority "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures" (ACARA, 2010a) as follows:

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identities are represented as central to the priority and are approached through knowledge and understanding of the interconnected elements of Country/Place, Culture and People. The development of knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' law, languages, dialects and literacies is approached through the exploration of Cultures. These relationships are linked to the deep knowledge traditions and holistic worldviews of Aboriginal communities and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.

Mundine's description of Aboriginal 'nations' bears marked similarity to the Australian Curriculum's notion of 'culture'. However, the Australian Curriculum emphasises the interconnected elements of country/place, culture and people does not represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clans, tribes and/or communities as discrete nations. By not attributing nation status to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Indigenous people can be positioned as another cultural group rather than as the nations they were prior to white settlements. Further, the omission of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island nations supports Mundine's contention that there is "unfinished business" (2016, p. 225) pertaining to how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are positioned in Australian political relationships with non-Indigenous Australians. Like the Australian Curriculum, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (Education Council, 2015) distinguishes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through such terms as perspectives, culture, histories, values and languages. Despite using the phrase 'Australia's First Nation peoples' in terms of the vision for Indigenous education, the strategy continues to position Indigenous Australians as another subset of Australian society albeit with different perspectives, cultures, histories, values and

languages. The education strategy fails to reflect Mundine's and Pearson's point of nation which would equalise power and authority between Indigenous communities and non-Indigenous education providers.

The government's positioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'culture' in lieu of Indigenous 'nations' suggests political relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians continue to be unresolved. The repercussions of these unresolved politics in education impact directly on relationships between the school and community. At the time of this study, non-Indigenous people in Australian institutions continue to define Indigenous education, including decisions pertaining to how Indigenous perspectives are included in teaching and learning. In remote Aboriginal communities, unresolved politics between the government and the community lead to tensions between the school and the community. Politically, the term 'culture' in lieu of the term 'nation' enables government agents, including teachers, to assert authority over what is and is not considered in terms of culture; who does and does not have authority to make assertions about culture; and when and where culture is included or not. Emphasis on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'nations' would require Australian government and institutional leaders to position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clan, tribe and/or community leaders as equals to negotiate how Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander society fits, or not, with non-Indigenous Australian society.

For Mundine (2016), Indigenous people had, and continue to have, social orders and arrangements that do not readily align with those of mainstream non-Indigenous Australia. As such, respecting and interacting with Indigenous Australians as equal nations within a broader Australia would destabilise the 'one size fits all' approaches to education models such as the Australian Curriculum. It would require government and institution leaders to collaborate directly with clan/tribal leaders who are numerous and diverse. Thus, each clan/tribe would need to be consulted in all matters affecting them, including education.

Mundine's (2016) idea of unfinished business is also evident in Australian government and institution reliance on Indigenous consultative bodies and advisory groups to contribute to strategies such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Strategy (Education Council, 2015). For critics of current political and institutional arrangements with Indigenous Australians, such as Maddison (2011), the

inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in consultation groups and reforms is a cursory move. Maddison (2011) argues the apparent inclusion of Indigenous people seeks to contain the potential crisis of non-Indigenous legitimacy instigated by anti-colonial movements "by allowing limited notions of 'culture' to become incorporated into the liberal order without rupturing the state framework" (Maddison, 2011, p. 82). Liberalised, politically correct terms such as 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander' help to organise a group of people whose existence continues to be in the 'too hard basket'. Knowing what to do with Indigenous people is an issue for other colonised countries.

International parallels are drawn by Irlbacher-Fox, raised in Inuvik and Implementation Director for the Deline Got'ine Government, Canada's first combined Indigenous/public community-based self-government. She argues modern governments, founded during colonisation, retain "assimilation as their subtext" (Irlbacher-Fox, 2010, p. 162) despite giving "rights, authorities, [and] recognition" to its Indigenous people (2010, p. 161). Here, Indigenous rights, authorities and recognition continue to be on the terms of the Australian government because of a lingering government and institutional perception that Indigenous Australians are ill-equipped to make decisions or lead change.

This lingering cultural deficit was also observed by Sarra, an Aboriginal academic, who recognises all stakeholders have a significant role to play in improving educational outcomes of Indigenous students. In his quest to evolve school leadership to include the local Indigenous community, Sarra established the Indigenous Education Leadership in 2006 before partnering with Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Education Queensland from 2008 to 2013 to further develop and implement the Stronger Smarter Leadership program (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017). In 2013, the Stronger Smarter Institute replaced the Stronger Smarter Leadership program. Sarra's concept of school leadership as a collaboration between principals, teachers, assistant teachers, parents and community Elders evolved from his experiences as principal of Cherbourg State School (Stronger Smarter Institute, 2017). The Stronger Smarter Leadership program equips these school leaders to actively engage with the community by adopting strategies such as high expectations, deep listening, reflection, collective sense-making and decision-making processes to support Indigenous students to achieve success at school. While this approach is innovative and addressed issues of deficit

thinking about Indigenous students and the community, leadership and community engagement (Lowe, 2011; Purdie & Wilkinson, 2008; Sarra, 2011a; Sarra, 2011b), a summative evaluation of the Stronger Smarter Communities Project, 2009-2012, identified continuing institutional deficit thinking in regard to Aboriginal students (Luke et al., 2013). Despite increasing collaboration between stakeholders in schools involved in the Stronger Smarter project, the institution of education has not mandated collective leadership between the school and the community in schools. Rather, principals continue to determine school activities in accordance with institutional directives, which focus primarily on Indigenous students achieving NAPLAN benchmarks. The institution continues to struggle to counter entrenched perceptions that Aboriginal students and their families are 'less' than their non-Aboriginal counterparts because school talk is frequently more focused on Aboriginal student academic failure rather than Aboriginal student successes. The Stronger Smarter Institute's (2012) work to develop school leadership as a collaboration between school and community leaders and the failed Coalition of Australian Governments (COAG) trial in Wadeye (Calma, 2009a; Gray, 2006), to be discussed in Subsection 3.2.3, have influenced the way government perceives of partnerships with remote Aboriginal communities.

In the 2017 'Closing the Gap' report (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017), a new way of engaging and working with Indigenous leaders and communities via the Empowered Communities strategy was outlined. Acknowledging the need to apply different approaches in different regions of the country, this strategy focuses on supporting "Indigenous ownership and true partnerships with government" (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017, p. 10). Empowered Communities moves from "an application driven, transactional approach to one of partnership, transparency and shared accountability" (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017, p. 10) requiring each leadership group, comprising joint partnership between government and local leaders, to address first priorities and apply a participatory action research approach to be informed by what works and what does not. Beagle Bay has been identified as "a trial site to implement family empowerment and preventative measures" to address children-out-of-home care" (Turnbull, 2017, p. 13). Although the Empowered Communities strategy to be applied in Beagle Bay is indicative of establishing the preconditions for creating a Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) and utilising a participatory action research (PAR) methodology (Kemmis, McTaggart, et al., 2014) to

implement change, there is no other information available at this time on its progress. The challenges associated with PAR methodology are discussed in the methodology chapter (Chapter Four).

An example of Indigenous people and government seeking to transform a failing education system into one consistent with Third Space can be found in the Council of Yukon First Nations (YFN). The Yukon First Nations, located in the smallest and most western territory of Canada's three federal territories, have negotiated a series of treaties and agreements with the Canadian government. In 2012, the Canadian government and the Yukon department of education collaborated with 13 Yukon First Nations to devise the *Tripartite Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on Education and Partnerships between YFNs, Yukon and Canada* (Council of Yukon First Nations, 2013). The mandate of the education department was to "work alongside Yukon First Nations to facilitate unified efforts aimed at addressing common interests in education and to advocate for the advancement of Yukon First Nations education as directed by the [First Nations Education] Commission" (Council of Yukon First Nations, 2017, para 2). The Council of Yukon First Nations (CYFN) Education Department works with the First Nations Education Commission (FNEC), local Yukon First Nations, Yukon Education, the Canadian government and other partners and stakeholders "to advance, coordinate and support YFN education priorities and goals in education" (Council of Yukon First Nations, 2017 para 1). The CYFN supports capacity-building and technical support at the local level, demanding "front line staff" (Council of Yukon First Nations, 2017 para 1) to incorporate local YFN cultures, languages, values, laws and traditions in the education system, schools, curriculum, methodology and pedagogy in efforts to close the academic achievement gap between YFN students and their non-Indigenous counterparts. Despite being in its early stages of implementation, the government sought FNEC input into Yukon First Nation engagement and consultation processes affecting education matters (Wykes, 2015, p. 5). Priority areas and key issues include legislative routes for education, teacher and school leadership attributes, employment and evaluation; and accountability for Yukon First Nations outcomes (Wykes, 2015).

The Council Yukon First Nations' political partnership with Canadian governments and institutions illustrates the governing authority's ability to give rights, authorities and recognition to its Indigenous people (Irlbacher-Fox, 2010, p. 161), particularly in remote territories where Indigenous people continue pre-colonial practices. Further,

reports pertaining to the progress of this Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) example clearly identify the rewards and challenges that accompany two groups coming together for a shared purpose. The Yukon example stands out because it is an example of a government's willingness to tackle the politics underpinning education and the 'talk' generated by this contractual obligation has shifted from one of failure to one of forth-coming success.

As identified in Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994) and described by Rose (2011), Maddison (2011), Lea (2008), Pearson (2016) and Mundine (2016), the current locked-in inequality in Australia will only be displaced by addressing the unequal power relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, particularly in remote locations where Indigenous people comprise the majority of the population on traditional lands. Current practices and policies "couched in liberal rhetoric" (Ford, 2016, p. 97) need to be addressed through processes – in line with theories such as Third Space theory to address the abysmal educational outcomes currently experienced by Aboriginal clan groups in remote Aboriginal communities.

### 3.2.2 Conflicting understandings as to the purpose of school

The co-construction of a Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) is premised on a shared purpose. However, the literature suggests there is a conflict of understanding between remote Aboriginal people and the institution of education as to the purpose of school in remote Aboriginal communities. A large project which investigated this issue was the Remote Education Systems (RES) project conducted by the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation's (CRC-REP) (Guenther, 2015a).

The RES project led by Guenther was a collaboration with 59 partners including Australian, state and territory governments; universities; and communities, businesses and people in remote regions. The CRC-REP sought to understand why enrolments, attendance and learning outcomes have changed little in very remote Indigenous education despite reform efforts and millions of dollars. One question shaping the RES project was "What is education for in remote Australia and what can/should it achieve?" (Guenther, 2015b, p. 3).

Suspecting the government and remote Indigenous people had different views about the purpose of education, Guenther, reviewed the goals and outcomes of the education

jurisdictions in New South Wales, Northern Territory, Western Australia, Queensland and South Australia as outlined in numerous declarations and agreements and annual reports (Guenther, 2015b). He explored each department's mission and vision and processes to achieve goals, seeking causal and philosophical assumptions that underpin the institution of education.

Within government and institution documents pertaining to Australian education, Guenther (2015b) identified numerous rationales for participating in education which he categorised as: a sociological and societal rationale; a developmental rationale; a knowledge and skills rationale; and individual and economic rationale. Each of these education rationales "reflect many sometimes divergent views about what education is really for" (Guenther, 2015b, p. 6) such that education can be touted as catering for everyone, including remote Indigenous students. Reflective of Guenther's (2015b) rationales, for most people, education is pursued as a philosophical, social and economic investment in individual and national futures that leads to "buy-in among end-users and investment from policy-makers and political leaders" (Guenther, 2015b, p. 6). Guenther then looked to the NAPLAN data of 'very remote' schools, such as the context of this study, noticing no improvement in Year 3 reading results and a widening gap in Year 3 numeracy results over five years to 2012 within the 'Closing the Gap' reform environment. He also noted:

> schools with less than 80 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are within the top half of Australia's highest performing schools while schools with more than 80 percent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are in the bottom five per cent. (Guenther, 2015b, p. 7)

Further analysis indicated "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status, remoteness, socio-economic advantage, or attendance did not adequately explain the difference between outcomes for very remote schools" (Guenther, 2015b, p. 9). Guenther then turned to remote Indigenous peoples' perceptions of the purpose of school.

To identify remote Indigenous perceptions of the purpose of school, Guenther (2015a) drew on a range of qualitative and quantitative data sets including community surveys across 10 remote communities. He identified remote Indigenous perceptions of the purpose of school. The following list, presented in descending order to reflect the

frequency of each reported reason, provides remote Indigenous respondents' reasons for sending their children to school:

- maintaining strong links to local language, kinship and stories;
- supporting student belonging, individuals knowing who they are, being confident and strong in spirit;
- leading to jobs;
- teaching young people how to engage within their own culture and be confident engaging with western cultures. That is, being able to speak Aboriginal languages and English and knowing the rules of western cultures and know what was appropriate in both cultures;
- helping students learn to live in the world, being able to deal with the realities of life in community, building cultural capacity to deal with environments they find themselves in, engaging in relevant learning, enabling them to be productive, and broadening their horizon;
- preparing future community leaders;
- becoming socialised to the norms of school (particularly for those seeking boarding school);
- offering pathways to further learning; and
- empowering learners. (Guenther, 2015a, p. 15)

Remote Indigenous perceptions of the purpose of education and schooling clearly embrace both clan group and nation-state societal mores. Themes of 'both worlds', and future aspirations for the individual's and clan group/community's robust advancement underpin remote Indigenous perceptions of why clan members should engage with school and resonate with other 'two-way education' literature (Fogarty et al., 2015; Harris, 1990; Lowe, 2011; Perso, 2012; Purdie, Milgate, & Bell, 2011; Sarra, 2011b). Introduced in the 1990s by Harris, a non-Indigenous academic and educator with significant experience in Indigenous education, two way education was conceptualised during the era of Aboriginal self-determination. As "a theory of schooling for simultaneous Aboriginal cultural maintenance and academic success" (Harris, 1990, p. xiii), Harris' proposed two-way model of schooling was conceptualised for remote communities which continued pre-colonial practices. Harris (1993) argued two-way schooling would be initiated and controlled by local Aboriginal people and Aboriginal ways of learning would be a "conscious, planned and deliberate purpose of changing the school (p. 4). Harris' (1990) two-way schooling promoted the ideals of choice and identity to enable Aboriginal people to be strong and empowered in the Western world and in Aboriginal identity.

In summary, Guenther (2015a, 2015b) concluded that the curriculum does not reflect the remote community's needs. Most significantly, Guenther (2015a) argues that "if

remote communities saw advantage in engaging in education then they would be demanding more of the education system. Poor student attendance is a key indicator that remote parents and families do not aspire to attain the education offered by the institution.

Education in Aboriginal communities is further exacerbated by a mismatch between institutional language associated with success and that of remote Indigenous people. Guenther (2015a) also observed that the language of aspiration for non-Indigenous young people did not correlate with that of remote Indigenous youth; and that the majority of people in remote communities did not perceive of themselves as being disadvantaged, contrary to media, political leaders and academics views.

Conflicts between Indigenous and non-Indigenous understandings of the purpose of school have been recognised by numerous people working in and associated with remote Aboriginal communities (Guenther, 2015a; 2015b; Folds, 2001; 2013). In a workshop facilitated by the Menzies Foundation (2010), 34 invited experts and interested persons including Aboriginal teachers and leaders, teachers and academics, health experts, persons with cross-cultural expertise, and education officials met to identify measures needed to help remote Indigenous students in northern and remote Australia. This group recognised that the achievable objective of contemporary schools should be to accommodate both traditional and mainstream cultures and education "to preserve the best aspects of traditional culture, and to provide new opportunities for young Aboriginal people in future generations" (Menzies Foundation, 2010, p. 24). To develop an education model that draws on both traditional and mainstream culture and education, the institution of education and the community needed to renegotiate, with integrity, the terms of schooling and education in the context of the local community thus reflecting the creation of a Third Space (Bhabha, 1994); neither one nor the other, but a hybrid of both.

### 3.2.3 Schools acting in isolation from the community

In the current model of schooling instated by the institution of education, schools are "an island of western culture in a sea of a completely different culture" (Guenther, 2015b, p. 9). Resonating with Guenther (2015b), Lowe (2017) argues that one of the underpinning issues plaguing Aboriginal schools "centres on the depth of the socio-cultural disconnect between Aboriginal students and their communities, and teachers"

(p. 35) indicating teachers' lack of knowledge about Aboriginal people. Institution and school cultures "guided and shaped by Western educational policies, practices, guidelines, accountabilities and orientations" (d'Arbon, Fasoli, Frawley, & Ober, 2009, p. 46) are endorsed by leaders at the helm of Indigenous education. That the institution of education has proven insufficient to the needs of remote Aboriginal communities is a finding reported time and again in the literature (Beresford, 2003a; d'Arbon et al., 2009; Gilbert, 2015; MCEETYA taskforce on Indigenous education, 2000; Robinson, Mares, & Arney, 2016).

Calma (2009a) reflects on the failed Council of Australian Governments (COAG) trials of 2003 to 2005 in Wadeye, a community in the Northern Territory comparable to the context of this study. To avoid replicating programs and services provided in remote Indigenous communities, COAG selected Wadeye as a trial site to streamline the various services offered by the different tiers and departments of Australian governments. To give voice to the people of all 20 clans, Wadeye community had developed a representative governance model and proposals for action to provide guidance for improving program and service outcomes. However, as Calma explains, the Wadeye trial revealed two significant contributors to failure. Firstly, government agencies failed to heed community proposals which were considered to be draft documents. Secondly, the multiple tiers of governance within government departments lead to incoherence, replication and inflexible processes and procedures. Calma notes, "the trial failed due to the intractability of government departments that relied on coordination from centralised bureaucracies rather than from the community" (Calma, 2009, p. 108). Education bureaucracies located in centralised urban offices are also ill-positioned to direct education from a distance because they can't respond to local needs and aspirations. Rather than seeking constructions of sharedness, such as a Third Space (Bhabha, 1994), the dominating government departments focused on "defining their turf and their responsibilities" (Calma, 2009, p. 108) and did not listen to Wadeye's representative governance group.

From the failed COAG trial in such communities as Wadeye came new ways for governments working with communities. Firstly, Shared Responsibility Agreements (SRA) (Australian Government, 2009) were introduced as unique, locally developed voluntary agreements between governments and Indigenous communities to outline what the community, governments and others will contribute to long-term changes in

the community. Gray, who conducted the evaluation of the Wadeye trial referred to by Calma (2009), determined several factors for partnerships between community, governments and others to be successful in remote contexts such as Wadeye. Firstly, expectations of the partnership needed to "clarified and mutually understood at the outset and reviewed periodically" (Gray, 2006, p. 14) during the partnerships. Secondly, partners need to identify specific, mutually understood priorities "limited to an achievable level" (Gray, 2006, p. 14) that would produce achievable deliverables and visible outcomes within the community. Thirdly, Gray (2006) recognised the need for an authorized person or group to manage the partnership ensuring partners engage in disciplined efforts to maintain the processes associated with effective partnership for the duration of the partnership. Lastly, "effective communication links between the partners and within the agencies [are] essential for the whole-of-government approach to succeed" (Gray, 2006, p. 14).

The government's dominance in the COAG trials undermined the successful implementation of numerous strategies despite the community's attempts to interpret and localise solutions that could be achieved. The lack of articulation of each participant's role and accountability contributed to poor communication and un-disciplined, sporadic approaches to group collaborations, undermining efforts to streamline agency services and programs. Further, the lack of community involvement in guiding government approaches maintained the alien nature of government services and programs to families and the disconnection with local people's daily practices in the community.

Folds (1987; 2001), Trudgeon (2000) and Brennan (in Perso, 2012, p. 68) recognise schooling as continuing to be culturally alien to Indigenous children and their parents. Perso (2012) notes the "cultural 'jarring' that can occur on entering school" (p. 68) for students who do not share the same cultural background as the institution of education and how student characteristics and skills are then positioned by educators as being deficit rather than different. Non-Indigenous teachers' lack of knowledge of Indigenous children's home lives or culture further contributes to students' cultural jarring.

Indigenous students and families recognise the influence of non-Indigenous teacher knowledge and practice on student learning outcomes. At the request of the Diocese of Townsville Catholic Education in North Queensland, Lewthwaite et al., (2015) sought

to identify the teaching practices that influence Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student learning. Lewthwaite et al., (2015) obtained feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and their families primarily from the Mount Isa area about their school experiences. Despite tenets of inclusion espoused by Queensland schools, parents spoke about their lack of influence over the ways schools operated. Lewthwaite et al. (2015, p. 141) concluded that parents felt that schools "catered to the aspirations and patterns of the dominant society only, and as they perceived, made little allowance for difference" (Lewthwaite et al., 2015, p. 141). This finding from Lewthwaite et al.'s research (2015) is consistent with the findings in the literature discussed earlier in this chapter (Calma & Dick, 2011; Irlbacher-Fox, 2009; Ma Rhea, 2015; Mundine, 2016; Pearson, 2016; Rigney, 2011; Rose, 2012; Sarra, 2011b). Despite espousing the value of including Indigenous people equitably in education, non-Indigenous views of education continue to dominate all matters pertaining to education. Significantly for relations between schools and community, Indigenous people continue to be located on the periphery of schools set up to provide education for their community.

In Mornington Island, a remote Queensland Aboriginal community in the Gulf of Carpentaria, Bond (2004) focused on elders' views about teachers and education in a remote Aboriginal community, exploring the relationships between the school and Aboriginal community by listening to elders' voices. She conducted a series of extended open interviews with 36 senior Mornington Islanders. In contrast to many studies undertaken in remote Aboriginal communities that do not foreground Indigenous voice, this study sought to hear the elders' perceptions of the existing relationships between the school and the community and the relationships these elders desired to exist between the community and the local school and its teachers. Bond (2004) found elders wanted to have genuine input in teacher selection and contribute to policy development.

One of the problems the elders identified was the transience of teachers. Elders lamented that non-Aboriginal teachers displayed more talk than action saying, "they are all talk. They say they're going to help us, help our kids, but they never do it. They stay a couple of years and they're off to [Darwin]" (Bond, 2004, p. 201). The elders recounted "they come and go, not nearly long enough to learn our culture and how can they understand our children if they don't know their culture" (Bond, 2004, pp. 201-

202). Perceived as outsiders coming and going, the transience of teachers exacerbates issues of trust between teachers and the school, and the community. The issue of transience is not unique to this school.

One institutional response to Indigenous communities' concerns about the high transience of teachers and significant differences between school and the community has been the appointment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers and locally sourced Indigenous teacher aides. Because they share Indigenous students' ethnicity and culture, Indigenous teachers have been ascertained as critical for improving Indigenous student outcomes, of increasing Indigenous student engagement, developing stronger connections between schools and communities and providing more culturally responsive education (Howard, 2004; Lowe, 2011; MATSITI, 2014; Perso, 2012). However, despite significant attention to Indigenous teacher education (Charles Darwin University School of Education, 2017; Department of Education and Training, 2017) Indigenous teacher numbers remain proportionately low. In 2015, 3100 teachers identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, "representing 1% of the total teacher workforce in Australia" (MATSITI, 2017, para 5) in contrast to 5.3% of students identifying as Indigenous.

Efforts to employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers has proven ineffective in remote contexts as the majority take up tenure in urban contexts indicating a continuing prevalence of non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Indigenous contexts (MATSITI, 2014). For the few Indigenous teachers who teach in remote contexts, frustrations at being the resident source of Indigenous information has proved so wearisome that many opt to leave teaching.

During a four year study to understand the experiences and career paths of Australian Indigenous teachers, Santoro and Reid (2006) identified the pressure placed on Indigenous teachers, particularly those in remote schools. Inundated with demands from schools and non-Indigenous teachers, Santoro and Reid (2006) found Indigenous teachers are expected to fill numerous and, often, conflicting roles due to inadequate knowledge and skill held by non-Indigenous staff. Santoro and Reid (2006) speculated the high expectations placed on Indigenous teachers results in many Indigenous teachers making the decision to leave the school system to work elsewhere. Further, they recommend non-Indigenous pre-service teachers be better prepared for teaching

Indigenous students by working alongside Indigenous colleagues (Santoro & Reid, 2006). As discussed earlier in this chapter, non-Indigenous teacher preparation and recruitment practices continue to be challenged by geographic isolation and economic shortfalls and fail to prepare teachers for the complexities of remote Indigenous communities (Bond, 2004; Clarke, 2000; Harrison, 2008; Howard, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, Sing, Kolopenuk & Ronbinson, 2012).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teacher aides also figure prominently in efforts to create stronger links between the school and the community (Howard, 2004; MATSITI, 2014). Also known as Indigenous Education Workers and assistant teachers, Indigenous teacher aides are perceived by the institution of education as the bridge between the school and the community because they are employed from the local community and share the language and culture of local clan groups and are usually family members to students at the school. Further, Indigenous teacher aides know what is going on in the community and are able to navigate the complex politics of the local community (Maddison, 2009).

While there is a small amount of literature outlining how non-Indigenous teachers can work with their Indigenous teacher aides, there is very little formal research. One study that focused on non-Indigenous teacher and Indigenous teacher aide relationships as a strategy to enhance students mathematical outcomes in three P-7 school sites found teacher/teacher aide relationships to be problematic and requiring more specific attention (Cooper, Baturo, & Warren, 2005). Despite this research being over fifteen years old, it continues to have currency in teacher interactions with teacher aides. Cooper et al. (2005) highlighted four issues hindering effective teacher/teacher aide relationships. Firstly, both the teacher and the teacher aide required training to build conceptual and pedagogical knowledge to form more effective relationships. Secondly, despite teachers demonstrating "differing degrees of effectiveness" in integrating aides in the teaching process, there was a need for the teachers and teacher aides to "respect and value each other's culture" (Cooper et al., 2005, p. 271). Thirdly, communication between teachers and their aides was limited with none of the teachers asking for contributions from the aides during planning with teacher aides being left to "fend for themselves in the classroom" (Cooper et al., 2005, p. 271). Finally, the westernisation of classroom programs, suitable for non-Indigenous students and the "continuing westernized nature of classrooms" (Cooper et al., p. 270) made it difficult for teacher

aides to feel valued. Despite teachers having control over how they worked with Indigenous teacher aides employed from the local community, findings from this study indicated teachers and teacher aides require significant support to develop and utilise relationships to effect. Further, Cooper, Baturo and Warren's (2005) findings are consistent with previously discussed literature that emphasises the need for teachers to be cognisant of local Aboriginal culture to be effective teachers of remote Indigenous students.

it is unlikely the Indigenous teacher workforce will equate the student population any time soon because the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has larger proportions of young people. For this reason, many policies (AITSL, 2012; Education Council, 2015) direct schools to develop strong partnerships with their local community, however, when implemented, they provide neither support nor guidance on how these relationships can and should look like. Wilson (2016, p. 63) identifies the limitations of strategic plans as they "do not easily lead to continued improvement". Wilson argues that the generality and vagueness of strategic plans for dealing with tough decisions result from their purpose being primarily political. According to Wilson, strategic plans "aim to satisfy interest groups, stakeholders, government clients and employees that their interests are being protected" (Wilson, 2014, p. 63). Wilson (2014, p. 63) notes "strategy determined in strategic plans needs to follow through and be explicit". In the Northern Territory, schools are freely able to choose their own approach to literacy and the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. The consequence of this is that strategy has not been applied and made explicit at the school level. He argues the lack of explicit systemic direction in the strategic plan might be intended to allow flexibility for approaches that are locally responsive but can also be interpreted "as the abandonment of the responsibility of the department to make clear what is required of schools" (Wilson, 2014, p. 63). An example of policy being vague relates to how remote schools address low literacy outcomes.

One popular program that has been developed specifically for Aboriginal students and continues to be used in remote Aboriginal community schools is "Accelerated Literacy" (Gray & Cowey, 2012). Accelerated Literacy (AL) is an approach to reading and writing that emphasises student participation in a literate society, routinised strategies contextualised for the classroom and shared experiences with carefully selected texts to provide a strong English foundation (Gray & Cowey, 2012). It attends to developing the

teacher's ability to specifically teach English to Indigenous students who do not have the cultural knowledge that underpins how to think about print literacies. This program utilises published narrative texts selected by the National Accelerated Literacy Program (Gray & Cowey, 2012) thus excluding local oral stories or oral story structures. Remote Aboriginal students are more familiar with Aboriginal oral stories and oral story structures and techniques. Accelerated Literacy replaces oral Aboriginal stories and storytellers with written English narratives and authors. Accelerated Literacy does not specifically utilise local Aboriginal culture, although teachers are able to briefly contextualise the focus text when it is first introduced. The teacher's ability to contextualise the text appropriately to the local context is reliant on the teacher's knowledge of the local context and/or their ability to engage with members of the local community. For remote Aboriginal students, Accelerated Literacy is frequently instated as another foreign component of schooling.

Findings from a review of the outcomes of the AL program from 2004-2008 (Tyler, Robinson, & Barlett, 2009), showed progress for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in provincial and remote contexts and for non-Indigenous students in very remote contexts. However, there was no progress for Indigenous students in very remote contexts (Tyler, Robinson, & Barlett, 2009, p. 11). The reviewers noted student attendance and non-attendance and high teacher turnover could not explain differences between very remote Indigenous student outcomes and all other groups. They attributed the program's lack of success to the combined impact of "language other than English spoken at home" (students who only speak English in the school) and a very low "reading age at first assessment" of very remote Indigenous students (Tyler, Robinson, & Barlett 2009, p. 13). Despite providing an intensive teacher training program, Tyler, Robinson and Barlett (2009) argued that providing more training and support for very remote teachers, "as necessary as it may be" (p. 16), would not improve outcomes for very remote Indigenous students. Rather, they called for a review and further development of the AL method to accommodate the specific needs of very remote Indigenous speakers who only speak English in the school (Tyler, Robinson & Barlett, 2009). Following this review (Tyler, Robinson & Barlett, 2009), the Northern Territory Department of Education and Training (NTDET) withdrew its support of Accelerated Literacy. Despite NTDET's withdrawal, many Northern Territory school principals,

with little experience in remote contexts or Aboriginal education, continued to use Accelerated Literacy in very remote schools.

Schools in remote communities do not have to be an island of western culture in a sea of the local Aboriginal culture. Institution and teacher instated educational programs and strategies that fail to connect Aboriginal students and their families to their schooling are setting themselves and children up for failure. The mainstay of a remote community school is the local Aboriginal community who are waiting until the next program fails to deliver the anticipated results. Until the community is actively involved in remote areas of Australia, says Margot Ford, an Aboriginal educator, such as the context for this study, will continue to be "locked into educational inequality for decades to come unless governments embrace radically different ways of providing education" (2016, p. 83).

### 3.2.4 Institutional and teacher vulnerability to good marketing

Maddison (2011) acknowledges governments and institutions are under significant pressure to appear decisive but this pressure can result in fake remedies or superficial actions. Critically, in situations where two very different cultures come together, as in the case of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, the lack of shared meanings combined with non-Indigenous bureaucratic policies and strategies for education reform further exacerbate a tenuous situation that Lea, Thompson, McRae-Williams and Wegner describe as a "lingering cultural deficit" (2011, p. 335). The lingering cultural deficit is evident in the negative ways institutional leaders talk about Indigenous students and their education. For example, as mentioned earlier, remote communities do not perceive of themselves as failures (Guenther, 2015a), yet the institution frequently emphasises remote Indigenous student academic failure. The institution's emphasis on Aboriginal students reaching national academic benchmarks as pivotal to 'Closing the Gap' has resulted in schools placing emphasis on school activities that lead to desired NAPLAN improvements rather than other aspects of education.

The Stronger Smarter Communities evaluation (Luke et al., 2013) found the influence of the rising stakes of NAPLAN and the push to 'Close the Gap' figured prominently in what principals and school leaders allow and do not allow in teacher practice. Despite school leader participation in workshops addressing perceptions of Aboriginal learners and the need to teach Aboriginal students more than 'the basics', the view that "student

lack remediation and repair" (Luke et al., 2013, p. 408) continued to feature prominently in approaches to teaching Aboriginal students.

Caught in a situation whereby Australian governments determine school success by students meeting government determined literacy and numeracy benchmarks for Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students via NAPLAN, principals and school leaders are motivated by a desire to find the right program or resources to improve student outcomes. Principals and teachers are particularly vulnerable to the appeal of well-marketed programs that claim to compensate for perceived teacher inadequacy and enable students to reach national benchmarks.

> Our view is that principals and school leaders are engaged in market behavior characterized by an active search for products, consultants and methods that they believe will boost test scores – often in the absence of programmatic advice from their state jurisdictions. At the same time, publishers and consultants work in an unregulated inservice market, where, quite literally, anybody can offer their programs and approaches to schools for a fee (Luke et al., 2013, p. 429)

Determining principal and school leadership influence as significant, Luke et al. (2013, p. 417) identified the need for the institution to improve "training in instructional/curricular leadership and data analysis risks" for principals seeking greater autonomy. Luke et al. (2013, p. 417) recognised principals did not have the required skills to rigorously evaluate well-marketed programs and see through "skewed and idiosyncratic patterns of achievement". Rather than adopting programs ill-suited to specific contextual factors, such as that discussed earlier in the example about Accelerated Literacy, principals need to be well informed instructional and curriculum leaders and have the capacity see beyond marketing. Principals, however, are only one group of stakeholders who require the necessary skills to support Aboriginal student schooling. Principals, teachers, assistant teachers, parents and community Elders must all have the necessary knowledge, understandings and skills to fulfill their duties which include being effective leaders. Further if data-driven practices are valued by the institution, these leaders must be skilled in collecting, analysing and responding to data with integrity to ensure data reliability and validity. With these skills, all leaders would be better equipped to make informed decisions thus resisting the claims of programs and approaches to provide quick fixes to long-standing and complex issues. Often the

programs provide data to illustrate program effectiveness without considering all the factors impacting students' academic outcomes.

One such program, Accelerated Literacy, discussed in the previous section, illustrates the effectiveness of marketing to educators who are not trained to teach English to remote Indigenous students who speak languages other than English in the home and community. Accelerated Literacy claimed to be effective for Indigenous students yet failed to improve outcomes for this very specific sector of the education system (Robinson, 2010). There are no magic programs to improve academic outcomes in remote Indigenous communities. In short, until the institution of education allows genuine Aboriginal voice to co-construct schooling in remote communities, in particular, education, outcomes for remote students will not change. Without breaking the regenerative pandemic (Rose, 2012) that continues to separate Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people or accepting Aboriginal people of the community in which the school is located as equal partners in leadership (d'Arbon et al., 2009), blind white educators with little to no knowledge of Aboriginal perspectives will continue to lead the blind.

### 3.3 Locating the white teacher in remote Indigenous education

Studies pertaining to white, non-Aboriginal teachers in remote Indigenous community schools focus on either the actual teacher or factors impacting teacher practice (Lock, Budgen, & Lunay, 2012; Sullivan & Johnson, 2012). Although there is limited literature about graduate and experienced teacher experiences in remote Aboriginal communities, pre-service teacher experiences frequently attend to matters such as teacher preparation, particularly emphasising skills, knowledge and attitudes towards Indigenous people (Bond, 2004; Buckskin, 2012; Canavan 2005; Castagno & Brayboy, 2008; Devlin, 2011; Fryberg, etal, 2013; Lewthwaite, etal, 2015). Apart from distinctions made between the career stage of the teacher, numerous factors impacting on teacher practice also frequent the literature (Berry & Hudson, 1997; Bond, 2004; Clarke 2000; Cooper, 2003; Lowe, 2011; Purdie, Milgate, Bell, 2011; Purdie &Wilkinson, 2008; Rose, 2008; Yunkaporta, 2009). Factors impacting teacher practice are distinguished as practices within control of the teacher and practices beyond the control of the teacher. Emphasising the white, non-Aboriginal teacher, this section discusses practicing teachers, teacher preparation, factors within control of the teacher and factors beyond the control of the teacher in remote Aboriginal community schools.

### 3.3.1 Practicing teachers in remote Indigenous community schools

Given the relatively high number of non-Aboriginal teachers taking up practice in remote Indigenous communities (MATSITI, 2014, p. 20), it could be reasonably assumed the voice of the non-Aboriginal teacher is one of the dominant voices in the literature. This is not the case. In recent years, few studies have taken place in remote Aboriginal communities in which the non-Aboriginal teacher is the protagonist. Here, an ethnographic study involving 23 teachers (Lock, Budgen, & Lunay, 2012); a case study of an individual teacher (Sullivan & Johnson, 2012) are discussed in depth because of their similarity to this study.

Before reviewing the two studies directly related to non-Aboriginal teacher practice in remote community schools, I reflect on how the practicing non-Aboriginal teacher appears in the literature. When the practicing non-Aboriginal teacher voice appears in research, it is predominantly heard in evaluative studies focused on explicit teacher practice (Jorgensen, Grootenboer, & Niesche, 2009; Yunkaporta, 2009); in studies about Indigenous communities in which teachers are secondary actors (Lewthwaite et al., 2015; Matthews, Watego, Cooper, & Baturo, 2005; Nichol, 2011; Sarra, 2011a; Walker, 2004); and as 'implicated' in studies about the political and institutional context of Indigenous education (Auld, Dyer, & Charles, 2016; Vass, 2013). This in itself is not concerning; it becomes problematic only because there is a dearth of literature on the white, non-Aboriginal teacher experience per se.

Sullivan and Johnson's (2012) study focused on one graduate non-Indigenous teacher's wellbeing as she transitioned into the profession and responded to the challenges that confronted her while teaching in a remote Aboriginal community school. Sullivan and Johnson (2012) found the main constraints to the teacher's personal and professional wellbeing were institutional and contextual factors. The teacher identified the dissimilarity of teaching in a remote Aboriginal community with other schooling contexts. This teacher identified how ill-prepared she was for teaching across the full range of abilities presented in her small class of under ten students, identifying practicums tended to focus on one or two year levels, not six (Sullivan & Johnson, 2012). Realising the importance of relationships with students, the teacher was confronted by the time and effort put into building relationships with students only to have all of these students disappear and a new cohort come to the school. This teacher

was frustrated she had worked hard to establish what she could achieve with her class, only to begin again with a new group of students in the next week. Further, highly transient students made it difficult to establish consistent behaviour management and implement planning. Sullivan and Johnson (2012) identified language differences between the teacher and students, and the unavailability of formal mentoring and support from school leadership and other teachers contributed to this teacher's feelings of professional isolation. Teaching in a remote Aboriginal community context involved "extreme living conditions, personal isolation, teaching students with complex needs, limited opportunities for collaborative work and a lack of professional support or learning opportunities" (Sullivan & Johnson, 2012, p. 113). Sullivan and Johnson (2012) recognised that despite the complex challenges experienced by this teacher in this Aboriginal community school, the teacher's "commitment to the moral and ethical purposes of teaching" (p. 112), her ability to build relationships with the local community and navigate contradictions were among the personal attributes that enabled her to sustain her remote tenure. In their analysis, Sullivan and Johnson identified the need for the institution to support remote teacher wellbeing by attending to contextual and institutional factors that impact on teacher practice. Sullivan and Johnson's (2012) findings were similar to those of Lock, Budgen and Lunay (2012) who also focused on teachers in remote contexts.

Lock, Budgen and Lunay's (2012) ethnography concentrated on 23 teachers of whom the majority came from states other than Western Australia and outside Australia. These participants were interviewed while practicing in remote Western Australian schools to understand teachers' reasons for taking up tenure in a remote school; affective factors for maintaining tenure; and professional factors impacting on teachers (Lock et al., 2012). Of significance to this study, were the affective factors for maintaining tenure and professional factors that proved most challenging for respondents. Teachers described many benefits for teaching in remote schools including "accommodation, being accepted by the community, family benefits, lifestyle and the natural environment" (Lock et al., 2012, p. 123). Amongst the benefits for teaching in remote schools, teachers identified the time taken for them to build trust and relationships such that they were accepted by the local community. Teacher dislikes included the lack of privacy because the teacher is quite visible in a remote Aboriginal community and because people were always knocking on their doors and looking through windows.

Several teachers also commented on their discomfort with "community issues such as violence and swearing" (Lock et al., 2012, p. 124). While affective factors can have significant impact on teacher tenure in rural/remote contexts, challenges in daily professional practices can be particularly wearing on teachers.

The reported professional challenges fell into six broad categories in unstated order: curriculum and assessment; catering for individual needs of children; working effectively with Aboriginal Education Workers, referred to as assistant teachers in this study; engaging and managing children; pedagogical issues; and language issues (Lock et al., 2012).

Within the curriculum and assessment category, participants indicated working with an unknown curriculum framework and supporting documents "difficult to comprehend and utilise on arrival at the school" (Lock et al., 2012, p. 126), noting they had not received professional development about the curriculum framework. Further, teachers did not receive professional development about "how to modify the curriculum for the needs of Aboriginal children in remote settings" (Lock et al., 2012, p. 126). Teachers found it difficult to make the curriculum relevant due to assumed contextual knowledge not available within the community and believed NAPLAN to be culturally inappropriate or academically irrelevant given students' low academic levels (Lock et al., 2012, p. 126). Participants also indicated students' very low academic levels were a highly significant challenge, as was catering for children of multiple ages and diverse abilities (Lock et al., 2012, p. 127). The challenge of catering for a broad range of abilities across multiple year levels was also noted by Sullivan and Johnson (2012). Offering more detail than Sullivan and Johnson's study (2012), teachers indicated higher than anticipated incidences of conditions such as dyslexia, foetal alcohol syndrome and dyspraxia and identified the need for teachers to have specialist knowledge they did not have (Lock et al., 2012). Of significance, students required the teacher's one to one attention. One teacher commented that "many of the students had specific special needs and much of the teaching had to be done 'one to one'" (Lock et al., 2012, p. 127). Teachers are frequently expected to teach over 20 students in a class. Teachers are taught how to teach students as a whole class or in smaller groups because it is not feasible for teachers to teach each student individually. In classrooms described by teachers in Lock et al.'s study (2012), poor student attendance would actually be a benefit in classrooms in which students require one on one teacher attention.

Teachers also noted other unexpected aspects of their teaching including providing food and going back to assumed basics such as how to hold a book and dealing with tired children (Lock et al., 2012). Teachers identified that engaging children with irregular attendance patterns made it difficult to create coherent plans and programs as "they never knew who was going to turn up for school and from one day to the next they might have an entirely different group of children in the class" (Lock et al., 2012, p. 128). Students' irregular attendance resulted in missing what had been planned and falling further behind academically (Lock et al., 2012).

Teachers working with locally employed Aboriginal education workers (AEW), acknowledge their high respect for AEW knowledge of students, language and culture but identified a need for more communication and collaboration with their AEW who was "often barely trained, if at all and had a high turnover rate" (Lock et al., 2012, p. 128). Student behaviour was also noted as a concern, particularly when strategies learned at university or elsewhere proved ineffective in a remote Aboriginal community context (Lock et al., 2012). For example, teachers found they had to show they were angry by raising their voice as less confronting displays of displeasure such as "I'm disappointed with you, that's wrong," were dismissed by students (Lock et al., 2012, p. 128). One teacher noted student swearing and lack of interest and motivation to learn what was offered in the classroom (Lock et al., 2012).

From a pedagogical perspective, teachers felt popular student-centred pedagogic approaches did not work with Aboriginal students (Lock et al., 2012). Rather, teacher-centred approaches were more effective than working in small groups or pairs because family tensions frequently entered the classroom resulting in fights between students (Lock et al., 2012). Predictably, language differences proved problematic, particularly for teachers not trained to teach students with languages other than English. Teachers also identified students' use of their home languages, more commonly referred to as "use of language" as a means of excluding the teacher although one teacher found learning students' language beneficial for teaching (Lock et al., 2012).

Teachers identified professional development as particularly problematic for teachers beginning throughout the year rather than at the beginning of the year. At the beginning of the year, cultural induction figured prominently in teacher professional learning but, like other professional learning, teachers felt the professional development activities

"did not go far enough" (Lock et al., 2012, p. 129) and required local contextualisation. The teachers favoured professional learning delivered on-site, over consecutive days and from colleagues (Lock et al., 2012). Amongst teacher requests for more professional development were professional learning about student behaviour, supporting students with high health needs, coping with stressful situations, physically surviving working in remote contexts, four wheel driving and first aid (Lock et al., 2012).

Although teachers identified benefits to living and working in remote contexts such as a strong sense of team, Lock, Budgen and Lunay (2012) noted that there were "more challenges than benefits" (p. 130). They also noted the lack of professional learning about specific contextual issues associated with teaching in remote contexts. Acknowledging there is no straight-forward solution to the complexities of attracting and retaining teachers, Lock et al. (2012) recommended professional learning be contextualised to reflect local school and community circumstances and that strategies such as subsidised living costs to retain teachers for longer in remote contexts be implemented. The challenges reported by teachers in Lock et al.'s (2012) study indicated, unsurprisingly, notable impact on teacher wellbeing.

As noted by Lock et al. (2012), teacher stress is increasingly targeted as an area of concern. When non-Aboriginal teachers take up tenure in a remote community, they are exposed to another culture and go through a process of adjusting to different social norms and practices that occur within the community. Heslop (2003) compares living in a remote Aboriginal community with moving to another part of the world. Heslop observes:

> that the district happens to be in Australia is irrelevant when it is remembered that the main language, culture, religion, society and economy are quite foreign to non-Aboriginal traditions. This is exacerbated when many non-Aboriginal teachers have no experience in living in cross-cultural settings and so have not embraced appropriate protocols of conduct that they can cope with particular circumstances that arise from time to time. (Heslop, 2003, pp. 214-15)

Exposure and the process of making adjustments to different social norms and practices of another culture is known as "culture shock" (reference?). There are distinct stages of transcultural adjustment and adaptation that have become associated with culture shock.

The four emotional stages of cultural shock involve the honeymoon, the crisis, the recovery and the adjustment (Ward, Bochner, & Furnham, 2001). Ward et al., (2001) expand on Oberg's (1960) theory of culture shock highlighting that the motive behind a person entering into a transcultural experience significantly influences how a person will be affected by culture shock, if at all.

Ward et al. (2001) identified four types of transcultural experiences: tourists, sojourners, immigrants and refugees. According to Ward et al., (2001) tourists have limited contact with members of the host culture and are "unlikely to experience any genuine or intimate intercultural contact or to have any of the pleasure and pain associated with it" (p. 20). Sojourners are temporary residents who anticipate and plan to return home. Immigrants are either 'pushed' or 'pulled' into another culture and "generally relocate with the intention of long term, if not permanent, resettlement" (Ward et al., 2001, p. 192). Finally, refugees share many of the characteristics of tourists, sojourners and immigrants but their relocation is "involuntary" (Ward et al., 2001, p. 142).

At the time of this study, non-Aboriginal teachers taking up tenure in remote Aboriginal communities fall into the category of sojourners. In this study, sojourners (Ward et al., 2001) are non-Indigenous teachers who take up tenure in the local Aboriginal community (the host culture) but must, at some point, have a re-entry transition, into a non-Aboriginal urban, regional or rural community. According to Ward et al., (2001) both transitions can be difficult and distressing for teachers "but social and psychological problems can be alleviated by preparation" (p. 165). The institution of education has been aware of teacher "culture shock" during transition into the host remote Aboriginal culture since the 1970s (Sommerland & Duke, 1974) although little attention has been paid to teacher experiences of working through the phases of culture shock.

Clarke (2000) identifies culture shock leading to "problems and issues becom[ing] more pronounced and many people becom[ing] depressed, frustrated and easily irritated" (p. 2). She further notes "it takes most people six months to settle in" (p. 2) to living in remote communities which is equivalent to one school semester. Recent policies directed at improving education in remote communities pays little attention to non-Aboriginal teacher adjustment or the need for specialised support. This suggests that the view maintained by the institution is denial that culture shock occurs or that culture

shock is an insignificant issue if teachers are returning to their own culture anyway as noted in Ward et al.'s reference to 'sojourners' (2001, p. 142) or that culture shock will be addressed by schools and teachers in situ.

Consistent with Sullivan and Johnson's (2012) finding that teachers are supported by building relationships with the local community, Ward et al. also argue that the challenge for employers demanding employee transition into a different culture is:

> to understand and manage contact between culturally diverse people and groups in order to reduce the stresses and difficulties that are a normal aspect of such encounters, as well as to enhance the positive effects that cross-cultural encounters can bestow on the participant. (2001, p. 18)

Despite researchers emphasising the need for the institution and local communities to develop mutual understandings, Ward et al. (2001) acknowledge strategies of abolishing differences and the repercussions of difference, including culture shock, have resulted in numerous policies focused on sameness. They state:

> The policy of abolishing intergroup differences as a way of dealing with intergroup friction has a long and odious history, providing the basis for genocide, apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and at a more mundane level, the justification for exclusivity in clubs, schools, and controlled housing estates. (Ward et al., 2001, p. 17)

The socio-political environment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people now demands teachers work closely with the community. Teachers balancing institution demands with the unknown of collaborating with remote Aboriginal families particularly require support given the additional pressures that come with teaching students in communities with complex issues.

Stress reduction and an opportunity to discuss difficulties with other teachers and members of the local community could be addressed through the re-creation of remote Aboriginal community schools as Third Spaces. Although not named as such, these are spaces in which teachers and the local community share educational discourse and establish mutual understandings in the context of the specific community in which the teacher is located.

Across the literature, institutional practices are implicated, yet their role is not directly expanded on in discussions about challenges to practicing teacher experiences. While the institution of education has relinquished complete domination of the education agenda in remote communities, there is a need for more precise information about the challenges to white, non-Aboriginal teacher practice and the causes for these challenges. This research project contributes further understanding of both the challenges and their underlying causes.

### 3.3.2 Teacher preparation for remote Indigenous education

In 2014, Wilson who conducted a comprehensive review of Indigenous education for the Northern Territory, identified the need for the Northern Territory education system to strengthen the remote area workforce by attracting the best principals and teachers to remote and hard-to-staff schools. Wilson (2014) specifically called attention to the need for teachers to have "the skills identified as essential to remote teaching" (p. 192). Effective teachers of remote Indigenous students have skills and knowledge to successfully engage and develop relationships with Indigenous students (Ockenden, 2014, p. 2). Further, they are trained in English as a second language teaching techniques, have experience teaching in cross-cultural situations and have the ability to tailor their teaching approaches and the structure of the curriculum to meet the specific needs of their Indigenous students (Ockenden, 2014).

Prominent within the literature is the critique that teacher preparation for teaching in remote Indigenous schools continues to fall short of student need (Ford, 2013; Lock et al., 2012; Ma Rhea, Anderson, & Atkinson, 2012; McCarthy, 2012). Preparation for entry into remote Indigenous schools for practicing teachers is limited to institutional induction that occurs at the start of a school year and school based induction that introduces new teachers to school operations and basic cultural information. School based induction is frequently overlooked amid the business of schools, particularly when there are only one or two new teachers. Most preparation for institutional activities instated to prepare teachers for remote Indigenous education takes place in under-graduate teacher programs (Auld et al., 2016; Bolin & Finkel, 1995; Osborne, 2003; Sharplin, 2002).

Pre-service teachers prepare for the possibility of teaching students from many cultural backgrounds. Tackling cultural differences, pre-service teacher studies are directed at

how white, non-Aboriginal teachers perceive Indigenous 'others'. Phillips (2011), an Indigenous scholar, developed the pedagogy of a critical Indigenous studies subject drawing on critical race theory "in an attempt to shift beyond traditional approaches to Indigenous studies" (p. 7). This subject involved guiding pre-service teachers to deconstruct non-Indigenous people's standpoints in relation to Indigenous people as the foundation for learning how to embed Indigenous perspectives. In her dissertation investigating the white pre-service teacher's interaction with studies about Aboriginal people in one university, Phillips (2011) highlighted the institution's preference for professional learning that favours "the un-critical consumption of the 'information' by the mainly non-Indigenous [teachers]" (p. 2). She identified Indigenous people's cultures and histories were represented through "narrow, descriptive and ascribed processes" (Phillips, 2011, p. 2) that enabled non-Indigenous people to maintain their distance from "knowledge of their own privileged positions" (p. 2) and contributed to the continued positioning of "Aboriginal people as a 'lost' culture" (p. 2). In her case study, Phillips (2011) found that engaging white (pre-service) teachers in self-reflections about their own standpoints and attempting to have them understand that their standpoints were reflective of "particular historical, social and cultural systems" (p. 267) led to resistance and students feeling victimised by Indigenous perceptions of non-Indigenous people. As students were guided to reflect on ways that systems of knowing positioned them to perceive of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, Phillips (2011) noted the shift from self-perceptions of white people as having no culture to recognition of having a culture and the ability to turn their gaze upon themselves to "be reflexive in thinking about 'why' they held beliefs about Indigenous peoples" (p. 267). From her study, Phillips (2011) surmised whiteness studies had the potential to "disrupt knowing self and other" (p. 270) and to challenge "assumptions and general dispositions that limit [teacher] ability to engage in the process of learning" (p. 270), particularly in relation to Indigenous communities and the students they teach. Although a relatively small study, the findings are significant for white teachers who take up tenure in remote Indigenous communities where white people become the minority group and teachers must adjust their standpoint to include Indigenous perspectives (Department of Education and Training, 2011; Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Nakata, 2007; Taylor, 1999; Yunkaporta, 2009).

Evans (2012) supports Phillips' (2011) emphasis on teachers becoming aware of white privilege and other perceptions of white teachers from alternative perspectives. She notes there is much to be done in "indigenising professional experience within teacher education programs" (Evans, 2012, p. 54). Teacher education programs need to ensure teachers have first-hand experiences interacting with Indigenous people so they develop "awareness of and responsiveness to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community aspirations" (Evans, 2012, p. 54) before taking up tenure in a community school. Against a backdrop of State, Territory and Federal policies expecting institutional collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, teachers are expected "to be knowledgeable about and able to demonstrate awareness of localised issues of land custodianship and contemporary protocols" (Evans, 2012, p. 59). However, Evans further notes the tendency for school and teachers to be isolated from the students and communities they serve. Evans (2012) suggests practicums in Aboriginal community schools by establishing partnerships between universities and schools could be a beneficial strategy for pre-service teachers to improve understandings about Aboriginal students and communities. Further, interactions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people during teacher education programs would also benefit teachers who would be able to make informed decisions about their own professional pathways which may or may not include community schools.

Sharplin (2002) a non-Indigenous academic, investigated the personal/social and professional expectations held by pre-service teachers about rural and remote teaching. Her findings suggested pre-service teachers are under-informed, "relying on narrow, stereotypical images" (Sharplin, 2002, p. 60) of remote teaching as being both "an idyllic retreat and outback hell" (Sharplin, 2002, p. 60). These simplistic perceptions indicate pre-service teachers require detailed information about the realities of teaching in rural and remote contexts and, where possible, opportunities to experience practice in these difficult-to-staff locations prior to recruitment.

Acting on the potential of remote practicums, Auld, Dyer and Charles (2016), have accompanied undergraduate teachers to participate in teaching practicums in remote communities of the Northern Territory for several years. Auld utilised his previous relationship with a remote Aboriginal community to create opportunities for undergraduate teachers to experience teaching and living in a remote community. This opportunity has resulted in several undergraduates accepting employment in the

community in which they conducted their practicum. Reflecting on pre-service teacher practices in the site of this study and in other communities around Katherine, Northern Territory, Auld et al. (2016) utilised pre-service teacher narratives to "identify the complexity of [pre-service teacher practicums] and the systemic limitations of doing teacher education in this context with non-Indigenous teachers" (p. 168). While acknowledging the benefits of engaging pre-service teachers in remote Indigenous community practicums, they caution the danger of pre-service teachers completing practicums in remote Aboriginal community schools (Auld et al., 2016). By "dangerous practices", Auld et al. (2016) mean the "risk of being counterproductive to the empowering and transformative practices of student learning and the ethical responsibilities associated with teaching" (p. 166). Pre-service teachers completing remote community school practicums come into direct contact with enduring deficit attitudes presented by some non-Indigenous teachers and structural barriers presented by both the institution and the community. Auld et al. (2016) note dangerous practices "come from the clash of expectations from the pre-service teachers, in-service teachers, their students and parents" (Auld et al., 2016, p. 166). A significant danger of conducting practicums in remote contexts is pre-service teachers developing "essentialist concepts of culture that ignore the way Aboriginal people themselves are actively negotiating space between traditional values and practices and the values and practices associated with Western culture" (Auld et al., 2016, p. 169). Auld et al. are wary pre-service teachers may develop their own constructs of a 'real Aborigine' and a 'real Aboriginal experience' that dismiss Aboriginal people residing in their urban towns and schools and their daily challenges to retain language and culture. Auld et al. (2016) identify the power relationships help between pre-service teachers and the school principal and teachers. Principals and teachers offer a partial reality of the many complexities associated with remote Indigenous education including why students are not at school. Without having the community's perspective, pre-service teachers run the risk of perpetuating the coloniser/colonised relationship that underpins deficit thinking about Aboriginal people, a concern also identified by Rose (2012). Pre-service teachers also have limited experiences, if any, of problematizing the curriculum for Indigenous students and their community. Despite Indigenous scholars (Martin, 2008, Nakata, 2007, Yunkaporta, 2009) highlighting the role knowledge and discourse play in positioning Indigenous people in the school curriculum, teacher understanding of the struggles experienced by indigenous people to authentically embed Indigenous

perspectives are limited. When non-Indigenous teachers impart their community education experiences on pre-service teachers without scholarly or Indigenous intervention, the problematic nature of Aboriginal students knowing the world through the curriculum without local perspectives challenging dominant perspectives perpetuates the ongoing colonial project. Auld et al. (2016) identify the English as a Second Language (ESL) mentality and the emphasis on "rudimentary ESL scaffolding" over complex issues of cultures and worldviews as problematic. Pre-service teachers are at risk of equating student capacity "to engage informal [English] conversations with the capacity to handle the challenge of school writing" (Auld et al., 2016, p. 174) without the sophistication to recognise differences between oral and written communication skills or the important role of students develop first language skills.

Despite attempts to create opportunities for interaction with the local community, pre-service teachers' work is in the school. The school is a site dominated by non-Aboriginal people who perpetuate the 'silent apartheid' (Rose, 2012, p. 67) and which enculturates new teachers into entrenched school cultures via "debriefing sessions where knowledge and practices are not contested from an Aboriginal standpoint" (Auld et al., 2016, p. 171). White mentor teachers, as outsiders to the community, become the narrators of unchallenged perspectives and interpretations of what is going on in the community as they are "not privy to the daily struggles or long term aspirations held by Aboriginal members of the community" (Auld et al., 2016, p. 171). Seeking to understand the many elements to which pre-service teachers are exposed in remote school practicums, Auld et al. (2016) highlighted the friction between "teacher agency, structural barriers and the complexities of teaching in remote communities" (p. 166). Auld et al.'s findings highlight the need for new and practicing teachers to be supported to developing deeper understandings of the history and life circumstances of the local Aboriginal community and teachers' direct and indirect roles in the enduring failure of education for remote Indigenous students.

Rose (2012) identifies teachers as being amongst the well-intentioned perpetrators of continuing Aboriginal disadvantage but also amongst the victims of a silent apartheid. Non-Aboriginal, white teachers are heavily implicated in the promulgation as they "emerge from their universities hav[ing] had very little exposure to Indigenous insights and then they inadvertently replicate this ignorance in their everyday practice by teaching nothing at all about Indigenous cultures, or worse, teaching illegitimate or ill-

informed Indigenous content" (Rose, 2012, pp. 69-70). However, in defense of teachers, Rose insists "in fairness, culpability should not be laid at the feet of the teachers, as they are just as much a product of the 'silent apartheid' as the students in front of them" (2012, p. 70).

Calma (2009), in turn, identifies the need for teachers to be informed about remote Indigenous Australia before agreeing to teach in remote communities, acknowledging that such contexts are not suitable for all teachers. Teachers suitable for remote communities are highly skilled and culturally competent (Buckskin, 2012; Perso, 2012); they are respectful of Aboriginal home languages and proficient in teaching English as an Additional Language (Buckskin, 2012; Devlin, 2011); and they know their students and know about their students (Perso, 2012). In other words, factors within the control of the teacher need to be well developed by teachers to give both teachers and their students the best chance possible to experience quality teaching and learning in remote communities.

### 3.3.3 Factors impacting Indigenous education within the control of the teacher

No single factor impacting teachers' practice in Aboriginal remote schools is entirely within their control. However, there are three factors over which teachers do have some agency. Within the expected control of the teacher is the pedagogy they use; the way in which they develop the teaching and learning relationship with the student; and how they build relationships with the Aboriginal community, particularly Aboriginal students and their families. The literature available on how to teach Indigenous students is plentiful, an emphasis which is consistent with Hattie's assertion that the teacher makes the biggest difference (Hattie, 2003, 2009). Hattie's synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement identified the two major sources of variance for student academic achievement as being the students themselves who account for about 50% of the variance and the teachers who account for about 30% of the variance (2003, pp. 1-2).

The literature about teaching Indigenous students is mainly about providing direction for classroom practice and outlining strategies that teachers can apply to specific subject areas. Literature that takes a broad perspective towards teaching Indigenous students in the classroom, attends to Aboriginal ways of learning (Christie, 1995; Henry & McTaggart, 1991; Hughes & More, 1997; Yunkaporta, 2009) and embedding

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander perspectives (Kincheloe & Steinberg, 2008; Matthews et al., 2005; Nakata, 2002; Taylor, 1999). In some jurisdictions, there are recommendations for how to embed Indigenous perspectives across the curriculum (Department of Education and Training, 2011; Primary Connections, 2007). More narrow perspectives attend to specific strategies for teaching English and literacy to Indigenous students for whom English is an additional, sometimes foreign language (Berry & Hudson, 1997; Canavan, 2005; Gray & Cowey, 2012; Murray, 1995); teaching mathematics (Matthews et al., 2007; Sarra, 2011; Western Australia Department of Education and Training, 2015b); and teaching science (Aikenhead, 2001; Australian National University, 2008a). With appropriate instruction and mentoring, teachers are able to master these strategies and implement them in the classroom.

Another facet of Indigenous education over which teachers arguably have some control is building relationships with Indigenous students, parents and the local community (Buckskin, 2012; Godfrey et al., 2001; Groome, 1985; Harrison & Greenfield, 2011; Lowe, 2011; Prince, Leitch, & Pisani, 2016). The institution of education identifies school relationships with the community as integral to improving student outcomes (Education Council, 2015). Reflective of strategic plans directing school practices, a standard practice in remote community schools is to encourage teachers to engage with their local community. However, teacher relationships with community are rarely supported with little guidance as to what these relationships can and should look like. Increasingly educational jurisdictions are attending to school and teacher need for explicit guidance when developing positive relationships with their local Aboriginal community. For example, the Western Australian Department of Education has included relationship building in its Aboriginal cultural standards framework (Department of Education, 2015) to provide guidance for teachers so that they can build respectful relationships with members of the Aboriginal community. Teachers are also able to access literature developed for other government agencies (Department of Community Services, 2009; Prince et al., 2016). Overall though, practices for interacting with families and the local community are largely left to the discretion of the teacher. Studies that capture the voice of the Indigenous community draw attention to numerous elements over which the teacher has some control.

By examining Aboriginal students and their families' perspectives about education in remote Indigenous communities, numerous elements of teacher practice within the

control of the teacher become evident. Many of these studies seek to understand the qualities of a good teacher in remote contexts by listening to Aboriginal students and their families (Harslett et al., 1999; Lewthwaite et al., 2015) and elders of the community (Bond, 2004). Indigenous people stress the importance of the teacher-student relationships which is deemed more effective when teachers display "personal warmth and good humour and make realistically high academic demands of students" (Bourke, Rigby, & Burden, 2000, p. 25). The teacher's ability to provide stimulating, imaginative and original approaches to teaching and learning is also valued. The personal qualities identified by Indigenous people as desirable in non-Aboriginal teachers are within the control of the non-Aboriginal teacher.

Despite institution policies being imbued with notions of respect and shared responsibility, Bond (2004) found that policy rhetoric was far from the lived reality of that experienced by the remote Aboriginal community. The elders identified several issues with non-Aboriginal, white teachers in their community such as not knowing who the teachers are and therefore being unable to establish a relationship. Not knowing the teachers led to the elders questioning the community's ability to know and trust the teachers. In situations where the elders and teachers did interact, the elders found many teachers to be "condescending" and "contemptuous" (Bond, 2004, p. 197). Despite elders' contention that "part of a teacher's job is to have good relationships with people in the community by associating socially with the local people" (Bond, 2004, p. 197), the elders believed an outside influence was telling teachers not to mix with the community and that increasingly, teachers did not go to places where locals could catch up with them (Bond, 2004). Developing relationships with the local community and partaking in community events are within the control of the teacher.

Despite concerted institutional efforts, the majority of teachers in remote contexts continue to be non-Aboriginal and white people who do not share the cultural and linguistic backgrounds of their students. For this reason, much of the literature pertaining to Indigenous education concerns cultural responsiveness. Cultural responsiveness was made popular by Ladson-Billings' work with African American students in the United States (Ladson-Billings, 1995) but has since been adopted by teachers of Maori students in New Zealand (Bishop, 2003; Bishop & Berryman, 2011), First Nations students in Canada (Lewthwaite et al., 2013; Lewthwaite & Renaud, 2009) and Australia's Indigenous students (Perso, 2012). Central to cultural

responsiveness is the teacher's cultural competence and his/her ability to positively engage with students' cultural heritage; to use comprehensively "cultural resources to teach knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes" (Gay, 2010, p. 32); and to recongise multiple cultures can, and often do, exist in the classroom environment. Culturally responsive teachers apply teaching practices and evaluation strategies that aim to liberate students from the dominant discourse of Australian education and to empower students into "academic competence, personal confidence, and the will to act" (Gay, 2010, p. 34). Proponents of culturally responsive education argue it is transformative because it enables teachers and students to defy education traditions and the status quo that has traditionally under-served them (Gay, 2010; Lipman, 1995). Teachers intent on being quality educators of students in remote Aboriginal community schools can and do develop personal and professional qualities required to provide effective teaching and learning.

### 3.3.4 Factors impacting Indigenous education beyond the control of the teacher

Although teachers have some control over their own practices, they are also affected by factors that are entirely within the control of the institution of education and the community. Significantly, it is the interplay of institution and community factors that strongly affects what is and is not possible in teacher practice and unforeseen practices teachers must engage with despite the underlying circumstances being beyond the control of the teacher. Here the community related factors of student health and wellbeing, participating in cultural activities that take them away from the school, and dealing with complex social lives and the institution related factors of attending a school steeped in academic failure and driven by practices significantly different to students social, cultural and linguistic experiences are discussed. In many ways, community and institution related factors overlap because community factors do not pause at the school gate.

In a remote Aboriginal community, students are challenged by learning English to enable interactions with teachers and engagement with the curriculum; mandatory western models of schooling that sideline clan ceremonies which were traditionally used for teaching and learning; and home issues involving violence and inadequate basic resources. Hattie's (2009) critics argue that his preoccupation with teachers fails to recognise the full impact of remote students' health and wellbeing. Critics of Hattie's

meta-analyses draw attention to the way he ignored or down-played the "important role of socio-economic status and home background" on student achievement (Snook, O'Neill, Clark, O'Neill, & Openshaw, 2009, p. 98). In contrast, Snook et al. (2009) stress that policy decisions informed by Hattie's focus on teachers "cannot be drawn in isolation from the background variables of class, poverty, health in families and nutrition" (p. 96).

Hattie's (2009) research, however, does not totally ignore home and student factors. He indicates that issues facing education in remote communities, such as welfare policies, retention and mobility, have the reverse effect on student learning. According to Hattie (20009), welfare recipients fared worse in student outcomes than those who received no welfare, supporting Pearson's argument against passive welfare dependency (Pearson, 2003). However, the reality for remote Indigenous students is that families are welfare dependent and have been for multiple generations (Pearson, 2003).

Students perceiving of themselves as failures proves detrimental to student wellbeing. Hattie found students who are retained in a year level "in rather arbitrary and inconsistent ways" (2009, p. 99), rather than progressed to the next level, resulted in students doing worse academically in the future. He also found students assigned grades indicative of failure produced immediate trauma to children (Hattie, 2009). Issues of students repeating school years become contentious, however, when contrasted with the findings from Lock et al., (2012). Lock et al. (2012) found, in remote Aboriginal community schools, "no child in the K-10 school could read above a year three level" (p. 126). Lock et al.'s (2012) findings indicate that students are not retained until they master the curriculum of a specific year level resulting in a situation in which teachers of high school students are teaching K-3 literacy. School leadership insists teachers support student wellbeing by progressing students onto the next school year because student academic failure is a consistent characteristic of education in remote Aboriginal communities. Beyond the control of the teacher, student progression through the year levels, despite failing to achieve minimal year level benchmarks, falls well within the purview of the institution of education. Combining Hattie's argument that arbitrary and inconsistent retention is detrimental to students' future learning and observations pertaining to the complexities of remote Aboriginal communities in which school failure occurs in conjunction with welfare dependency, poor health and nutrition presents a situation in which the institution of education has to rethink the approach to

remote Aboriginal student learning and wellbeing; learning and wellbeing are not mutually exclusive.

In addition to Snook et al.'s (2009) criticisms, Hattie's meta-analyses fail to consider the impact of colonialism, historic and intergenerational trauma (Calma, 2009a) or the denial of education in the students' dominant language (Calma, 2009b). In both situations, Aboriginal people have been denied their land, language and culture and expected to learn non-Indigenous, foreign ways of being in the world. For the vast majority of Aboriginal people, schools are another institution in which their presence is non-negotiable and in which Aboriginal identify, curriculum, pedagogy and academic standards are dictated by outsiders not necessarily intent on Aboriginal clan advancement. Unlike non-Aboriginal students, Aboriginal students have to learn the language of the oppressors which is also the language of school.

Hattie's analysis also fails to consider the impact of endemic health and hygiene issues in the home (Calma, 2009a), high levels of family incarceration (Calma, 2009b) or lateral violence. Lateral violence is prevalent in "harmful behaviours between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples collectively as part of an oppressed group: within families, organisations and the community between" (Gooda, 2011b, p. ). Lateral violence occurs when minority groups turn frustrations against their own because they are unable or unwilling to express anger at the oppressor. Significantly, and noted obliquely in educational research (Lock et al., 2012; McCarthy, 2012), students in remote communities experience endemic health and hygiene issues, multi-generational welfare, oppression, high levels of family incarceration and lateral violence simultaneously. These issues rarely occur in isolation, resulting in students having to live under constant stress from multiple sources.

Despite the literature clearly articulating the impact of Aboriginal people's home and community experiences on student learning (Australian Indigenous Health*InfoNet*, 2015; Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2014; Hanssens, 2010; Lyons & Janca, 2012; McDonald, Bailie, Grace, & Brewster, 2009), the institution of education continues to foreground the need to improve literacy and numeracy outcomes (ACARA, 2016e) with limited attention to teacher and school practices that consider complex student needs.

In addition to poor health and wellbeing, remote Australian Aboriginal students who speak English as a second, third, fourth or fifth language historically fail to reach NAPLAN benchmarks in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, leading to the rhetoric of Aboriginal education. Aboriginal students' poor academic results in consecutive NAPLAN testing reinforce the institution's perception of 'deficit', undermining attempts by educators and Aboriginal communities to alter perceptions of failure associated with being remote and Aboriginal. The emphasis on literacy and numeracy was challenged by elders in Hilary Bond's (2004) research that foregrounded Mornington Island elders' voices about teachers and education in their community. Bond (2004) urges teachers, and by extension, the institution of education,

> to be aware that academic learning depends on a whole range of qualities which the students bring to class which include not only their cognitive but the emotional and social development and the way a child interprets the life experiences which are a result of prior home, culture and community factors. (p. 260)

Arguably, NAPLAN can be considered high-stakes testing due to the emphasis placed on remote Indigenous student abysmal academic results based on NAPLAN data. In 2008, Au, an American academic, conducted research to understand how high-stakes testing operates as a relay between socio-economic relations and classroom-level pedagogic discourse, with emphasis on identifying how high-stakes testing reproduces social and educational inequality. His research found that government control over content and forms of knowledge in tests, such as NAPLAN, influenced school environments. He noted the "inequalities associated with socio-economic relations external to education through the selective regulation and distribution of consciousness and identities" (Au, 2008, p. 649). In the Australian context, Au's research would suggest that the government's NAPLAN testing creates a situation that undermines its reforms and ensuing actions for improving Indigenous education which are assuredly based on ultimately improved student health and wellbeing. It would also suggest that an emphasis on NAPLAN further distances Indigenous people from socio-economic improvements by not attending to underlying non-Indigenous consciousness and identities inherent in the Australian curriculum and NAPLAN.

Almost every aspect of schooling falls within the control of the institution of education. While teacher preparation and strong relationships with the local Aboriginal community

are integral to enabling teachers to be culturally responsive, Buckskin (2012) acknowledges systemic changes, evident in policy, and school practices must be in place to sustain positive changes. Yet Wilson (2014), an experienced education consultant who led the review of Indigenous education in the Northern Territory, downplayed the significance of improving partnerships between the institution of education and local communities despite quoting recommendations from the Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies), 2013). The Menzies School of Health Research stated, "it is not appropriate for *non-Indigenous* [author's italics] people to continue to be seen to make all the decisions about what is best for the education of Aboriginal children and young people in the [Northern Territory], particularly in its Aboriginal Communities (Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies), 2013, p. vi, in Wilson, 2014, p. 79). In a previous publication in which a group of 34 experts and interested persons met in a workshop facilitated by Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies Foundation, 2010), the need for "interdisciplinary cooperation" between Aboriginal leaders, health workers, social workers, police and teachers to enable interdisciplinary perspectives to resolve entrenched issues (p. 28) was clearly stated.

In contrast, Wilson focuses on the need for "a cohort of highly educated Indigenous leaders in schools and the system" (2014, p. 79) recognising that future leaders will be developed in schools. Wilson's interpretation of the Menzies School of Health Research (2013) indicates a significant loss of meaning in which Indigenous leaders are not associated with specific clan groups and communities. Pointedly, the vital message that outsiders can no longer make decisions for Aboriginal communities seems to be lost in Wilson's interpretation of who comprises Indigenous leadership.

Indigenous leadership is one of the many complexities in Indigenous communities. The complex politics of Indigenous communities is a matter rarely understood by non-Indigenous people. Seeking leadership amongst Australia's Indigenous people, government and institutional leaders have sought the input of well-known Indigenous academics such as Lester Irabinna-Rigney, Martin Nakata and Chris Sarra and political leaders such as Noel Pearson and Warren Mundine. The acceptance of input from these leaders is problematic.

Firstly, clan groups deny the authority of people who speak for the clan without the clan's authority (Mundine, 2016). For example, two leaders who have a lot to say about Aboriginal education are Chris Sarra, Indigenous educator and Noel Pearson, an Aboriginal lawyer. Sarra is from Bundaberg, Queensland and Pearson is from Hopevale, Queensland. Although non-Indigenous people might perceive that these two Aboriginal, Queensland men might be accepted by the broader Aboriginal Queensland, even Australian, community, this is not the case. In Indigenous politics, Indigenous people are only able to speak with authority about their clan. For Indigenous people, being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander is not enough as clans are discrete; a fact that remains problematic for non-Indigenous governments because each clan group demands representation and input. Whereas non-Indigenous governments have struggled to understand Indigenous politics, this is not the case for Indigenous people.

Indigenous people are adept at navigating relationships and politics with non-Indigenous people. Folds (1987), a non-Indigenous educator who has spent many years interacting with the Pintupi people of Australia's western deserts investigated relationships between Pintupi and non-Aboriginal outsiders. Folds challenges popular non-Indigenous assumptions of deficit that underpin many policies. Folds (2001) argues that Pintupi people are able to exert more control over what happens in their lives, emphasising Pintupi are more comfortable with "the clash of conflicting wills" (p. 180) between western society and Aboriginal society than their non-Indigenous counterparts who have "a need for control and structure" (p. 180). Martin, an Aboriginal academic who identified numerous ways Aboriginal people maintain agency in interactions with non-Aboriginal people, similarly found that Aboriginal people are not without their own strategies for maintaining authority when entering partnerships with non-Aboriginal people (Martin, 2008). Utilising relatedness theory, Martin (2008) argues that non-Aboriginal theories that depict Aboriginal people as being powerless and hopeless are misguided. She recognises that Aboriginal people have always exerted a level of agency in the regulation of Outsiders (Martin, 2008). Aboriginal people identify outsiders as 'stranger' who is unknown; 'whiteman' who is known about; or 'friend' who is known (Martin, 2008). Martin notes "each form of relatedness is regulated according to the types and levels of physical, social, emotional, cultural and economic relatedness" (Martin, 2008, p. 9) between Aboriginal people and outsiders. Aboriginal people then regulate encounters with outsiders depending on whether interactions are minimal or if

brief interactions become sustained engagements. Relatedness is also affected by whether outsiders come amongst or come alongside Aboriginal people and the degree of equality applied by outsiders to relationships with Aboriginal people (Martin, 2008). For Aboriginal people, the maintenance of identity and autonomy is crucial and therefore the degrees of relatedness with 'other' will only be expanded when outsiders display honesty, co-operation and respect without seeking to diminish or replace Aboriginal identity (Martin, 2008). Until non-Indigenous people demonstrate the necessary respect of including Indigenous people in activities that affect their everyday lives, such as schooling, Indigenous people will continue to apply passive-aggressive strategies to regulate non-Indigenous intrusion into Indigenous lives.

The Menzies group (2010) encapsulated many of the aspects that need to be attended to with clan groups in remote Aboriginal communities. According to the Menzies group (2010), matters of specific relevance for Indigenous education are:

- The importance of early life experiences;
- Changing attitudes and perspectives;
- Cross-cultural agendas and insights for decision-makers;
- Paths and attitudes to knowledge;
- Language, culture and communication;
- Preservation of traditional languages;
- Teaching in remote Indigenous schools – biliteracy and bilingualism;
- Aboriginal studies programs;
- Community tensions, strengths, role models and opportunities;
- Quality of teaching;
- Departments of education and teacher-training organisations; and
- National commitment to Indigenous education. (Menzies Foundation, 2010, p. 3)

Linking all of these matters of significance to improve remote Indigenous education is the need for governments to work in partnership with Indigenous leaders and parents at the community level, ensuring authentic capacity building (Menzies Foundation, 2010).

### 3.4 Conclusion

The literature indicates remote Aboriginal education is complex and, for practicing non-Aboriginal and white teachers, particularly confusing. Matters of politics underpin institution and community attitudes and practices which in turn affect teacher practice. Differences between the cultures of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people are particularly noticeable in remote communities when two different societies come face-

to-face with each other. Teachers do not act as lone agents in education. Teacher practices are influenced by the social arrangements and ensuing practices embedded within the institution of education and of the community, but the literature provides little to support understanding of the impact on teachers when two different cultures come together in a teacher dominated space. While there is a small quantity of literature that provides insight into the teachers' experiences in remote Aboriginal communities, the daily incidents while teaching in a remote context have been largely overlooked. Rather, the majority of literature pertaining to teacher experiences in remote Aboriginal communities emphasises cultural differences downplaying the complexities of teaching in a remote Aboriginal community. This study focuses on identifying the challenges experienced by non-Indigenous teachers and seeks to understand the underlying causes for these challenges. This new knowledge will contribute to government, institution and community leaders' understandings of what is affecting teacher practice and stopping them from providing the quality education they seek to deliver. Further, this new knowledge will provide the bases for comprehensive dialogue challenging outdated practices that disable teacher effectiveness.

# Chapter Four. Methodology for this study

This qualitative study was conducted using principles and techniques of critical ethnography (Carspecken, 1996; Madison, 2012; Thomas, 1993). The chapter provides an overview of critical ethnography including a rationale for its choice in this study. It outlines Carspecken's (1996) five stages to conducting a critical ethnography, possible pitfalls and issues associated with legitimacy, validity and reliability. This is followed by a description of how critical ethnographic principles and techniques were specifically applied in this project. This overview explains how participants and critical friends became part of the project and how my role as the researcher changed at various stages during data collection. Methods for collecting, reducing and analysing the data are also described. Finally, the data analysis process that led to the findings that answer the two research questions in Chapter Five are outlined.

## 4.1 Critical ethnography

Critical ethnography is a research methodology that adopts the perspective of the subject of the study to explore cultural phenomena in situ (Anderson, 1989; Mills & Comber, 2014). Originally associated with anthropology, ethnography is field-based, conducted in the settings within which real people live and by researchers who maintain face-to-face contact with those people with the option to also participate in the ethnography as both participant and observer. While immersed in the social environment of the study, the researcher applies multiple data collection techniques over an extended period of time. The researcher collects data from participants and, by keeping a detailed journal, builds thick descriptions of the social environment, thus constructing a comprehensive depiction of the group who are the subject of the study. Other ethnographic data collection methods are carefully selected to facilitate a close relationship between the researcher and participants in the study to enable the researcher to develop deep insight into the relationships between social structures and participants' stories. Despite origins in anthropology (Geertz, 1983), researchers in other fields, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, began utilising ethnography in such fields as education (Anderson, 1989).

Concurrently, critical theory (Foucault, 2002; Said, 1994) was influencing new research directions in education. Since the 1970s, increasingly critical theory has been incorporated into education to critique societies and dominating nation-state institution

cultures (Apple, 2000, 2004; Applebaum, 2005; Cooper, 2003; Freire, 1972, 1974, 1992; Ladson-Billings, 2009; McLaren, 2000) with particular attention to minority groups and the impact of colonialism (Battiste, 2004; May, 1999; Nakata, 2007; Welch, 1988). Ethnographic movements and critical theory merged to establish a new form of research, critical ethnography.

Critical ethnography developed from a merging of "interpretivist movements in anthropology and sociology" with "neo-Marxist and feminist theory to produce a unique genre of research in the field of education" (Anderson, 1989, p. 249). Interpretivists in the fields of phenomenology, sociology, and anthropology explored questions about the nature of knowing and reality seeking "local knowledge" (Geertz, 1983, p. 215) and "the native's point of view" (Malinowski, 1922, p. 25). Sociological research questions about knowledge, how it can be acquired and the extent of knowledge on any given subject or by any given entity (epistemology) were also challenging positivist approaches to understanding human experience (Trochim, 2006). Angus (1986) notes the interpretivist movement placed "human actors and other interpretive and negotiating capacities at the centre of analysis" (p. 61).

### 4.1.1 The purpose of critical ethnography

Critical ethnography is research in which the researcher advocates for the liberation of groups who are marginalised in society by attending to the wider social structures and systems of power relationships (Harvey, 2012-17, para 1). The critical ethnographer plays a central role seeking research accounts that are "sensitive to the dialectical relationship between the social structural constraints on human actors and the relative autonomy of human agency" (Anderson,1989, p. 249). The overriding goal of the critical ethnographer is to help free individuals from sources of domination and repression, acknowledging the researcher's interests in hearing the lived experiences of real people in untenable situations with a view to empowering them.

As a research methodology, critical ethnography delves into the depths of a social situation deliberately sympathising with a particular type of member who becomes the subject of the study. Critical ethnographers favour the subject's point of view and/or emotional responses, amplifying a specific voice, or type of voice, to gain insight into issues of "power, ideology, marginalisation, equity, and agency-empowerment" (Mills

& Comber, 2014, p. 8). However, critical ethnographers do not fail to recognise the voices of other types of members within a social situation.

Critical ethnography was an appropriate approach to studying the experience of white teachers in a school in a remote Aboriginal community for several reasons. Firstly, having taught in remote Aboriginal contexts for over a decade, I recognised that the current state of affairs in remote Aboriginal government schools was untenable in that the continuation of very poor education outcomes are unethical and irresponsible and therefore required attention. Secondly, the social inequalities associated with remote Aboriginal education and Aboriginal people also affect non-Aboriginal, white teachers who are the main type of teacher in remote contexts. Amid government efforts to bring about positive social change, non-Aboriginal,white teacher voices are not often heard in data sets that inform decision-making directed at education in remote Aboriginal communities. It is my contention that teachers in remote schools are a marginalised group in the institution of education.

There is no specific data indicating the number of teachers in remote or very remote locations such as the context for this study. I included remote and very remote locations as Aboriginal communities mostly fall into one of these two geographic categories. The "More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative" (MATSITI) (2014) provides insight into the percentage of Indigenous teachers who taught in remote and very remote contexts in 2014 by making comparisons to non-Indigenous teachers. However, when comparing Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) and MATSITI data I noticed a discrepancy with the number of Australian teachers. According to the 2014 census (ABS, 2015), there were approximately 373 300 full-time equivalent teachers in Australia whereas MATSITI data indicated 162 756 teachers in Australia. However, unlike the ABS data (2015), MATSITI (2014) data provided insight into the distribution of Australian teachers across geographic locations: major city, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote (p. 20). I returned to the MATSITI data and calculated the percentage of non-Indigenous teachers working in remote (2.8%) and very remote (1.7%) schools. As a matter of interest, I then applied these percentages to the ABS data resulting in 6, 794 non-Indigenous teachers in remote schools and 10, 826 non-Indigenous teachers in very remote schools. These numbers indicate a possible 17, 620 teachers (approximately) working, every day in a highly complex cultural environment;

this represents a considerably high number of people living with the challenges reported by participating teachers in this study.

A third reason for selecting critical ethnography is that its reflexive inquiry approach captured the cause and effect cycle between teacher-reported challenges and the conditions emerging from existing institution, community and school practices. Lastly, the political nature of Australian Aboriginal affairs was considered a pertinent factor in remote Aboriginal education and it influenced the selection of Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994) as the critical framework in this critical ethnography.

This study repositioned white teachers as an authority on their own experiences in remote Aboriginal education. This study recognised the white teacher as one part—and only one part— of the remote Indigenous education experience because teachers in remote communities represent a small number of Australian teachers and are frequently overlooked in discussions related to Indigenous affairs due to their non-Indigenousness. Because critical ethnography begins with an "ethical responsibility to address processes of unfairness or injustice within a particular *lived* domain" (author's italics) (Madison, 2012, p. 5), critical ethnographic principles and techniques were used as the methodology for this study.

### 4.1.2 Conducting a critical ethnography

Carspecken (1996), a renowned critical ethnographer, identified five stages to the study of social action taking place, such as teaching, that explains the action by examining how the context and social systems intertwine to shape the social action. Carspecken (1996) does not consider the researcher's orientation into the site of the study to be one of the five stages. Rather, he makes note of the preliminary stage as the means to initiate the study. The subsequent three stages provide guidance for the researcher to progressively compile data shifting from the monological voice of the researcher to the dialogical data generation with participants. Specific to critical ethnography, stages four and five guide the researcher to identify the link between social systems within the context of the study and the data generated through dialogue generated between participants or the researcher and participant/s.

Carspecken (1996) recognises that data collection methods and the involvement of the researcher often result in the non-sequential application of the five stages. Carspecken

recommends a "loosely cyclical use of the stages" (1996, p. 40), recognising the findings delivered in preliminary analyses drawn from researcher monologue and researcher and/or participant dialogue can lead the researcher to revisit the first three stages while investigating the social systems and relationships.

Pertinent in critical research, findings from stages one to four make reference to broad system features, while stage five enables the researcher to "suggest reasons for the experiences and cultural forms" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 43) by using a theoretical and methodological process that makes the implicit components, structures and general rules, explicit. In this way, factors such as the social and political structures of society at play in the context in which research participants are located can be understood as underlying forces that can be changed.

Carspecken's five stages for critical ethnography are briefly described below and explained in greater detail later in this chapter. In this project, I applied stages one to four during ***Years 1, 2 and 3*** of this study, electing to conduct formal analysis after all data had been collected. The theoretical and analytical frameworks were not finalised until the latter part of ***Year 3***.

***Preliminary stage: Creating a list of research questions, a list of specific items for study, and examining researcher value orientations***

In the preliminary stage of the critical ethnographic study, the researcher identifies a specific social site and brainstorms a list of "general, broad, comprehensive and flexible" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 41) questions that can be changed as necessary during the qualitative study. A list of specific topics for examination is also produced to identify information the researcher needs to collect to satisfy the questions. This list of topics includes the social routines to study, socially constructed artifacts within and linked to the social site, and the identification of the specific actors or participants who will be interviewed in the study. During the preliminary stage, the researcher also explores his or her own value orientations to raise awareness of potential biases so any such biases can be checked for at various phases of the study. Biases have no place in critical research. Rather, what is frequently labelled as 'bias' in critical research is better understood as the value orientations of "criticalists" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 6). Carspecken (1996) considers criticalists to be researchers who view traditional ideas

about knowledge and reality as wanting and conduct research as a way to improve circumstances for the oppressed.

### *Stage One: Compiling the primary record through the collection of monological data*

In Stage One, the researcher makes his or herself as unobtrusive as possible within the social site to observe practices. The research "builds an intensive set of notes for the site of focus and a looser journal" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 41) which is kept to record general observations and conversations as the researcher becomes familiar with the site of the study. During Stage One, the information is monological because the researcher seeks a third-person perspective describing the social site "from the perspective of an uninvolved observer" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 41).

### *Stage Two: Preliminary reconstructive analysis*

In Stage Two, the researcher begins to make speculations from the primary record as it is collected. The researcher employs a range of techniques in analysing the data to "determine interaction patterns, their meanings, power relations, roles, interactive sequences, evidence of embodied meaning and intersubjective structures" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 42). During Stage Two, researchers seek to capture the culture and subcultures leading to the types of practices observed. In this stage, analysis is reconstructive enabling the researcher to explore a range of interpretive frameworks, including those that enable and restrict interpretations. The analysis is reconstructive because the researcher seeks "cultural themes and system factors that are not observable and are usually unarticulated by the actors themselves" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 42). Reconstructive analysis has an element of uncertainty for the researcher who must put the unspoken and unobserved into words; that is, making the invisible, visible.

### *Stage Three: Dialogical data generation*

In stage three, Carspecken (1996) explains that the researcher introduces other voices to build the primary record. Intense conversations with the subjects of the study take place in interviews and discussions. Stage three is crucial to critical ethnography. By focusing on participants in the study, emphasis is placed on participant voices rather than artifacts generated in the site thus democratising the research process. The researcher anticipates the interpretations made about the data collected in stages one and two to be challenged by data collected from participants in stage three. In stage three, the

researcher takes care to give bland encouragement, non-leading questions or comments and demonstrate active listening during interviews and discussions. The researcher also employs medium-inference paraphrasing and high-inference paraphrasing. When utilising medium-inference paraphrasing, the researcher uses the words of the interviewee. The researcher seeks clarification of information provided by participants including implicit beliefs and theories the researcher suspects are held by participants. When utilising high-inference paraphrasing, the researcher waits until the end of the interview to articulate "suspected background beliefs that have not been explicitly stated by the subject" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 42). While Carspecken identifies the usefulness of medium-inference paraphrasing, he warns researchers to use it sparingly because it can lead participants to making statements they do not believe or to denying something s/he does really believe.

***Stage Four: Discovering system relations***

In stage four, the researcher "examines the relationship between the social site of focused interest and other specific social sites bearing some relation to it" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 160). This stage requires a conceptual framework to enable the researcher to make sense of the social system at play in the site of the study. Carspecken asserts "the analysis of systems relations is both epistemologically possible and absolutely crucial to gain a full understanding of qualitative research findings" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 161). The social systems at play in this study were described in Chapter Two, the context chapter.

***Stage Five: Using system relations to explain findings***

In stage five, the researcher significantly increases the level of inference in seeking to explain the findings from stages one through to four. Stage five seeks explanations of findings utilising socio-theoretical models and occurs in conjunction with stage four. Using the systems analysis model from stage four, researchers draw on the experiences and cultural terms used by the participants to construct a systems analysis. As part of the democratic nature of critical ethnography, the critical ethnographer aims to reciprocate research participants sharing their insider view by helping participants attain an inside view of her position of researcher and of researcher culture. Stage five combines the insider's views and the researcher's interpretations to gain a consented and intelligible explanation about a phenomenon. Carspecken warns critical ethnography is a morally compelled form of research and is thus unable to avoid hurting

or helping people because it is rarely neutral to all humans and their welfare. Carspecken recommends making the research project "as democratic as possible, from start to finish, [as] the best way to help rather than harm" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 194).

Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon's Practice Architectures framework (2014) was the analytical model utilised for both stages four and five of this critical ethnography. Developed by critical participatory action researchers, Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014), the Practice Architectures framework supports researchers to understand the social systems within the site of the study and to understand and transform ineffectual practices. In this study, the Practice Architectures framework (Kemmis et al., 2014) was used to interpret Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994) to help me re-imagine a remote Aboriginal community school in which both First and Second Spaces were equally valued. It made me aware that the school in which I was operating was not a Third Space thus influencing the description of the school as an 'in-between' Space in the context chapter (Chapter Two).

### 4.1.3 Traps in critical ethnography

Critical ethnography is propelled by the researcher's sense of duty and compassion for human suffering and "commitment based on principles of human freedom and wellbeing" (Madison, 2010, p. 5), therefore, there are several issues critical ethnographers must note to maintain the integrity of the scientific research process.

Thomas (1993) highlights possible pitfalls that can lead a critical ethnographic study to becoming "passionately rhetorical but scientifically unpersuasive" (p. 62). The pitfalls or traps include seeing only what serves the ethnographers' purposes, using conceptual clichés, placing passion before science, making claims beyond demonstrable evidence, replacing reason with stridency, writing to the already committed, forgetting the ethnographic project and taking self as given. This section outlines possible pitfalls of critical ethnography described by Thomas (1993) and actions I took to reduce them. Issues of legitimacy, reliability and validity are then addressed.

*Seeing only what serves our purpose*

To retain intellectual honesty and ethics, it is imperative to listen to the data, requiring the researcher to change position as directed by the data rather than force the data to fit researcher expectation (Carspecken, 1996, p. 195). The following example illustrates

my increased awareness of this potential pitfall. Having taught in remote Aboriginal community schools since the early 1990s, I was caught up in the frustrations of seeing little progress and the tendency to blame teachers and school leadership. For example, I believed that schools made very little effort to connect with the Indigenous community in which they were teaching. During my initial attempts at data analysis, my supervisors asked me to prove, using the data, the negative generalisation that teachers and school leadership weren't attempting to work with the community. Embarrassingly, I found that teachers and school leadership had made numerous attempts to work with the community. The frustrations expressed by community members of communities I had lived and worked in led me to make generalisation that teachers and school leadership did not attempt to work with the community. Teacher and school leadership attempts to work with the community provided vital information that would inform my findings. After this incident, I became conscious of the necessity to develop my awareness of unconscious biases and have procedures and processes to check for biases. I was mindful to seek patterns in the data and constantly monitored the data for my opinions so they could be dismissed.

*Using conceptual clichés*

A conceptual cliché is a concept that has been used over and over again and often accompanied by special words or expressions used by researchers or the group being studied. Jargon can "exaggerate claims and distort conclusions" (Thomas, 1993, p. 63) when writing up results. Fortunately, I was warned in advance about the pitfalls of jargon by my supervisors. I deliberately distanced myself from my role as a teacher while I categorised the data by taking leave from the school. I described what I was finding, step by step, giving examples of findings using the interviewed teacher's words. I also gave additional contextual information to help the reader make sense of what the teacher said.

*Placing passion before science*

Critical ethnography is attractive to passionate advocates of change; however, Thomas (1993) emphasises that the research process is a systemic, scientific process that focuses on a topic rather than gathering information to attack a target. When I began this study, I felt I had 'an axe to grind' which, ironically brought me to my PhD. Having lived and taught in remote community schools, I was frustrated at the revolving door of what I perceived to be ignorant and arrogant teachers and leaders coming to and making

judgments about remote education. As I collected the data, checked the accuracy of the data with participants and talked with my critical friends I became aware of three things. First, the situation was not the fault of any ONE person, policy or act; therefore, targeting individuals as being unjust or oppressive was negligent, inaccurate and unhealthy. Second, axe grinding was counter-productive in both the short term in the context of this doctoral study and in the long term in my work in remote Aboriginal education. Third, I needed to filter out negativity so I began isolating myself from negativity. Weekly discussions with my supervisor made me aware of my tendency to become frustrated and negative. During my reflections on both writing and thoughts, I deliberately was mindful of my capacity to be negative so I could acknowledge the negativity and try to stop. When my supervisor commented I was being negative I reflected on her feedback.

*Making claims beyond demonstrable evidence*

In research, a claim is an interpretation of the data or understanding of the subject. Researchers require that claims be substantiated by the data. Thomas warns, "overgeneralizing means we speak beyond the data" (1993, p. 64). Because this study was motivated by my passionate involvement in remote Aboriginal education, I had to be particularly careful not to focus on something I noted in my journal or something a participant said and draw conclusions that this finding was absolute. Rather, I had to suspend judgment and further interrogate a finding seeking further evidence to either disprove or support the evidence. As I stated earlier, I listened carefully to the data and would read it out loud if I found myself teetering on the verge of making a generalisation. This helped to objectively refocus.

*Replacing reasoning with stridency*

The intensity of claim, stridency, does not equate with sound scientific reasoning. Thomas states that "good ethnography illustrates rather than asserts, and if a point cannot be asserted empirically, then it should not be asserted" (1993, p. 65). The field of Indigenous education is particularly fraught with conjecture and speculation. To ensure sound reasoning, as required in rigorous critical studies, I reworked findings by analysing data in multiple ways as discussed later in this chapter. At no point did I feel the need to assert something not evident in the data.

*Writing to the already committed*

Intellectual integrity is crucial in research, demanding the researcher to be "fluent in three languages: that of the subjects, that of our own science, and that of the audience" (Thomas, 1993, p. 66). Of particular concern in this dissertation was the context. The context for this study is extremely complex but rather than reducing the context chapter for the purpose of expediency (Thomas, 1993), I had to consider carefully how the readership of the context chapter could include people unfamiliar with remote Indigenous education. At one stage, I felt my context chapter was too big so I removed half of it. When I showed it to one of my supervisors, she asked so many questions about my context, I realised I had made a huge mistake. I knew my Findings chapter was written for a broad audience so when I rewrote the context, I made sure the Findings chapter and the context chapter talked to each other so as to ensure clarity. This process also prevented assumptions being made about my readers and prevented my going off on tangents with generalisations or axes to grind.

*Forgetting the ethnographic project*

The researcher's goal is not to condone or vilify one particular group over another, a danger that can quickly become a reality in critical ethnography which advocates for marginalised or stigmatised groups. Remote Aboriginal communities are a stigmatised population, as, by association, are teachers in remote Aboriginal community schools. I was mindful that as a piece of research, this study had to do more than "convey a common humanity" (Thomas, 1993, p. 66). As I analysed white teachers' stories in the episodes identified for analysis, I recalled the challenges I experienced teaching in remote community schools. I realised I had a responsibility to translate white teacher narratives into a "conceptual and theoretical" (Thomas, 1993, p. 67) story to communicate white teachers' lived experiences in an effort to positively influence the remote Indigenous education agenda.

*Taking ourselves as given*

In critical ethnographic research, researchers are a necessary part of the research project and, as such, must be aware of how they "influence and shape the slice of culture we study" (Thomas, 1993, p. 67). I began this research focusing on how teachers understand quality teaching in remote Aboriginal contexts. As days merged into weeks and weeks into months, conversations with teachers and teachers' stories made me more sensitive to factors influencing quality teaching that went well beyond the teacher. I

became aware of the nuances affecting teacher practice; of the interactive nature of social orders and arrangements within this school. I began to discover reflexively, by attending to the data rather than what I thought was going on, that my bias against teachers was undermining my efforts to attend to the very injustices I sought to address. Just as my attitude was changed by the data, so too was the focus of my study. Rather than focusing intently on teacher practice, I focused directly on the challenges reported by teachers seeking to understand the social conditions impacting on teacher practice.

After collecting the data, a number of participants told me I had encouraged them to be more conscious of the enablers and barriers to their practice helping them to put their energy into more fruitful adventures. Further, these participants told me they had gained significant insight into the lived experiences of their students with most participants and critical friends reporting higher quality and substantive relationships with one other. On the one hand, I was pleasantly surprised at this because I was so caught up in the demands of the study and remaining objective and true to the data I had not thought beyond the study. On the other, this feedback made me aware that the project itself had increased the collegiality experienced at the school and had thus affected the culture in which teachers worked. For that reason, it was important to note the teachers' feedback.

In addition to feedback from teachers, I also noted a culture of transparency between teachers and pre-service teachers was beginning to take shape. By talking openly about issues affecting pre-service and white teacher practice with both groups present in POD meetings and meetings with pre-service teachers and their mentors, I challenged people to raise issues that impacted on their practice so they could be resolved together. After this project ended, participants who stayed on at the school continued to engage pre-service teachers in robust dialogue about concerns although few strategies collaboratively brainstormed were acted on due to the culture of the school.

While I knew I had influenced the culture of the school by conducting my employed duties, I had not realised the full extent of my influence on the culture of the school in my researcher role.

### 4.1.4 Issues of legitimacy, reliability and validity

Anderson (1989) argues that legitimacy, reliability and validity are the most serious methodological challenges in critical ethnography. As the researcher, it is my

ideological position that the current situation for teachers in remote Aboriginal community schools is untenable. With this ideology, I had to be cautious of "the apparent contradiction of such value-based research with traditional definitions of validity has left critical ethnography open to criticism from both within and outside of the ethnographic tradition" (Anderson, 1989, p. 253). Critical ethnographers attend to legitimacy, reliability and validity by ensuring the researcher is forthcoming with his/her biases (Anderson, 1989), as I did in Chapter One, and maintaining authentic representation of participants while seeking to reveal the circumstances that influence participants' stories.

Claims for legitimacy in ethnographic research pertain to the privileging of the emic or insider perspective of first-hand experience of research participants. Participants' stories within the locale or Space of investigation provide insight into local and lived social practices. Experiences conveyed by participants are considered to be relevant and legitimate because stories are considered by critical ethnographers as a "knowledge practice" (Lather, 1986). The critical ethnographer recognises research participant normative claims, through their stories, as their perception of truth and universality and questions whether such norms represent the entire group. Further, the researcher actively seeks contradictions to normative claims through observations of practices in situ, identifying power relations and considering alternatives that may be put forth by 'other', those people who are seen as different or outside the group of the person or people making the normative claims (Kincheloe & McLaren, 2008).

Claims of validity and reliability in a critical ethnographic study are related to the social processes the critical ethnographer employs to ensure participant accounts are accurately and honestly presented (Carspecken, 1996). In critical ethnographic research, the context plays a significant role in the investigation such that the findings of the study could only be transferrable and valid if the same or similar circumstances were evident in another site. Because critical ethnography is situational in that it privileges a particular group in a particular place and time, who then become the research participants, it is difficult to replicate critical ethnographic studies because contexts cannot be reproduced.

In all fields of research, reliability and validity of findings are important. Reliability in ethnographic research is dependent on resolving potential external and internal design

issues. External design issues are related to whether another researcher would discover similar results in a similar setting. Internal design issues are related to whether another researcher "given a set of previously generated constructs, would match them with data in the same way as did the original researcher" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 32). In terms of reliability, critical ethnographers "aim in application for comparability and translatability of findings" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 34) rather than outright transference. Thus variables considered in the study must be clearly articulated. In turn, validity is concerned with the accuracy of the findings. Validity requires the researcher to determine the extent to which her conclusions "represent empirical reality and assessing whether constructs devised by the researcher represent or measure the categories of human experience that occur" (LeCompte & Goetz, 1982, p. 32). Unlike scientific research, ethnography emphasizes the interplay between and among variables in a specific context. The emphasis is on the naturalistic setting and "on-the-spot analysis of causes and processes" to maintain precise control over potential extraneous factors being incorporated into the story being told about the evidence. Just as in this study, it is the interplay of factors that is usually the focus of ethnographic study.

Research design and method addressed potential issues of reliability and validity in this study. In all aspects of this study, I fully explained every step and process. For example, I clearly articulated contextual factors specific to the locale, characteristics of the participant group, my roles as researcher and co-participant, data collection methods and analytical methods included in this study. The findings of this study are not meant to be translated to any other type of school other than a remote Aboriginal community school in which the institution directs schooling activities and the majority of teachers are non-Aboriginal, with little to no experience with remote Aboriginal communities. In the first chapter, I gave an in-depth account of my experiences knowing these contributed to what would and could be observed and how observations might be interpreted. I was cognisant of my roles in this study and accounted for them clearly. At no point did I manipulate situations or participants as discussed later in this chapter.

Being positioned as both an insider and outsider I was able to recontextualise my etic (outsider) observations with both my emic (insider) and participants' daily accounts from lived, first-hand experiences. I kept a detailed journal of my observations of the daily happenings in the school and my own experiences as a teacher in this school. I

transcribed recordings of teachers' accounts as close as possible to the actual time in which particular events, expressed in teachers' stories, took place, returning to teachers to confirm statements or gain additional information. I provided excerpts of transcribed conversations in the Findings chapter, Chapter Five, to share what teachers actually said about specific challenges identified in the data. I also triangulated knowledge of context with my journal and transcribed conversations to ascertain consistency and accuracy of collected data.

Attention to Carspecken's (1996) principles of ontology ensures the trustworthiness of critical ethnographic research. Carspecken makes reference to three ontological claims that critical ethnographers must check and re-check throughout the duration of the study: objectivity, subjectivity and the rationality of value claims. The first ontological category, objectivity, refers to "truth claims made about everyday contexts of life" (Carspecken, 1996, p. 64). Carspecken urges critical ethnographers to consider the possibility that appearance is not the same as reality and to consider the world of one person does not equate with that of another. By considering the possibility of multiple interpretations of research participant experiences, the critical ethnographer is able to seek alternative points of view and thus develop a more well-rounded explanation for the causes and conditions being studied. I actively sought alternative points of view querying why each of the points of view existed. I traced all points of view, as much as possible, to such contextual aspects as events, core documents, information provided in staff meetings and policies to identify where participants were gaining their information and what experiences were contributing to participant perceptions. I also engaged in further discussions with participants to find out why they told the stories they told.

The second ontological category, subjectivity, refers to the self-conscious perspective of the person or subject that they may or may not divulge to others. The critical ethnographer needs to understand people have access to certain forms of experience that influence truth claims. Further, people may or may not understand what is happening and may require an outsider with expertise to support understanding because the outsider with expertise has information the claimant does not. For the critical ethnographer, it is important s/he does not make claims for others and is aware information needs to be considered both discretely and as part of a collection of information to enable a deeper understanding of the meanings that appear in the

findings. The second ontological category is heavily reliant on face-to-face interviews and discussions to enable people to talk through their understandings, develop new understandings and make connections between different understandings and interpretations. Carspecken notes, "only a self-report can approach validation of any claim that is subjective-referenced" (1996, p. 70) depending on the subject control over honesty. It is assumed, by the critical ethnographer, the subject is providing honest claims. I checked participants' accounts of events during conversations with participants. If something struck me as 'not quite right' or 'unexpected' I would follow up any questions I had with participants as soon as possible after the conversation.

The third ontological category, normative/evaluative claims, refers to the values, meanings and social norms taken by a claimant according to their position in the site of the study. Carspecken notes, "position-taking with others necessarily carries claims and assumptions about what is 'proper' that soon expand into cultural understandings about what is right, wrong, good, or bad" (1996, p. 85). Critical ethnographers understand the need to become familiar with the context of their study without the influence of other peoples' values or meanings. Further, the critical ethnographer seeks to identify social norms and problematise them so they can be interrupted, de-normalised and interrogated from alternative points of view. When the critical ethnographer engages with participants in the site of the study, they have already begun to probe deeply into their observations before gaining subjective insights from participants. I became very familiar with the context in ***Year 1*** of this study. I also engaged in discussions with the local pre-service teachers whom I was teaching to gain insight into community and school events from the perspective of the community. By doing this I continued to build my knowledge of the community which, in turn, enabled me to understand the circumstances in this context in which white teachers were teaching. As a senior leader and teacher, I was able to make comparisons between the perspectives of senior leadership and teachers, then double check these perspectives with members from each group.

### 4.2 Application of critical ethnography in this study

Attending to Carspecken's five stages (1996), I first provide an overview of this research project's development describing how I identified and entered the locale, the Participatory Action Research (PAR) project which was the beginning of the research

project, and my changing roles and responsibilities that impacted this study. I then describe the participants of the study and how they became involved in the project, also noting how I engaged the support of critical friends. How data were collected from participants over an 18 months and the researcher journal are also described before outlining the process for analysing the data. How the unit of analysis was determined is described followed by an outline of the two levels of data analysis required to respond to the two research questions. The analytical frameworks used at specific phases during the data analysis and how these analytical frameworks were utilised to organise and interpret patterns within the data are outlined in detail.

### 4.2.1 Overview of the research project's development

Ethnographic research is open to the changing conditions that take place in the locale of the study. Typical of schools, such as the locale of this study, numerous events and projects took place over the two and a half years of data collection. Table 4, provides a chronology of key events and project activities from the time of researcher entry in to this locale to the completion of this dissertation, paying particular attention to events that influenced data collection. Chronology is conveyed according to the school year and term. The school year begins at the end of January and finishes mid-December. It comprises four terms, two terms in each of two semesters. The first entry in the table "***Yr 1***, T3", for example, indicates that I arrived at the school in the third term of the first school year.

Table 4 outlines school events, the professional role of the researcher in the school and the activities specific to the research project. The second column lists school events including teacher arrivals and departures; the commencement and cessation of NTDET strategies; changes in school leadership; and the commencement and cessation of strategies established by principals. The third column, labelled as the "professional role of the researcher in the school" outlines the formal position to which I was appointed in the school; specific professional activities assigned to the researcher; and additional roles assigned to the researcher. The last column of the table titled "Research project activities" includes when I entered and exited the site in my researcher role; specific activities pertinent to the undertaking this project; and the activities resulting in the creation and completion of the dissertation chapters. This column also captures the changing nature of how this study was conducted due to school events and changing

professional roles of the researcher. This table continues over three pages. Acronyms used in Table 4 are explained at the end of the table.

As this study evolved, I became aware of the connections between the events that were occurring in the school community, changes in my professional roles and how the research project was developing. These events particularly impacted my access to teachers which, in turn, directed the types of data made available to me as researcher.

Table 4 does not contain every incident that occurred during this study. Rather, the information provided in Table 4 helps to give a sense of the changing nature of the context of this school during the study. References to Table 4 will be made in subsequent sections. In this section, I elaborate on two particularly important moments in the project, namely the initial establishment of the project in ***Yr 1***, T3 and the disbanding of the participant action research group in ***Yr 2***, T3. I then describe my main roles as a teacher within the school and how these roles influenced the study.

### *Identifying and entering the site*

In the preliminary negotiations to conduct this study in a remote Aboriginal community, I was invited by the school principal, with whom I had previously worked, to visit the remote Aboriginal community school in the Northern Territory in which she had recently assumed principalship. Knowing I was seeking a context for my study, the principal suggested I might find this school a suitable location to undertake the research while, simultaneously, utilising my experience to lead the curriculum reform agenda. During the formalised employment process, I negotiated the research project as part of my employment. At the time, I knew my research area of interest was teachers' views and practices regarding quality teaching and learning and its interpretation in Indigenous education. After gaining support from the school principal (Appendix F) and YuyaBol, the local Indigenous advisory group, (Appendix G) to conduct the study, I submitted a research proposal and obtained ethics approval from James Cook University (Appendix H) and permission from NTDET (Appendix I). I concluded this school was a good choice for the study as I had no previous knowledge of this community, school or jurisdiction. I did not come with preconceived assumptions and opinions of NTDET, the community and the school because my teaching experience had been in Queensland, by selecting this Northern Territory remote Aboriginal community school.

Table 4 Chronology of key events and project activities

| Time | School event | Professional role of the researcher in the school | Research project activities |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Yr 1,*** T3 | • New principal and new AP: Primary commence beginning of Term Three<br>• NTDET deliver School Review findings to Staff mid-Term Three<br>• NTDET announce bilingual education to be discontinued in ***Yr 2***, T1<br>• Departure of one out of eight primary teachers<br>• Arrival of one primary teacher<br>• By now, NTDET no longer supports *Accelerated Literacy* approach to teaching | • *Sole role:* Senior leadership team<br>• Review school's curriculum, pedagogy and assessment | • Researcher arrives at the site mid-Term Three<br>• Negotiate permissions with principal and Yuyabol to conduct research on improving teacher practice<br>• Begin researcher journal<br>• Continue reading literature<br>• Begin writing context chapter |
| ***Yr 1,*** T4 | • Responses to NTDET school review<br>• Strong foci on student attendance and participation<br>• Develop professional collegiality<br>• Principal assigns senior teachers to lead reforms in<br>• Curriculum<br>• Attendance and participation<br>• Principal negotiates to have on-site pre-service teacher education for Aboriginal assistant teachers (BTLP)<br>• Four teachers leave end of Term Four | • *Sole role:* Senior l'ship and curriculum leader<br>• Trial two front-ended assessment tasks with primary teachers (Yrs 1-3; 4-6) that align community and curriculum<br>• Facilitate workshops in explicit English instruction<br>• Review, categorise and centralise literacy and mathematics resources | • Gain permission from NTDET to conduct study<br>• Establish relationships staff members<br>• Begin writing methodology chapter |
| ***Yr 2,*** T1 | • Five of the ten primary teachers new to the school<br>• Continue responses to NTDET school review<br>• Seven pre-service teachers inducted into BTLP course<br>• Preschool teacher leaves end of Term One | • *Main role:* Senior l'ship and curriculum leader<br>• Design and support primary teacher implementation of front-ended assessment tasks that align community and curriculum<br>• Facilitate workshops in explicit English instruction<br>• Introduce diagnostic maps as precursor to implementing Transition-Yr 9 Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (NTDET)<br>• *Other role*: BTLP lecturer (part time)<br>• Induct pre-service teachers and mentor teachers | • Negotiate to implement the PAR approach to *Language and Literacy in the classroom* PD<br>• Invite teachers to the project<br>• Gain ethics approval from JCU |

Table 4 Continued

| Time | School event | Professional role of the researcher in the school | Research project activities |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Yr 2,*** T2 | • Principal volunteers school to participate in the Australian curriculum trial – English, Maths, Science and History<br>• BTLP formally begins<br>• Transition teacher moves to preschool<br>• New transition teacher appointed<br>• Teacher librarian leaves end of Term Two<br>• AP: Primary leaves end of Term Two<br>• Start of ceremony season | • *Main role:* Senior l'ship team and BTLP lecturer<br>• BTLP lecturer (ostensibly fulltime)<br>• Deliver all units<br>• Induct new teacher mentors<br>• Negotiate with teacher mentors to align practicum with BTLP<br>• Model pedagogy for teacher mentors and pre-service teachers<br>• Develop pre-service teacher knowledge of school operations<br>• *Other role:* Curriculum leader<br>• Lead Australian Curriculum trial in implementing national curriculum and moderation process (trial successful according to teachers and Australian Curriculum)<br>• Facilitate *Language and Literacy in the classroom* PD (registered tutor) using PAR model | • Invite new teacher to the project<br>• Operationalise PAR with the focus on Language and Literacy in the classroom<br>• PAR group begin meeting as a group<br>• Begin collecting data from teachers (interviews and meetings)<br>• Begin transcribing<br>• Begin interpreting data and seeking themes |
| ***Yr 2,*** T3 | • NTDET continues with NT curriculum<br>• New AP: Primary appointed<br>• POD structure of classes and their teachers initiated to develop professional collegiality and improve budget<br>• NTDET conducts another school review at request of principal<br>• Principal on leave weeks 7–10, Term Three<br>• AP: Secondary in acting principal position<br>• Two local staff and a student pass away<br>• Ceremony season – impact on attendance<br>• New teacher librarian | • *Main role:* Senior l'ship team and BTLP lecturer<br>• Facilitate regular discussions about practice with POD 1 & 2 teachers<br>• Facilitate 'Culture Day' for school led by pre-service teachers<br>• Continue BTLP teaching responsibilities described above<br>• *Other role:* Curriculum leader<br>• Attempt to retain Australian curriculum in the school after NTDET trial (did not occur)<br>• Plan collaboratively and support teacher implementation of three week units (NTDET curriculum) each focused on one area: Health, Arts and Science emphasising community needs<br>• Transfer curriculum leadership to the new AP: Primary | • Invite new teachers to participate in study<br>• Continue collecting data<br>• Record POD conversations<br>• PAR project reveals<br>• challenges teachers were experiencing<br>• teacher sense of collegiality |
| ***Yr 2,*** T4 | • NTDET delivers school review findings to the principal<br>• Start of Term Four, principal resigns and new principal takes up appointment<br>• New principal terminates the Language and Literacy in the classroom PD<br>• Finish of ceremony season | • *Sole role:* Senior l'ship team and BTLP lecturer<br>• Facilitate regular discussions about practice with POD 1 & 2 teachers<br>• Continue BTLP teaching responsibilities described above<br>• | • PAR group disestablished because *Language and Literacy in the classroom* PD stopped<br>• Study continues investigating themes revealed in PAR<br>• Research interest crystallised to two research questions |

Table 4 Continued

| Time | School event | Professional role of the researcher in the school | Research project activities |
|---|---|---|---|
| ***Yr 3,*** T1 | • New appointment of Senior Teacher: Literacy and Numeracy<br>• New curriculum leadership established: Principal; AP: Primary; AP: Secondary; and Senior Teacher: Lit/Num<br>• Curriculum reviewed<br>• Community meetings with federal government re: "The Intervention" | • *Sole role:* Senior l'ship team and BTLP lecturer<br>• Facilitate regular discussions about practice with POD 1 & 2 teachers<br>• BTLP teaching responsibilities described above<br>• Begin second group of BTLP Indigenous pre-service teachers<br>• | • Invite new teachers to participate in study<br>• Continue collecting data<br>• Invite pre-service teachers to be critical friends<br>• Study evolved into a critical ethnography |
| ***Yr 3,*** T2 | • *Accelerated Literacy* approach to teaching re-introduced at the beginning of Term Two<br>• Start of ceremony season<br>• | • *Sole role:* Member of senior l'ship team and BTLP lecturer<br>• Facilitate regular practice discussions with POD 1 & 2 teachers<br>• Conduct community 'drive arounds'-part of attendance strategy Continue BTLP teaching responsibilities described above<br>• Assess primary students using WIAT | • Continue collecting data<br>• Finalise data collection from participants with group interview at end of Term 2 |
| ***Yr 3,*** T3 | • PODs disestablished<br>• POD time now staff meetings & lit/num PD<br>• Aust Curr.English and Maths in NT schools<br>• Ceremony season – impact on attendance | • *Sole role:* Member of senior l'ship team and BTLP lecturer<br>• Continue BTLP teaching responsibilities described above<br>• | • Finalise transcriptions<br>• Continue research journal |
| ***Yr 3,*** T4 | • End of ceremony season<br>• | • *Sole role:* Member of senior l'ship team and BTLP lecturer | • Finalise research journal |
| ***Yr 4 – Yr 7*** | • | • Member of senior l'ship team and BTLP lecturer (Yrs 4-5); on leave (Yr 6); classroom teacher (Yr 7)<br>• Work with pre-service teachers to design front-ended assessment tasks that align community and curriculum<br>• Accompany pre-service teachers who present at the "Education and Development" conference March 5th-7th 2012, Bangkok<br>• Deliver workshop at school organised PD focused on culture | • Begin formal analysis of data Interpret data on site<br>• |
| ***Yr 8 – Yr 9*** | • | • On leave | • Finalise thesis |

Notes: Yr=Year; T1=Term 1; T2=Term 2; T3=Term 3; T4=Term 4.
AP: Primary: Assistant Principal in the primary school; BTLP: Bachelor Teaching and Learning Primary; NTDET: Northern Territory Department of Education and Training; PAR: Participatory Action Research; PD: Professional development; POD: Class and teacher grouping; The Intervention: Federal government's Northern Territory national emergency response strategy; WIAT: Weschler Individual Achievement Test; YuyaBol: Indigenous advisory group

As noted in Table 4, my entry into the locale of this study was halfway through the third term of the school year. My arrival occurred at a time of significant change for teachers in the school. It coincided with NTDET's decision to remove bilingual instruction and the release of the external audit of the school (Rogers, 2009) that indicated the school was in crisis. NTDET's response to the review involved inviting teachers either to be part of the solution under new school leadership with a changed strategic plan or choosing to continue their careers outside this school. School leadership utilised the remainder of that year to recalibrate the direction of the school to engage the community, upskill staff and initiate data-driven practices.

Because the principal had invited me to lead the curriculum reform agenda in the school, staff drew their own conclusions about my role in their future in the school. Staff who believed I was supplanting bilingual teachers were openly hostile towards me while other teachers welcomed my experience and support.

After NTDET leaders had outlined the change agenda to teachers, I spent the rest of the term meeting teachers, helping out in classrooms and discussing curriculum possibilities with assistant teachers and teachers. At the behest of the principal, I met with YuyaBol, the local advisory group, to discuss my previous work incorporating local perspectives into school curriculums and sharing examples of the possibilities. I also explained to this group that I had a long-term commitment to remote Aboriginal education and would like to conduct my PhD in this school. After explaining what a PhD was, I outlined my interest in conducting a participatory action research project with primary teachers to determine what teachers understood quality teaching and learning to mean in this remote Aboriginal school and as importantly, to improve practice. Both the principal and YuyaBol, the local advisory group, were keen for me to pursue my study as they, too, recognised students' inconsistent experiences of success in this school. Upon my successful application for fulltime employment, I successfully garnered the support of the principal and YuyaBol to conduct my study in this school (Appendices F and G). I did not talk to teachers about my research project or seek participants for the study until the following year because of the school climate,.

During terms three and four of the first year, the school was a fairly hostile environment with tensions between strong unionised teachers and the school leadership. My alignment with the principal positioned me and hence my research

project precariously as a number of teachers were quick to block any perceived threats. For example, some staff insisted I was employed to take one teacher's job, a matter that was incorrect and for which staff had no evidence. I negotiated with my research supervisor to postpone research participation requests until the beginning of the following year, when this teacher had moved on because this teacher had been in the school for several years and was closely aligned with local staff and a strong union member. This teacher and over half of the remaining teachers left the school at the end of that year.

During this time, I focused on building reciprocal relationships with teachers with whom I could build a relationship. From these relationships, I invited Primary teachers to participate in my research project being careful to ensure potential participants understood their participation would have no influence on their role in the school. As discussed later in this chapter, I was conscious of power over participants in my senior leader and researcher roles and took great care to maintain rapport and trust between myself and participants. I ascertained with participants that data generated for my study, such as participatory action plans devised by groups of teachers, would be treated confidentially by me and that the use of such materials would be directed by participants. In this way, I could ensure that while I might be supporting teachers within my role description of 'senior leader', material created in the process of supporting teachers could be used anonymously by me as data and kept by participants to use as they saw fit. If the principal or assistant principal saw artifacts that I collected as research data it would be provided by the teacher and not by me. I cautiously and steadily built positive working relationships with school staff, but chose to defer inviting teachers to participate in the study until the beginning of the following year which heralded a new beginning for school practices. I invited other primary teachers to participate in the study as they arrived at the school.

***The participatory action research project***

The initial intent of the study was to document a Participatory Action Research (PAR) approach to implementing change in teacher practice (1996, p. 85). The Rogers review (2009) identified the need for teachers to be supported in the implementation of the incoming Australian Curriculum (Borda, 2001; Kemmis, McTaggart, et al., 2014; McIntyre, 2008; McTaggart, 1989; Smith, 1997; Wadsworth, 1998) and to teach

English as an Additional Language (EAL), a known barrier to student academic outcomes. Professional development for teachers was problematic due to a strong union presence in the school that demanded the principal only hold mandatory meetings one day a week for one hour as stipulated in the Enterprise Bargaining Agreement (ACARA, 2016b). This condition significantly reduced possible times for the principal to mandate professional development after school hours.

The PAR project aimed to have participating teaching staff address the issue of poor student learning outcomes through a process of interrogating their own views regarding quality teaching and learning and its interpretation in Indigenous education. It sought to support participant usage of demonstrations of student learning (evidence) to direct teacher practice as guided by curriculum demands. The PAR project required participants to engage in critical reflections vis-à-vis their individual and collective experiences, values, attitudes and assumptions as influencing perceptions and practices in remote contexts. It was envisaged that participants would redefine their interpretation, in theory and action, of quality teaching for Indigenous students in remote contexts and align their understanding of quality teaching and learning, evidence of student learning and pedagogy to effectively respond to the challenges of the classroom and school context. This research was intended to examine the learning journey of school administration, teaching staff and the researcher as they collaborated to provide quality teaching and learning over an eighteen-month period.

When I discussed quality teaching and learning in staff meetings and with individual teachers, teachers asked me what I did to develop in-depth knowledge and skills to teach EAL to remote Aboriginal students. I explained that, apart from years of experience in remote schools similar to this school, I had completed a Masters degree in Applied Linguistics but had actually developed greater understanding by completing the "Language and Literacy in the classroom" course (Northern Territory Government, 2010), because it provided a practice component that linked theory directly to practice. Teachers asked me, as part of my role as curriculum reform leader, to deliver "Language and Literacy in the classroom" (Dare & Polias, 2006), a course for which I was an accredited tutor, to support them teaching EAL. Improving EAL instruction to students became a "shared concern" (Kemmis, McTaggart, et al., 2014, p. 91) in the subsequent participatory action research project.

I saw an opportunity to support the teachers using PAR without the objections of the union. Teacher participation in the PAR project was voluntary and fell outside the union's purview. I negotiated with the principal to begin a PAR project that would deliver the language and literacy course by making reference to the Australian Curriculum and enabling individual research participants to collaborate with a focus on teaching English in the classroom. After providing an overview of the PAR project to all teachers via information sheets (Appendix J) accompanied with a general discussion, I gained signed consent from participating teachers (Appendix K). I also invited senior leadership to participate in the study (Appendix L) and gained their signed consent (Appendix M).

The PAR project began in week three of my fourth term at the school (***Yr 2***, T2). Participants volunteered to attend a PAR group every fortnight during which time I would facilitate a process of delivering sequential activities of the "Language and Literacy in the classroom" course (McTaggart, 1994) followed by small groups of teachers working with teachers of similar year levels to develop a plan for incorporating new practice into the classroom and monitoring its effect on student learning.

Despite strong enthusiasm and positive feedback from participants, factors beyond our control led to the demise of the PAR project in the third term of the same year. Over two school terms the PAR group met four times. The first two meetings took place in term two and the last two meetings took place early term three. The first meeting was to discuss the PAR process and confirm that teachers' shared concern was improving how they taught English as an additional language to their remote Aboriginal students. The second meeting occurred in the following fortnight, according to the schedule negotiated in the first meeting, during which I introduced the "Language and Literacy in the classroom" (Dare & Polias, 2006) course outline and negotiated a rough learning and implementation schedule. The third meeting focused on working collaboratively and how to use evidence to monitor teacher impact on learning. Unfortunately, the third meeting took place early term three, eleven weeks after the second meeting due to factors that stopped or delayed meetings including the annual four-week school break between terms two and three. Other factors that stopped or delayed meetings included water and electricity being switched off during school days for upgrading across the

community; successive deaths of more than ten significant elders within the community, two current employees and one student; store and clinic closures due to deaths and/or vandalism; and my perception that the majority of teachers were exhausted. The fourth meeting took place in the fourth week of term three. During the fourth meeting, I delivered the first part of the "Language and Literacy in the classroom" (Dare & Polias, 2006) course and followed this up with meeting with small groups of teachers to initiate their action plan. Despite our commitment to the PAR model of professional learning, factors outlined earlier continued to challenge when and if meetings could take place. In the end, a change of principalship (discussed later in this chapter) proved to be the undoing of the formal PAR project.

In an effort to save the study, I embraced the reality of the unstable community and school environment that had disrupted our PAR project and began to critically examine the numerous factors that impacted on teachers teaching in this school. My observation that numerous factors disrupt what is taken-for-granted as standard teacher practice was captured by a new research participant in ***Yr 3*** when she asked, "What is going on here?" such that it was included in the title of this thesis. I negotiated with my researcher supervisor, principal and teachers to continue collecting data from teachers concerning the challenges to practice teachers experienced and why they experienced these challenges.

The PAR project influenced this study in several ways. Firstly, it revealed that teachers and the school's best-laid plans were significantly affected by factors beyond the control of teachers or the school. Secondly, the PAR project established my role as both co-participant and researcher, making me realise the need for continual reflection and distinction of both roles. I reflected on these roles in my researcher journal and with my research supervisors.

***Researcher's changing professional roles and responsibilities***

In this study, I fulfilled two roles: co-participant (emic) and researcher (emic and etic). Although I did not teach children during the data collection phase of the study, I defined myself as a co-participant in this study because I worked alongside teachers attempting to resolve challenges specific to this context, I too experienced many of the challenges expressed by teachers as I taught into the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning: Primary (BTLP) to pre-service teachers in my role as lecturer. As a co-

participant, I was positioned to experience participants' worlds to comprehend and appreciate the nuances of daily occurrences because I was also a white teacher. As a researcher, I was able to take an external view of the school culture because I could step outside my subjective experience and examine daily occurrences through an analytical framework that accounts for how the myriad of components comprising the school culture interrelate with one another. The dual roles of co-participant and researcher afforded me a particular perspective in this study, but also alerted me to the tenuous nature of filling the dual position of senior leader in the school and researcher.

My employed role within the school changed over the course of this study with each role influencing how I was able to interact with teachers. Table 4 shows I maintained membership of the senior leadership team for the duration of the study. The role of senior leader was an extension of my curriculum leadership role enabling me to meet regularly with other senior leaders in the school. When I first entered this locale in the latter half of the first year, my role in the school was to lead and implement the curriculum reform, a role that continued to the end of the second year. As the curriculum leader, I was able to develop positive relationships with teachers which enabled me to gain insight into the challenges faced by teachers. I encouraged teachers to reflect on the curriculum reform process and how this influenced their practice. Actively encouraged to critique curriculum, teaching and learning and assessment expectations, teachers disclosed thoughts related to professional practice in this school.

During my time as curriculum leader, in Term Three, ***Yr 2***, the Senior Leadership Team clustered teachers into PODs and positioned me as the Senior Leadership representative for POD 1 and POD 2 with access to POD 3. A POD was a group of classroom teachers in year level clusters: POD 1 – Preschool to Year 1 teachers; POD 2 – Year 2 – 3 teachers; POD 3 – Year 4-6 teachers that enabled teachers with students of similar age/year level groups to work together during school time and for staff meetings. I collaborated with teachers to group students into classes, monitoring student learning, implementing the curriculum, managing teacher non-contact time and planning as a team. Rather than just focusing on curriculum, conversations during POD meetings provided insight into the challenges experienced by teachers and prompted me to explore the circumstances underpinning the challenges as PODs attempted to address challenges to practice. The PAR group was a group of teachers from across the school,

including preschool to Senior Secondary and specialist teachers, who independently volunteered to focus on English and literacy practice as part of their individual and group professional learning.

Changes in leadership of the primary school in the third term of year two resulted in further changes to my role and responsibilities that affected the research project. The term began with a new primary assistant principal who had taught in a student support role in this school in Term Two and had previous leadership and teaching experience in another remote community. With the installment of this experienced assistant principal, I began handing the leadership of the curriculum reform agenda to him so I could focus more on the supposed fulltime role of lecturer for the BTLP course. Removing the role of curriculum leader, however, meant a change in my interactions with teachers. Conversations with teachers now primarily took place during POD meetings and discussions pertaining to supporting pre-service teachers enrolled in the BTLP course for whom primary teachers were mentors.

The following term, Term Four in ***Yr 2*** began with a new principal. In the previous term, the principal at that time had requested an external school review, conducted by NTDET leaders to monitor the progress of the Senior Leadership Team and teachers in addressing key issues outlined in the Rogers' Review (2009). Around the time of the external school review, the principal had a personal tragedy that drew her away from the school for the last few weeks of the term. The change in leadership was unexpected and fraught with uncertainties for teaching staff and my research project. There was an atmosphere of angst and anticipation as teachers gauged what would be maintained, removed and challenged with the change of leadership. One of the first changes the new principal announced in that term was the termination of professional development in the "Language and Literacy in the classroom" course (Dare & Polias, 2006) thus ending the formal PAR project as discussed earlier.

At the beginning of the following year, ***Yr 3***, the principal announced change to the composition of the curriculum support team. The new team would comprise the principal, the assistant principals of the primary and secondary sections of the school and the newly instated senior teacher for literacy and numeracy. While I was still a member of the senior leadership team, I was no longer involved in curriculum implementation or teachers' professional development. My professional role was now

focused on being the BTLP lecturer and providing POD support. From this moment, the nature of the conversations I had with teachers changed to one of support person with no authority or accountability for teachers' duties. The focus of conversations with teachers thus changed to teachers recounting critical events in the fulfillment of their duty as classroom teacher. This changed my project from being focused on literacy to exploring challenges experienced by teachers during every day practice.

Having lost PAR as the primary methodology for this study, I focused on my initial findings, which indicated numerous challenges to teacher practices that were beyond my initial research focus on teaching and learning. Reflecting on the implementation of PAR and what teachers were saying during POD meetings, I realised the challenges experienced by teachers and why teachers continually experienced these challenges required further investigation. I also realised the literature frequently asserted teacher classroom practice as having the most impact on student outcomes, yet my experiences and those of teachers in this school indicated something else was going on here; something else that was creating barriers to teachers being effective practitioners. By this time, the study had evolved into a critical ethnography.

### 4.2.2 Participants

The 16 teachers in this study, excluding myself, taught in the early childhood and primary sectors of the school. This was an appropriate participant group because my professional roles as curriculum reform leader and pre-service teacher lecturer for the onsite teacher education program connected me with the teachers in these two sectors.

In the year that the study recruited participants (***Yr 2*** in Table 4), ten teachers, all identifying as white, which is typical of remote community schools, taught in the early childhood and primary school. The following year the number increased to eleven. In that year, one teacher identified as originating from India, one teacher identified as Indigenous Australian and the remaining nine teachers were white.

Although the study did begin with only white teachers as participants, it was not necessary that it should have remained so. At the start of ***Yr 3***, I met with both the Indian teacher and the Indigenous teacher to discuss the intent of the project and negotiate whether they should be involved or not. In the interest of professional collegiality, it was more important to be inclusive than to limit the study to the

experience of a homogenous group of white teachers. The Indian teacher elected not to be involved in the study because he wanted to focus on being a classroom teacher with no distractions. The Indigenous teacher elected to be excluded from the study because she identified with the remote Aboriginal students and believed most teachers coming to remote contexts were white therefore her participation could complicate matters. As a first year teacher, the Indigenous teacher also wanted to focus on her teaching probation to gain fulltime permanent employment status. I could not record conversations with POD 3 teachers because these two teachers were part of POD 3. The two POD 3 teachers who had joined the project at the start of ***Yr 2***, continued to meet with me either alone or in groups of their choosing. The voluntary exclusion of these two non-white teachers led to consolidating the direction of the study to be about the challenges experienced by white teachers in this remote Aboriginal community school.

Participation in the study was voluntary. In ***Yr 2***, one teacher elected not to be involved in the study. This teacher came to the school in term three to teach a class in POD 3, unsure if she would be staying at the school for any length of time. She elected not to participate in the project, wanting to focus on her new class. Logistically, I could not record conversations in which this teacher participated. This was not a major distraction as the POD 3 teachers usually wanted to meet with me on their own or in a group with membership of their choosing. Additionally, I was not assigned by senior leadership to work with POD 3, as the assistant principal supported this teacher.

In the first two years of the study, I invited specialist teachers, the principals, both the original and the replacement, and the second Assistant Principal: Primary. I considered it prudent to enlist these teachers as participants due to their connections to the primary school. Although all of these teachers accepted the invitation, none of them actually taught classes. Because much of their work occurred separately to teachers or in highly confidential meetings, it proved very difficult to meet with them. Three specialist teachers were involved in the PAR project, however, because the project ended after four meetings, I did not have any specific contact with these specialists. Specialist teachers were not included because there were no episodes in which they contributed.

While listening to and transcribing recordings, I made the decision during the data reduction process to exclude data (e.g., meetings, discussions) generated by the two principals and the Assistant Principal (AP): Primary from the data set. I excluded

episodes with the two principals because episodes tended to focus on curriculum development and implementation or the tertiary program. Additionally, their roles would have been very easy to identify by people in, or associated with, the school at the time of this study. Finally, conversations with the AP: Primary tended to be of a more philosophical nature and included making comparisons between two very different jurisdictions that did not have bearing on this study.

Over the two years in which participant data were collected, a total of 16 teachers (plus the researcher) participated in the study. Their duration in the study ranged from a minimum of two school terms to the maximum of six terms. Table 5 provides an overview of participants' personal and professional profiles. As well as gender and age group, the table includes details of participants' prior teaching experience at the commencement of the study and their professional roles. It also notes the number of school terms teachers participated in the study including their starting date. The initials used to distinguish each participant were created by randomly selecting letters of the alphabet. The letters chosen do not reflect participants' real initials in any way.

Teachers were invited to be research participants at three key points: term one, ***Yr 2***, mid-year ***Yr 2*** and term one, ***Yr 3*** of the study. Term one of a school year was the most obvious time to invite participants because that is when most teachers transfer into the school. Table 5 illustrates that the majority were recruited in term one at the beginning of ***Yrs 2*** and ***3***. At the start of ***Yr 2***, ten participants joined the study, of whom five were new to the school. Although these ten teachers indicated they would remain at the school for two years, one participant left at the end of ***Yr 2*** while another took unpaid leave in Term Three of ***Yr 2,*** but returned the following term. Additional participants joined the project in Term Two, ***Yr 2*** (one participant) and Term Three, ***Yr 2*** (two participants). In Term One, ***Yr 3,*** I invited three teachers new to the school to join the project because another principal had been appointed unexpectedly at the start of Term Four the previous year. It was possible that these teachers would provide different insights from those who had taught under the previous principal. All three accepted.

Despite the literature indicating non-Aboriginal teachers typically do not stay long in remote communities (MATSITI, 2014), this school was, for the most part, an exception during the time the study took place. At the end of ***Yr 2***, one teacher left after one year citing personal reasons for leaving the school; the non-participating primary teacher

who arrived in term three was reassigned to the High School; and the school made a decision to employ one more teacher for the large POD 2 group of students. Thus, three new teachers began in ***Yr 3.*** With few exceptions, teachers stayed for at least two years and considered NTDET's 'study leave' of one semester at full pay after four consecutive years of teaching as a motivator to stay for four years or more at the school.

Table 5 shows that the teachers in the study, including me, represented a range of experiences, both in the general field of education in remote Indigenous contexts. Nine participants had less than six years of teaching balanced by eight participants with six or more years of teaching which is typical in remote schools. The majority of participants were new to teaching in remote Indigenous contexts which is, again, typical in remote schools. Of the six with experience in remote contexts prior to coming to this school, three had classroom experience only and three had classroom and specialist experience.

Of all the participants, I had the most experience in remote contexts. Prior to this study, I had lived and worked in communities for 11 years during which time I acquired formal qualifications suitable for teaching remote Indigenous students. One other participant, who arrived at the start of ***Yr 3***, was formally qualified to teach English as an Additional Language but expressed a lack of confidence in teaching remote Aboriginal students. As a co-participant in this study, primary teachers frequently checked English concepts with me to ensure their understanding was correct and discussed how they would teach EAL to suit their students' needs and be effective EAL teachers.

### 4.2.3 Ethical considerations in doing critical ethnographic research

After gaining initial permission from the first principal (Appendix F) and YuyaBol, the school's Aboriginal reference group (Appendix G), I sought and gained ethics approval from the JCU Ethics Committee (Appendix H). After providing a written application to conduct formal study to the Northern Territory Department of Education (NTDET), I was granted permission to pursue my study via a telephone call from the department. Upon completion of the data collection, I provided a final report to the JCU Ethics Committee. All data collected for this study was saved in electronic form and stored following JCU's process for storing research data.

Table 5 Participants in the study

| Code | Gender | Age | Teaching experience | Role in this context | Year /Term enlisted to study | Number of terms as participant* | Teaching in this school prior to this study | Number of previous remote contexts | Number of years teaching in remote contexts | Positions in previous remote contexts |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| BQ | F | <25 | Graduate | CT | *Yr 2, T1* | 4 | No | 0 | 0 | - |
| CR | F | <25 | Graduate | CT | *Yr 2, T1* | 6 | No | 0 | 0 | - |
| EB | F | 35-40 | 2 years | CT | *Yr 2, T1* | 6 | Yes | 0 | 0 | - |
| FT | F | 50–55 | 9 years | SL | *Yr 2, T3* | 4 | No | 2 | 5 | CT; Spec |
| GV | M | 50-55 | 12 years | CT; ST1 | *Yr 2, T1* | 6 | No | 0 | 0 | - |
| HX | F | 60-65 | 10 years | CT | *Yr 2, T1* | 6 | Yes | 1 | 3 | CT |
| JW | M | 40-45 | 3 years | CT | *Yr 2, T1* | 6 | No | 0 | 0 | - |
| KZ | M | 50-55 | 5 years | CT | *Yr 2, T1* | 6 | Yes | 1 | 1.5 | CT |
| LN | M | 25-30 | 3 years | CT | *Yr 2, T1* | 5 | Yes | 0 | 0 | - |
| MB | F | 45-50 | 4 years | CT | *Yr 2, T2* | 6 | No | 0 | 0 | - |
| NC | F | 25-30 | 2 years | CT | *Yr 2, T1* | 6 | No | 0 | 0 | - |
| PF | M | 35-40 | 13 years | CT; ST1 | *Yr 2, T3* | 4 | No | 3 | 8 | CT; SL; Spec |
| QG | F | 35-40 | 5 years | CT | *Yr 3, T1* | 2 | No | 0 | 0 | - |
| RH | F | 50-55 | 18 years | CT | *Yr 3, T1* | 2 | No | 1 | 0 | - |
| SJ | F | 30-35 | 6 years | CT | *Yr 3, T1* | 2 | No | 0 | 0 | - |
| BZ | F | 50-55 | 4 years | CT | *Yr 2, T1* | 6 | Yes | 1 | 2 | CT |
| **R (Researcher)** | F | 35-40 | 14 years | ST1 | *Yr 1, T3* | 10 | No | 5 | 11 | CT; SL; Spec |

Notes: F=Female; M=Male; CT=Class Teacher; SL=Senior Leadership; Spec=Specialist and/or Support role; Yr =Year; T1=Term 1; T2=Term 2; T3=Term 3; T4=Term 4
*Teacher participant: possible six terms; Researcher: possible ten terms.

Referring to the principles of right and wrong, ethics in advocacy research such as critical ethnography requires attending to the 'I' of my personal responsibility to fieldwork. As noted by Madison, "advocacy and ethics are interconnected, responding to the question 'What should I do with what I have witnessed?'" (2012, p. 97). Critical ethnographers are compelled to act morally due to the responsibility to make a difference in the world, notably, by "actively assisting in the struggles of others" (Madison, 2012, p. 98) in such a way "that will lead to something more, something of larger philosophical and material effects" (Madison, 2012, p. 98). My moral responsibility required ethical consideration of my role as a co-participating researcher and especially of the potential issues of power with research participants and critical friends.

***Potential issues of power between researcher and participants***

As a senior teacher leading curriculum reform in the school, I was included in the Senior Leadership Team to ensure consistent messages between school leaders and teachers. I also worked directly with individual teachers and teams of teachers in our professional roles. As I ventured into exploring, questioning and challenging what was taught and supporting teacher capacity, I became aware of my subjective link to all aspects pertaining to curriculum reform including the development of assessment tasks, advice to teachers to support task implementation and completion and the moderation process in which teachers talked to teachers about evidence of student learning. As the study progressed through numerous critical events, I became very aware of the relationship between the principal, my senior leadership role and my access to teachers and their lived experiences in this school.

*Ethical relationships between the researcher and the researched*

Madison (2012) identifies that the primary responsibility of the researcher is to those studied, noting that this supersedes all other interests. Madison (2012) highlights that if conflict occurs, "the people studied *must come first* [Madison's italics]" (p. 129). Further, Madison (2012) demands the researcher "make every effort to ensure their work does not harm *the safety*, *dignity* or *privacy* [author's italics] of those with whom they work" (p. 129).

Participants were advised participation was voluntary and could be withdrawn at any time with no negative consequences. Participants were advised they could, at any time,

have copies of all audio and/or transcripts and the final thesis. Teachers did not request a copy of the thesis or transcripts despite me reminding them they could have a copy of drafts or the final thesis. They were also advised they could withdraw all or any of the data provided in the course of this study, up to the point of publication. At no point did any participant withdraw from the research project while teaching at this school. Withdrawal occurred when the teacher ceased tenure as a teacher at this school. Unless a teacher stated otherwise, data collected from him/her was still included.

All participants were supportive of this study by allowing all requests for audio recordings of the full range of staff meetings, leadership meetings, sub-sector meetings, conversations regarding pre-service teachers, individual and focus group interviews, and teacher initiated conversations with the researcher. Permission was always sought from all participants in any conversation and all requests were respected. As a co-participant in a leadership position, I was conscious of the need for confidentiality and chose to not record numerous situations that were particularly sensitive. Both principals and the second Assistant Principal: Primary in place during this study supported my study as signatory participants; however, for reasons given earlier, the episodes that were analysed did not contain their voices.

Researchers gain professionally and personally from those who are studied and therefore must be aware of not exploiting or responding inappropriately to participants. Noted by Madison (2012), "researchers who enter into an enduring relationship with their subjects must adhere to informed consent and *openness* or they must negotiate the *limits of the relationship* [author's italics]" (p. 129). As a senior leader within the school, I was concerned with staff welfare and the demands placed on teachers. Conscious of teacher workloads and the challenges of living and teaching in this remote context, I monitored the impact of my questioning on participants, making the decision to continue or not dependent on such factors as the participant's body language, energy and mood and events in the community and the school. I also checked on the welfare of individual participants by asking if they were okay. If I detected misdirection or mistruth, which was rare because I had built trusted relationships with staff, I either reminded the participant of the challenging nature of this context and that everybody relates to this type of context in different ways or I walked away. If I felt it was appropriate, I would name senior leaders I thought the participant could talk to and offer my ongoing support as a confidential sounding board to allow teachers an opportunity

to vent without fear of repercussions. At the beginning of a debriefing session, I would make a professional judgment whether to ask the participant if I could record the conversation or not because there was slippage between my roles. I was always directed by the participant's request.

All conversations with participants were treated as confidential unless participants indicated otherwise. In the event a participant indicated a conversation could be repeated, I negotiated the limits of the sharing. At no time did I breach participant trust as I was conscious of the ramifications to my professional and personal relationships with people in this small community; my ethical responsibility to participants; and the reliance of the research project on my integrity, honesty and discretion. Also, because I have witnessed and experienced the repercussions of a misspoken word in a small community and/or a cross-cultural context, I knew the damage that it may cause.

In writing up the thesis I also made ethical decisions about not including data that may have professionally or personally damaging consequences for the participant.

***Potential issues of power between researcher and critical friends***

Conscious of my power in my relationship with critical friends, I had overlooked how critical friends might control me. Despite knowing the literature pertaining to Aboriginal control of outsiders (Maddison, 2009; Martin, 2008), I had misjudged the time it would take for critical friends to be truly forthcoming without holding anything back. Fortunately, my decision to commit to the extra three years after data collection ultimately deepened my understandings of the findings.

*Researcher power over critical friends*

Five months into this project, I applied for and accepted a Senior Leadership position as the Senior Teacher (ST1): Remote Indigenous Teacher Education (RITE) program which positioned me as the lecturer for locally employed assistant teachers who had enrolled as pre-service teachers to complete the Charles Darwin University (CDU) Bachelor of Teaching and Learning, Primary (BTLP). I was determined to maintain distance between my roles of lecturer and researcher, cognisant of JCU's ethics committee granting ethics clearance based on my application that stated that the participants of the study were non-Indigenous teachers. For the first six months of ***Year 2***, our teacher/student relationship had little impact on this study as my interactions with

participating teachers, at this point, involved enlisting participants and guiding teachers through a Participatory Action Research Project in which pre-service teachers were not involved. During lectures and tutorials, I was the teacher and pre-service teachers were the students.

In Term Four, ***Year 2***, the BTLP course demanded pre-service teachers learn how to write, teach and assess units of work for a number of subject areas including Studies of Society, Health and Physical Education and Mathematics. In the process of collaborating to develop units of work, the pre-service teachers and I identified ourselves as holding expertise about our respective First Spaces but equally recognised our need to learn about our respective Second Spaces. Rather than reinforcing boundaries around our expertise about our respective First Spaces, we had a philosophical discussion about the problematic nature of what happens when non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people come together. This philosophical discussion resulted in us acknowledging the various positions of power and authority and agreeing to suspend assertions of power unless consented to by the group. We began what I finally recognised as our group beginning to act in a Third Space between the ways of the institution of education and the ways of the community. We began our construction of the Third Space by holding general discussions about what pre-service teachers observed in their classrooms during practicums and how these observations could be interpreted from the institution of education's and community's perspectives. I began to realise the important role pre-service teachers could have in this study. Although I had deliberately not focused on pre-service teachers in this study, their insight into the Second Space was essential. At this point, I had to address issues of power and authority in my study.

As we developed confidence and competence with the process of bringing institution practices and community practices together, we slowly extended our reach to discussing my observations as both researcher (outsider) and teacher (insider). Pre-service teachers also shared discussions and observations of both their classroom practice and their teacher mentor's practices. All the teacher mentors were research participants. During our discussions, the conditions, barriers and enablers of white teacher practices bubbled to the surface. Realising this study would be enriched by me improving my knowledge about the community I determined my pre-service teachers would be excellent as critical friends. To ensure the pre-service teachers did not feel obliged by me asking

them to be my critical friends, and ensuring I maintained ethical standards by not being coercive in any way, I asked the teacher librarian and one of the pre-service teachers, who was highly proficient in English, to explain my research project to the other pre-service teachers. Pre-service teachers were informed they were under no obligation to participate in conversations with or about anything or anyone to do with in my study and would not be prejudiced against if they chose not to be involved in my study as a critical friend. I believe that because our tertiary education group had developed in such a respectful and reflective way, the pre-service teachers agreed to support my study. I also regularly checked-in with them if they thought I was being coercive. The pre-service teachers, my critical friends, were cognisant of white people trying to coerce them as they reported this happened numerous times during their separate and collective lifetimes. Further, the pre-service teachers explicitly stated the benefits of talking about the issues in teacher practice in our classes because they recognised that the issues raised by teachers also impacted their practice in the school. I deferred to pre-service teacher knowledge and expertise as insiders of the Second Space just as they deferred to my knowledge and expertise as an insider in the First Space. We realised that together, we navigated the in-between space of teaching and learning in this school, seeking to problem solve challenges impacting the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning: Primary and/or to understand why the challenges arose. I consulted with critical friends throughout the development of this thesis. Critical friends did take up the opportunity of accessing drafts and the final copy of this thesis, with me supporting them to read dense text. Together we discussed the meanings of statements made in the thesis and alterations and clarifications were made as requested.

During Term Four, ***Year 2***, I invited pre-service teachers to be critical friends of this study. In the natural evolution of the pre-service teachers' growth as teachers and the evolution this study, the pre-service teachers became a pivotal part of the education fabric of this school and, similarly, the context of this study. The important role of critical friends was identified by Doran (2015) in her six-year study of the lived experiences of Irish sixth year school girls as friends and members of a middle-class single-sex girls' school. Doran (2015) recognised the importance of triangulating participant, researcher and critical friends to address issues of researcher bias. She noted, "the roles of the [teacher-researcher], critical friends and [research participants] are triangulated to counter researcher bias or assumption and to assist with the

interpretation and understanding of data" (Doran, 2015, p. x). The inclusion of critical friends who worked alongside participants and had deep understanding of the community proved pivotal in helping me to interpret and understand participant data and my own observations.

By the start of ***Year 3***, I was able to engage in robust conversations with critical friends about white teacher claims about influences on their practice. Robust conversations typically bypassed politeness, honestly and directly stating the issues. These robust conversations helped both the critical friends and me develop understandings about why or how white teachers and local people engaged in specific practices in the context of the school. Having robust conversations was quite risky because upset critical friends could have easily led to me being removed on the first plane at their request! We frequently discussed tensions between our different worlds. I consistently sought confirmation that I was acting appropriately as per community expectations. Participating teachers also noted the increasing depth of conversation between pre-service teachers and white teacher mentors, discussed in Chapter Five. I found my influence in developing critical friends/teacher relationships to be mutually beneficial to critical friends, teachers and myself, as both researcher and participating teacher. As we were able to make progress in our understandings about each 'other' and developed trusting relationships, we developed the courage to tackle persistently challenging topics. Further, by being able to openly talk about issues affecting pre-service and white teacher practice, a culture of transparency was beginning to take shape.

*Local Aboriginal power over the 'outside' researcher*

To understand nuances particular to teaching in this remote Aboriginal community, I found critical friends more willing and forthcoming as informants about the Second Space after they had lived and worked beside me for several years. I was unable to speed up this process as this type of pressure on critical friends would have sabotaged my study and shown I was untrustworthy and a user. My patience and genuine desire to collaborate with critical friends enabled me to be privy to events, personal insights and knowledge because I stayed in this community for almost seven years, even though the data collection period had been only the two and half years. Although I limited data collection to the specified time period, I found my understanding of what happened during my study was much deeper because I continued to encounter similar situations as

I gradually distanced myself from being directly involved in the community and the school.

### 4.2.4 Data collection

Carspecken's stages one and three of the critical ethnographic study (1996) focus on data collection. It is in Stage One that the researcher begins building an intensive set of notes from the monological perspective of the researcher in the form of a researcher journal while stage three introduces other voices via intense conversations with the subjects of the study (Carspecken, 1996).

Data were collected from participants through interviews and conversations with teachers. As noted previously, I maintained a researcher journal from the moment of entry into this locale. Table 6 provides an overview of the data collected from participants: Column one represents the transcript number allocated to the event of teacher talk; column two outlines data collection methods; column three identifies the event during which the talk took place; column four outlines the location of the talk; column five provides who is referred to in the talk; and column six outlines my role at the time of the talk. Abbreviations are explained below the table in order of the column in which they first appear. Table 6 represents data remaining after the data reduction process. This table will be discussed in detail later in this chapter. Evident in column two, I elected to use conversation and interview methods for data collection to capture teachers talking about practice in as close to realistic situations as possible. An important consideration in the data collection involving participants was teachers' workload in the daily and weekly fulfillment of their duties. Within the school, teachers frequently engaged in professional conversations with each other and participated in prearranged meetings.

Throughout the two and a half years of this study, I maintained positive working relationships with all participants. As dialogue with participants, in the form of conversations and interviews, formed the basis of my data, my audio recorder became an extension of me in professional conversations. Participant consent forms stated I would be recording conversations with teachers such that teachers anticipated my request to record conversations and knew I would respect all requests to record or not. On occasions when I did not have my audio recorder with me, I noted the conversation in my researcher's journal. The first column provides the transcript number assigned to

recorded conversations with teachers. Drew (2008) notes that talk is not merely a medium for communicating thoughts, information and knowledge. Talk is also the means by which people participate in various activities.

***Conversation data collection***

People, or participants, perform and coordinate activities through talk that is socially structured by the resources available. By listening to and participating in conversations with teachers, I would develop a sense of the social context shaping and being shaped by teacher talk "including mutual knowledge, what each knows about the other, the setting, relevant biographical information, their relevant identities or relationships, and so on (Drew, 2008, p. 135). As shown in column two of table X, I utilized conversation method (con) for teacher-initiated conversations. Because I did not know what teachers wanted to talk about, I firstly asked permission to record the conversation and then participated in the turn-taking process. Six recorded conversations contributed to the data.

Shown in column two, of the thirty transcripts, eight conversations took place during POD meetings which occurred in teacher classrooms. Only one staff meeting was included in the data because this staff meeting was in part, a professional learning session requiring teachers to talk to teachers about aspects of their teaching. Professional discussions occurred in a range of locations with me fulfilling Senior Leadership Team duties.

***Interview data collection***

As noted by Carspecken, "interviewing is necessary when we cannot observe behaviour, feelings, or how people interpret the world around them. It is also necessary to interview when we are interested in past events that are impossible to replicate" (Drew, 2008). Gill, Stewart, Treasure and Chadwick (2008) identify three types of interviews: structured, semi-structured and unstructured. Structured interviews are "verbally administered questionnaires" (1996, p. 42) that can be delivered quickly and are of particular use for "follow-up questions to responses that warrant further elaboration" (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008, para 4). Conversely, unstructured interviews usually begin with a simple question such as "what were your thoughts when you first arrived at the school?" and can be difficult to manage. A benefit

Table 6 Overview of data collected from participants

| # | Data collection method | Event | Location of the talk | Who is referred to | My role |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | U-si | POD meeting | Teacher's classroom | T, S | Senior Leader |
| 2 | U-si | POD meeting | Teacher's classroom | AP, T, F, S, C, AT, VT, POD | S Senior Leader |
| 3 | U-si | Prof Disc | SL Office | S, C, T, F | Curriculum |
| 4 | U-si | Prof Disc | AP Office | ST; NTDET | Senior Leader |
| 5 | Con | T Initiated conversation | BTLP room | T, PT, S | Lecturer |
| 6 | U-si | Prof Disc | Library | E, S, P, R | Researcher |
| 7 | U-si | RI | Teacher's classroom | T, NTDET, B, C, S, F | Researcher |
| 8 | U-si | Establishing an individual action plan | Teacher's classroom | S, AT, SL, NTDET | Researcher |
| 9 | U-si | Performance Management Meeting | AP Office | S, T | Researcher |
| 10 | U-si | Prof Disc | Principal's Office | T | CL |
| 11 | U-si | Prof Disc | AP Office | S, NTDET, T | Senior Leader |
| 12 | U-si | POD | Teacher's classroom | S, T, POD, SL, C, F | Senior Leader |
| 13 | U-si | POD | Teacher's classroom | S, ST1: A&P, T, C, PT | Senior Leader |
| 14 | Con | Teacher upset | Teacher's classroom | SC, SNT, SST, S, F | Lecturer |
| 15 | Con | Teacher undermined | Teacher's classroom | Non-Indigenous AT, T, S, AP | Lecturer |
| 16 | U-si | Prof Disc | BTLP room | T, F, S | Lecturer |
| 17 | U-si | POD | Teacher's classroom | S, T, P | Senior Leader |
| 18 | U-si | POD | Teacher's classroom | S, C, T | Senior Leader |
| 19 | Con | T Initiated conversation | BTLP room | LPC, T, S, F, ST, P, Admin, AP, SC, SNT | Researcher |
| 20 | U-si | RI | Teacher's classroom | S, T, F, AT | Researcher |
| 21 | U-si | RI | Teacher's classroom | S, T, F, AP, AT | Researcher |
| 22 | U-si | RI | Teacher's classroom | T | Researcher |
| 23 | U-si | Prof Disc | Teacher's AP Office | T, AT | Senior Leader |
| 24 | U-si | RI | BTLP room | S, T, F, SL | Researcher |
| 25 | U-si | POD | Teacher's classroom | T | Senior Leader |
| 26 | Con | Staff Meeting | Staffroom | T, S | Senior Leader |
| 27 | Con | T Initiated conversation | Teacher's classroom | T, S, C, F, SL, VT, PT | Lecturer |
| 28 | U-si | RI | Teacher's classroom | PT, Doctor, S, T, C, F | Researcher |
| 29 | S-si | Final RI | BTLP room | S, T, F, ST, NTDET, SL, | Researcher |
| 30 | U-si | POD | Teacher's classroom | T, S | Senior Leader |

Notes: Con: Conversation; S-si: Semi-structured interview; U-si: Unstructured interview

POD: Class and teacher grouping; Prof Disc: Professional discussion; RI: Researcher initiated interview

AP: Assistant Principal; AT: Assistant teacher; CL: Curriculum leader; F: Families; NTDET: Northern Territory Department of Education and Training; P: Principal; PT: Pre-service teacher; S: Student; SC: School counsellor; SL: Senior leadership; SNT: Special needs teacher; SST: Student support team; ST: Senior teacher; T: Teacher: VT: Visiting teacher

of unstructured interviews, however, is that the researcher can interrogate the interviewee's statements, providing deep responses or different perspectives not previously considered by the researcher (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008, para 5). Semi-structured interviews "consist of several key questions that help to define the areas to be explored, but also allows the interview or interview to diverge in order to pursue an idea or response in more detail" (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, & Chadwick, 2008, para 6).

Interviews and conversations with participants took place in a location of their choosing. Anderson, Adey and Bevan (2010) argue that "the geographical dimension of place can fundamentally affect the nature of knowledge accessible through a range of methodological techniques" (p. 590). Further, they note the importance of the participant being in a very familiar and comfortable site for interviews and conversations because it facilitates "access to not only the ordinary aspects of [participant] geographies, but also languages that recalled more detailed emotional and embodied experiences" (Anderson, Adey, & Bevan, 2010, p. 597). For the most part, teachers elected to hold interviews and conversations in their own classrooms. The final interview was conducted in my lecture room due to the space needed for a large group of people and because of the participants' desire to have a confidential conversation away from chance visits from senior leadership. I obliged all requests.

Noting the advantages and disadvantages of each type of interview, I elected to exclude structured interviews, with one exception, because teachers did not have time at school to answer questions that could have been provided in written form. I did, however, have participants provide general information about themselves, which informed Table 5 (participant's table). I gave participants a paper copy of the questionnaire after having completed the paperwork to be a participant and asked them to return the document in a timely manner.

The one exception was the final data collection activity. I invited all participants to participate in a structured group interview involving all participants. The structured interview (Drew, 2008) comprised 11 questions which were presented to the whole group to clarify the a range of challenges that had been raised during previous conversations and interviews. Prior to the interview, I asked teachers if they wanted to

break up into groups or stay together as one group. Participants elected to remain as one group.

In total, I conducted 22 unstructured interviews. Each began with my seeking verbal confirmation that recording the interview was appropriate. Because teacher talk was largely directed by senior leadership in such situations as POD meetings, performance management meetings and other discussions with other professionals, I elected to allow teachers to direct the interviews by asking such questions as "what are we focusing on in this meeting?" or "the principal asked us to focus on what information do we have about that so far?" Leadership demands included monitoring student attendance and participation; monitoring student academic performance; planning, pedagogy and assessment; preparing for specific activities such as culture day. As teachers responded to senior leadership requests, I would seek clarification and/or make notes to follow up on something a participant said.

*Research portfolio and researcher journal*

The researcher journal provides a focal point for mapping the Space, taking notes on the overall setting, recording assumptions and emotions, and describing activities observed as an outsider and experienced as an insider. Rather than just reporting a participant's story, the researcher is able to draw on the researcher journal, or portfolio, to contextualise, understand and explain why the situation being investigated takes place. Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2012)) note that "a research portfolio is a place for a fieldworker to gather work, review it, and present the process of research to herself, her fellow researchers, and her instructor" . In this study, the researcher is both an outsider and an insider. As an outsider, I stepped out of my familiar roles and strived to perceive of the context and the people of the study as foreign and unfamiliar. I recorded observations of what people said and did and how they related to each other and to the context in which their sayings, doings and relatings took place as an important part of the study. By taking the stance of the foreigner, I collected contextually relevant information including physical features of the context, material artifacts, body language, oral language patterns and personal history to support thick descriptions necessary to interpret participants' stories. My outsider position as the researcher helped me to "reflect on patterns of movement and the meanings these patterns communicate" (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012, p. 273).

As an insider, the researcher has her own perspective of what is happening to her. Her first impressions of the site, the questions she reflects on as an insider, and the main themes she identifies during the study help to shape the study and understand other insiders' perspectives. By writing about personal experiences as they happen and from the perspective of the 'insider', the researcher is able to understand insider codes of talk, behaviour and shared value systems.

Both outsider and insider views enable the researcher to enrich her "understanding of the spatial gaze – what makes you see things the way you do" (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012, p. 203).

When I arrived at this school I began a journal to collect my reflections on all aspects of the study. As a means of understanding the context, I collected a wide range of material for my portfolio including maps, policies, organisation charts, and documents disseminated to research participants.

Entries in my journal constituted part of the data collection and contributed to the context chapter and to the Findings chapter. My journal rarely contained direct observations of participants' teaching. As the teachers and I fulfilled our own duties, I was rarely in a position to observe teachers teach. Rather, my journal reflected my thoughts about my duties; my interactions with colleagues and the broader community while conducting school business; events that happened in the community; and tentative thoughts about what my research was revealing. As such, my journal contained my "emerging insights, hunches and tentative hypotheses" (Cahill, 2007, p. 165). My journal became my place for venting and teasing out ideas and emotions and tracking the research journey.

As noted by Sunstein and Chiseri-Strater (2012), researcher jottings provide the unrecorded circumstances that surround the formally recorded notes. The association between researcher jottings and memory are clear: "like a snapshot or a home video, our jottings trigger a flood of information and remembrance about people and places" (Sunstein & Chiseri-Strater, 2012, p. 66). Every time I returned to my research journal, I experienced the recorded situation again. This was helpful in providing rich descriptions in both the context chapter (Chapter Two) and the Findings chapter (Chapter Five). However, in some cases, it also required me to relive uncomfortable

experiences that I would sooner forget. These experiences included altercations with people whose value systems collided with mine, but were not required as data for this study.

The research journal and transcripts of teacher talk provided rich data, but not all were relevant to the subject of this study. Once the research journal and the recordings of teacher talk were finalised, I began a process of data reduction.

### 4.2.5 Reducing the data set

Data reduction (Thomas, 2006) is an inevitable part of research. As indicated, the amount of data collected over two and a half years was very large as I had maintained a digital research journal and recorded conversations with teachers.

From the start of Term Two, ***Yr 2***, until the end of Term Two, ***Yr 3***, I collected 87 recordings of dialogue with teachers. At the end of each day that I recorded dialogue, I would listen to the recording identifying the purpose of the dialogue, themes and who did what talking. In some cases, I transcribed small segments. In the first stage of data reduction, I noted dialogue in which I dominated the talk in my role as curriculum leader. Twenty-four recordings involved me in an instructional role. Although I had begun the meetings not intending to dominate the talk, time constraints often resulted in participants doing minimal talking. I immediately excluded these recordings because these discussions were more instructional so I did not consider them to be part of my data set. Sixty-three recordings now comprised the data set.

In the second stage of data reduction, I noted that some conversations were no longer relevant to the study because of the changed direction, as outlined earlier in this chapter. Conversations with specialist teachers, the principal and assistant principal who had originally consented to be research participants were excluded, reducing the data from 63 to 47 recordings. Once I had narrowed the recordings to include participants outlined in Table 5 talking about teacher practice, I then considered which stories would be included in the data. Stories about other schools in which teachers had taught and general conversations about teaching and/or the community were excluded from the 47 recordings because this study focused on challenges experienced by teachers in this school. Seventeen recordings were excluded because they did not provide data pertinent to my research questions. The final 30 recordings, refer to Table 6, were fully

transcribed and included in the data set. These conversations contained substantive talk by teachers and included talk about teachers' thoughts on their practices in this remote Indigenous school.

The journal proved an invaluable source of information for the context chapter. I did not reduce any of the journal entries until I began formal data analysis. At all stages of data analysis, I sought to identify the meaningful parts of the journal that pertained to answering the research questions.

The smaller and manageable data set was further reduced as part of the data analysis process described below.

### 4.2.6 Data analysis

Data analysis was directed at identifying the challenges experienced by white teachers while teaching in this remote Aboriginal community and why teachers experienced the challenges they did. During the data collection period, I followed up on teacher comments and observations by identifying common threads in transcripts and seeking clarification with the individual or group who produced the talk in the transcript. Formal data analysis began six months after the final interview with teachers providing time to give myself emotional distance so I could remain objective when I re-analysed teachers' stories and my journal. My first task was to determine a unit for analysis for the data set that had been collected over two and a half years.

#### *Determining a unit for analysis*

The data set generated from transcribed conversations with teachers, interviews with participants and my research journal was substantial even after having removed 57 recordings. To process this data, I had to determine the unit of text to be analysed. Units of text had to be isolated so they could be compared to one another as I sought recurring themes in the data. Merriam draws on Lincoln and Guba (1985) who argue the unit of information must meet two criteria:

> First, it should be heuristic – that is, the unit should reveal information relevant to the study and stimulate the reader to think beyond the particular bit of information. Second, the unit should be "the smallest piece of information about something that can stand by itself – that is, it must be interpretable in the absence of any additional information other

> than a broad understanding of the context in which the inquiry is carried out. (Meriam, 2009, p. 177)

In this study, the unit for analysis was identified to be a segment of talk that was signaled by an event that occurred prior to a conversation and the teacher talk it generated. In this study, the unit for analysis is referred to as an episode.

*Identifying episodes*

An episode was readily identified by its attention to a specific topic and its response to a prompt. In the transcripts, teachers' stories were focused on specific topics of talk that had been prompted by a stimulus that is, something that happened that caught teachers' attention. Within a transcribed conversation or a conversation noted in the researcher's journal, teachers referred to these prompts through segments of talk about their daily teaching lives.

### *Foregrounding the research questions*

As I began to analyse the data, I recognised two levels of analysis were required to answer research question one and research question two. Level one analysis (in response to research question one) attends to the critical ethnographic requirement of *what is* to determine the challenges experienced by white teachers in this context. Level two analysis (in response to research question two) attends to the critical ethnographic requirement of *why it is* to determine why teachers experience the challenges they do. I have represented the levels of data analysis and their parts in Table 7 and these are now discussed.

### *Level one data analysis*

Level one data analysis provided insight into answering research question one: What are the challenges experienced by white teachers in government schools in a remote Aboriginal community?' Three hundred and eight episodes were extracted from the transcripts and 150 episodes from the research journal. Initially, I used the government provided Australian Institution for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2012) to categorise the 458 episodes. The AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2012) is a framework of teacher practice which describes the key elements of teachers' knowledge, practice and professional engagement. While the institution of education utilises the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2012) to establish and maintain high

standards of Australian teacher practice all schools are unique and have a range of challenges that may undermine teacher uptake of the Professional Standards in their daily practice.

*Level one, part one analysis: Elements of teacher practice*

The Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) Professional Standards governs the work of Australian teachers in schools and are used during

Table 7 Overview of levels of data analysis

| **Level one analysis** | | **Level two analysis** | |
|---|---|---|---|
| I | | | I |
| **Part one**<br>**Teacher challenges aligned with ATISL Professional Standards for Teachers** | **Part two**<br>**Prompts to teacher talk** | **Part A**<br>**Teacher practices with institution professionals** | Part B<br>**Teacher practices with the community** |
| | | | I |
| | | | ***Teacher practices with families***<br>• Stage 1<br>• Stage 2 |
| | | | ***Teacher practices with local employees***<br>• Stage 1<br>• Stage 2 |
| | | | ***Teacher practices with students***<br>• Stage 1<br>• Stage 2 |

teacher registration with the presiding Teacher Registration Board in their employing State or Territory. Organised in three domains of teaching pertaining to professional knowledge, practice and engagement, the standards outline descriptors of what is expected of teachers at different phases in their career: graduate, proficient, highly accomplished or lead teachers. Table 8 provides an overview of the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers.

While the Professional Standards discern between teachers' career stages, this study was not an evaluation of teachers conducting their duties. Rather, this study sought to understand the challenges that preoccupy non-Indigenous teachers as they strive to provide quality teaching in a remote Indigenous context where poor student outcomes continue to concern communities and the teaching profession. Consequently, the AITSL

Professional Standards for Teachers were used to identify the extent to which white teachers referred to the characteristics (as illustrated through the 'standards') of practice in their talk in this remote Indigenous context. By coding episodes using the Professional Standards, the elements of teaching that teachers found the most challenging could be discerned. Distinctions were made between episodes told by participants and episodes told by me, the researcher.

Table 8 AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers: Overview (AITSL, 2012)

| Domain of Teaching | Standards/Characteristics | |
|---|---|---|
| Professional Knowledge | 1 | Know students and how they learn |
| | 2 | Know the content and how to teach it |
| Professional Practice | 3 | Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning |
| | 4 | Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments |
| | 5 | Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning |
| Professional Engagement | 6 | Engage in professional learning |
| | 7 | Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community |

*Identifying elements of practice dominating teachers' attention*

Episodes were further categorised by sorting them according to the 37 elements of teacher practice that comprise the seven standards at a more detailed level. Coding at this level gave an initial idea of the element of practice's importance to teachers and enabled me to further distil the data. The elements of teacher practice are outlined below under the appropriate three domains of practice: Professional knowledge, professional practice and professional engagement.

Professional knowledge

A teacher's knowledge is paramount to their ability to provide effective teaching and learning to their students. Table 9 outlines the elements of teacher practice that comprise each sub-category of Professional Knowledge.

During practice, "teachers draw on a body of professional knowledge and research to respond to the needs of their students" (AITSL, 2012). A teacher's professional knowledge incorporates knowledge of students, curriculum and developmental stages of learning to produce a teaching practice that contextualises learning so it is meaningful to students. Additionally, teachers develop students' literacy and numeracy and utilise "Information Communication Technology to contextualise and expand students modes

Table 9 AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers: Professional Knowledge domain (AITSL, 2014c)

| Standard | Element of practice | |
|---|---|---|
| Know students and how they learn | 1.1 | Physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students |
| | 1.2 | Understand how students learn |
| | 1.3 | Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds |
| | 1.4 | Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students |
| | 1.5 | Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities |
| | 1.6 | Strategies to support full participation of students with disability |
| Know the content and how to teach it | 2.1 | Content and teaching strategies of the teaching area |
| | 2.2 | Content selection and organisation |
| | 2.3 | Curriculum, assessment and reporting |
| | 2.4 | Understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians |
| | 2.5 | Literacy and numeracy strategies |
| | 2.6 | Information and Communication Technology (ICT) |

and breadth of learning" (AITSL, 2012).

The Professional Knowledge domain of teaching is primarily concerned with what teachers know about their student and the curriculum. Teachers use their knowledge of students and content to identify strategies that respect students as individuals and their membership in a range of groups while ensuring student access to curriculum, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, language and culture, literacy and numeracy and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).

Focus areas 1.3 and 1.4 were problematic in this study because they were not distinct in teacher talk. As a generalisation, most non-Indigenous teachers do not understand the particularities of difference between discrete clan groups. Consequently, non-Indigenous teachers tend to perceive Indigenous students as a homogenous group different from non-Indigenous students. Positioning Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students as 'other' (AITSL, 2014c), non-Indigenous teachers compared the background of students in this remote Aboriginal community with their own non-Indigenous socio-cultural background. Non-Indigenous teachers in this study interpreted students' linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic difference as a direct consequence of being Aboriginal. Based on teachers' merging of the notion of

diversity with teaching Aboriginal students, I combined 1.3 and 1.4 for the purpose of this analysis.

Professional practice

In the domain of Professional Practice, teachers attend to planning, teaching and learning, learning environments and assessing, monitoring and reporting on student learning. Table 10 outlines the elements of teacher practice that comprise each of the three standards constituting the domain of Professional Practice.

In their quest to make learning engaging and valued, teachers use sophisticated communication techniques to "create and maintain safe, inclusive and challenging learning environments and implement fair and equitable behaviour management plans" (AITSL, 2014d).

Table 10 AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers: Professional Practice (AITSL, 2014d)

| Standard | Element of practice | |
|---|---|---|
| Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning | 3.1 | Establish challenging learning goals |
| | 3.2 | Plan, structure and sequence learning programs |
| | 3.3 | Use teaching strategies |
| | 3.4 | Select and use resources |
| | 3.5 | Use effective classroom communication |
| | 3.6 | Evaluate and improve teaching programs |
| | 3.7 | Engage parents/carers in the educative process |
| Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments | 4.1 | Support student participation |
| | 4.2 | Manage classroom activities |
| | 4.3 | Manage challenging behaviour |
| | 4.4 | Maintain student safety |
| | 4.5 | Use ICT safely, responsibly and ethically |
| Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning | 5.1 | Assess student learning |
| | 5.2 | Provide feedback to students on their learning |
| | 5.3 | Make consistent and comparable judgments |
| | 5.4 | Interpret student data |
| | 5.5 | Report on student achievement |

Teachers draw on a repertoire of effective teaching strategies to design and implement successful teaching programs and lessons.

Teachers reflect on all aspects of their teaching practice and are primarily concerned with meeting the learning needs of their students. Teachers utilise "student assessment data to diagnose barriers to learning and to challenge students to improve their performance" (2014d). Teachers are conscious of all aspects of the teaching and learning cycle: planning for learning and assessment, development of learning programs, teaching and monitoring student progress and providing feedback on student learning directly to students and in reports to parents/carers.

Professional engagement

While the teacher has the most direct association with the students, they work with other stakeholders in pursuit of professional learning and in fulfilling professional ethics and responsibilities to their students and students' families, their employer and the many networks and communities connected to the institution of education. Table 11 outlines the elements of teacher practice that comprise the two standards for Professional Engagement.

Teachers in this study attended to their professional learning and professional relationships with a range of stakeholders including parents, community, in-school colleagues, departmental colleagues, and other professional learning providers.

Table 11 AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers: Professional Engagement (AITSL, 2014b)

| Standard | Element of practice | |
|---|---|---|
| Engage in professional learning | 6.1 | Identify and plan professional learning needs |
| | 6.2 | Engage in professional learning and improve practice |
| | 6.3 | Engage with colleagues and improve practice |
| | 6.4 | Apply professional learning and improve student learning |
| Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community | 7.1 | Meet professional ethics and responsibilities |
| | 7.2 | Comply with legislative, administrative and organisational requirements |
| | 7.3 | Engage with the parents/carers |
| | 7.4 | Engage with professional teaching networks and broader communities |

Effective teachers are active members of their profession, appreciating that numerous stakeholders are invested in a student's learning. As professionals, teachers "identify their own learning needs and analyse, evaluate and expand their professional learning both collegially and individually" (AITSL, 2014d). Teachers espouse a culture of learning through respectful and professional practices with students, colleagues, parents/carers and the community that enrich the educational context for students. Sensitive to the needs of parents/carers, teachers effectively communicate students' learning progress.

Additionally, "teachers value opportunities to engage with their school community within and beyond the classroom to enrich the educational context for students" (AITSL, 2014d, para 1). Concerned with the social and intellectual development of their students, teachers understand the role of school, home and the broader community.

*Level one, part two analysis: Prompts for teacher talk*

In the second part of the first level of analysis, the 458 episodes of teacher talk and journal reflections were recoded for the prompt or trigger that generated the episodes. These prompts may have been events, interactions or practices in which the teacher had directly participated or had observed without direct participation. This set of codes did not come from a theoretical position but emerged from inductive coding. The most significant code used concerned the "who" in the prompt. In coding for the trigger or prompt for each episode, six distinct groups of people were revealed. Participants encountered these groups while undertaking their work and impacted teachers' working lives.

Coding the data according to the groups of people implicated in the episodes was consistent with the Third Space theoretical framework which emphasises practices between people in a social Space. Understanding the social formations in the social Space of the school requires thinking about practices as "made by people" (AITSL, 2014d, para 3). The coding revealed that the groups of people were the school's leadership team, NTDET employees not based at this school, Aboriginal employees, families, students and other teachers.

The first four categories, the school's leadership team, NTDET, the locally employed Aboriginal staff and the Aboriginal families produced teacher talk about decisions and

actions made by these groups. Triggers involving the first category, the School's Leadership team, included events initiated by school leader practices, responsive actions taken by school leaders and teacher observations about the effects of events or actions primarily influenced by school leaders. The episodes allocated to category two, NTDET, comprised episodes of school-based activities directed by NTDET policies and/or NTDET personnel either during a visit to the school or through other modes of communication. Category three, Aboriginal employees within the school, comprised episodes influenced by Aboriginal employees either physically located within the school or acting on behalf of the school when physically located beyond the school gates. Category four, Aboriginal families, comprised episodes influenced by local families either within or beyond the school and included teachers' observations of family practices with the school, either in school grounds or in the broader community.

Categories five and six were identified as teacher talk prompted by student and teacher practices. Category five, the students, comprised episodes influenced by teacher talk with students or observations of students. Category six, the teachers, comprised episodes influenced by teacher talk with other teachers and observations of other teachers.

Part two of this first level of analysis revealed teacher talk was prompted by two distinct groups of people: institution professionals (First Space) and the community (Second Space). Although it was not surprising to find these two groups prompting teacher talk, the discovery that minimal teacher talk was prompted by the local community (the two groups of families and Aboriginal school employees) was confronting. It was alarming given the institution expects that white teachers develop knowledge of local context from these families and local Aboriginal employees. In this context where Aboriginal people comprise the largest proportion of community residents and students attending this school, the imbalance between talk prompted by institution professionals (First Space) and the local community (Second Space) led me to the second level of analysis.

***Level two data analysis***

Level two analysis is in response to research question two which asks why teachers experience the challenges identified by level one analysis. The results of level one, part two analysis showed that teacher practices were particularly influenced by the institution of education and by the Aboriginal community. Further investigation was

required to understand how each group influenced teacher practice. By exploring the pre-conditions underpinning teacher interactions with institution professionals and with members of the local community, it was anticipated that the distinctly different Practice Architectures (Kemmis et al., 2014) of each group, outlined in the context chapter (Chapter Two), would have considerable bearing on what was and what was not made possible in teachers' work.

Madison (2012) reminds critical ethnographers that critical social theory has emerged from a tradition of "intellectual rebellion" (p. 14) that requires in-depth understanding of "regimes of power" (p. 14) that, in the case of this study, enable and disable teacher practice. Madison (2012) further notes critical ethnographers use theory:

> to articulate and identify hidden forces and ambiguities that operate beneath appearances; to guide judgments and evaluations emanating from our discontent; to direct our attention to the critical expressions within different interpretive communities relative to their unique symbol systems, customs and codes; to demystify the ubiquity and magnitude of power; to provide insight and inspire acts of justice; to name and analyze what is intuitively felt. (p. 15)

In this study, Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994) was utilised as the theoretical lens to identify the school as an in-between Space in which the institution of education and the Aboriginal community overlap. In conceiving the two disparate groups as two different Spaces from the perspective of the white teacher, Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994) was initially used to recognise the institution of education as the First Space and the Aboriginal community as the Second Space. However, a limitation of Third Space theory is that it does not provide the means to understand the often invisible pre-conditions that shape current practices of the respective Spaces. It is for this reason that I sought Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon's Practice Architectures framework (2014) as a means to investigate teacher practice with members of the First Space and members of the Second Space.

### *Practice Architectures*

The Practice Architectures framework (Kemmis et al., 2014) provides the means to delve into teacher practices and discern the mitigating circumstances originating from First Space and Second Space that influence what was and was not possible in teacher practice in this school. This framework draws on Schatzki's (2002) work of

interrogating the constitution of the social site. The Practice Architectures framework provides a way to think and talk about factors that "enable and constrain, or 'prefigure' practices without determining them" (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p. 55).

Practice is enabled and constrained by many factors that permeate the situation in which the practice is found. As noted in Chapter One, a practice is a socially established cooperative human activity that comprises complex sayings, doings and relatings. The sayings, doings and relatings "hang together" (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p. 55) as the "project of the practice". As noted by Kemmis, Wilkinson, et al., (2014) the 'project of the practice' "is what people say when they sincerely answer the question 'what are you doing?'" (Kemmis, Wilkinson, et al., 2014, p. 31). This framework identifies three types of arrangements: the sayings, doings and relatings. The sayings, doings and relatings of a practice are "made possible by arrangements that are found in or brought to a site where the practice occurs: cultural-discursive arrangements that support the sayings of a practice, material-economic arrangements that support the doings of a practice, and social-political arrangements that support the relatings of the practice" (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p. 55).

Teachers' sayings are enabled and constrained by the cultural-discursive arrangements of the site. These arrangements are considered in such terms as another person's sayings, where the language or discourse comes from, who does/not speak the language in the site, contestation "among people involved or affected about the language, key ideas or importance" (Kemmis, McTaggart et al., 2014, p. 81).

Teachers' doings are enabled and constrained by the material-economic arrangements of the site. These arrangements are considered in such terms as another person's doings, the physical spaces occupied by teachers and significant others over time, the particular kinds of set-ups and objects involved, material and financial resources involved, and the adequacy of material and financial resources (Kemmis, McTaggart, et al., 2014, p. 55).

Teachers' relatings are enabled and constrained by the social-political arrangements of the site. These arrangements are considered in terms of the social and administrative systems of roles, responsibilities, functions, obligations, and reporting relationships that enable and constrain relationships in the site. These arrangements are also considered in

such terms of how people collaborate or compete for resources or regard, and the presence of resistance, conflict or contestation (Kemmis, McTaggart, et al., 2014).

According to this framework, these three types of arrangements hold practices in place and provide the language, material and social resources that make the practice possible. Together, the arrangements that hold practices in place and make practices possible are called "Practice Architectures" (Kemmis et al., 2014, p. 55). It is in the Practice Architectures that the question 'why are you doing it?' could be answered albeit with some hesitation as the arrangements are frequently taken for granted by group members.

*Practice Architectures in the site of this study*

In this study, teacher practices are enabled and constrained by arrangements, or Practice Architectures from the First Space, the institution of education, and the Second Space, the Aboriginal community. Both the institution of education and the local Aboriginal community are made up of practices that are recognisable in members' sayings, doings and relatings. As presented in Chapter Two, the context chapter, both the institution of education and the Aboriginal community each have specific Practice Architectures that shape the practices of each group. The status of membership in each group is initially recognisable as that of 'insider' and 'outsider'. Insiders to the group share sayings, doings and relatings and inherently understand the Practice Architectures shaping practices. In contrast, outsiders to the group see and hear the sayings, doings and relatings of the group but often lack understanding of the Practice Architectures shaping those practices.

In the context of this study, teachers are insiders to the institution of education sharing group membership with other teachers and institution professionals. White teachers are almost always outsiders to the Aboriginal community comprising Aboriginal families, Aboriginal school employees and Aboriginal students.

Level two analysis sought to identify the conditions of the institution of education and the conditions of local Aboriginal clan groups that influence teacher practice. The first part of the analysis, teacher practices with institution professionals are analysed using inductive coding (Thomas, 2006).

*Level two, part A analysis*

Level two, part A analysis focuses on teacher practices with institution professionals. Of the 458 episodes, 146 episodes were directed at teacher practices with institution professionals.

Institution professionals included teachers, school leadership, visiting NTDET specialists and episodes in which teachers directly cited NTDET, without the identification of a specific person. Each of these institutional professionals, either separately or collectively influenced the ways teachers talked, acted and related to others in this school. I was privy to conversations involving senior leaders and NTDET, thus providing insight into ways in which leadership influenced teacher practice in this school because I was also a senior leader during this study. Within the First Space, institution professionals create the social arrangements in which teacher practice occurs. The social arrangements of the First Space simultaneously shape, and are shaped by, discussions between institution professionals, resources provided to institution professionals and the ways particular people in First Space relate to one another. Together, interactions amongst these people make and re-make the social world of the school thus shaping the conditions that affect teacher practice.

Of the 146 episodes related to teacher practices with institution professionals, I removed 26 episodes originating from my journal because the teachers referred to in these episodes did not participate in my study. Further, the omission of these episodes neither added nor detracted from the information needed to understand the conditions shaping teacher practice in this school during this study.

I analysed the remaining 120 episodes paying attention to the underlying factors in the teachers' sayings, doings and relatings (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014) that could shed light on why teachers were experiencing the challenges. I deliberately sought contradictions, confusions and conflicts as per Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994) that teachers were encountering when trying to meet the expectations of their institution.

I also looked across all 120 episodes to identify what Bhabha (1994) identifies as "fixity and stereotyping" (p. 94) which are major discursive strategies in colonial discourse. Bhabha describes "fixity as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism" (1994, p. 94) and a "paradoxical mode of representation

[connoting] rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic repetition" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 94). Similarly, he determines stereotyping as "a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 95).

There were few clear distinctions between teacher practices with teachers, school leadership, and NTDET. Rather, episodes of teacher talk were more focused on how practice was influenced by institution professionals without the identification of a specific person. For this reason, I synthesised the results of the analysis to identify dominating themes. In the writing up of the findings, each theme is explained by providing an example of the theme and determining institutional practices and social arrangements that impact on teacher practice in the school.

While level one, part A analysis focused primarily on First Space Practice Architectures, level two, part B analysis delved more deeply into teacher practices with the local community. Level one, part two analysis indicated that minimal teacher talk was prompted by the local community. In this context, where the Aboriginal community is the dominant group, the lack of teacher talk prompted by interactions with Aboriginal families and local staff was particularly surprising and, therefore, demanded further interrogation. In a remote community, non-Aboriginal teachers are expected to develop relationships with Aboriginal families and staff so they can learn about Aboriginal ways of life. Therefore, the lack of teacher indicated something going on here.

*Level two, part B analysis*

Level two, part B analysis focused on teacher practice with members of the local Aboriginal community (the Second Space) to identify the circumstances affecting teacher practices in the in-between Space of the school. After returning to all 458 episodes for level two analysis, I excluded episodes not concerning interactions with the local community. I then excluded my interactions with students because I was focused on teacher stories. In total, of the 458 episodes, 195 episodes were to do with teacher practices with members of the local community. Teacher practices with members of the local community were further categorised into teacher practices with families, local employees or students. Of the 195 episodes, 54 episodes were focused on teacher practices with families; 58 episodes focused on teacher practices with Aboriginal staff members; and 83 episodes focused on teacher practices with students. The coding

categories for teacher practice with each group were derived inductively from the data for that group.

Each of the three categories of teacher interactions with the local community were analysed in two parts. Stage One sought to understand the nature of the teacher interactions with the group while Stage Two synthesised the findings from Stage One using Kemmis et al.'s Practice Architectures framework (2014) to highlight the sayings, doings and relatings.

In Stage One analysis, the three sets of episodes, that is, those with families, Aboriginal school employees and Aboriginal students, were firstly coded using content analysis to examine the types of teacher relationships within each group. For example, for the set comprising episodes with families, the episodes were coded as direct, indirect or as having no interactions with families. The episodes were further coded again using content analysis to examine the nature of the interactions. For example, the subset of episodes that concerned direct interactions with families were further categorised using subcategories such as official visit and personal relationship. From each set of episodes, an episode of teacher talk that best illustrated the situation in which the interaction took place was selected and described in detail. In the description, teacher contradictions, confusions and conflicts were examined.

In Stage Two, the sets of episodes with families, Aboriginal school employees and Aboriginal students were coded for teachers' sayings, doings and relatings in their interactions. Teachers' sayings, doings and relatings were recorded in the practices tables drawn from Kemmis et al.'s Practice Architectures framework (2014). The Practice Architectures framework separates elements of practice from Practice Architectures. Elements of practice outlines what qualifies as teacher sayings, doings and relatings. Practice Architectures correlate with the appropriate element of practice. The reasons teachers talked, acted and related to each group in the ways they did were then discussed in detail to illustrate the conditions shaping teacher practices.

The findings from the analytical processes described above are reported in Chapter Five. In Chapter Six the findings are synthesised to illustrate the connections between teacher sayings and the *cultural-discursive arrangements; teacher doings and the*

*material-economic arrangements;* and *teacher relatings and the social-political* arrangements (Kemmis, McTaggart, et al., 2014) that currently exist.

### 4.2.7 Writing up the findings

Critical ethnographies are typically presented as a sequentially ordered narrative with the researcher's narrative triangulated with participants' narratives (Karnieli-Miller, Strier, & Pessach, 2009; McQueeney & Lavelle, 2015; Rudkin, 2002). In a typical critical ethnography, the researcher utilises reflexive inquiry to engage participants in dialogue to capture and analyse participant perspectives about interactions and events in their group. The researcher then responds to participant perspectives seeking cause and effect relationships such as the participant's ideology and the effects of this ideology on practice and meaning making. This critical ethnography was not typical.

This dissertation was not written as a critical ethnographic narrative. Rather, it complied generally with the layout of a typical thesis report with the standard chapter titles as can be seen in the contents of this document. The addition of the context chapter is sometimes not seen in the traditional format. This format was selected for three reasons.

Firstly, I deemed this form as being the more appropriate to respond to the very focused research questions that guided this study in a very complex cultural environment. Even though I collected data over an extended period of time, the timeline still did not lend itself to tracking specific stories. Had I followed a specific story such as a literacy or mathematics story, I would not have captured the complexity the teachers live with. By not narrowing the focus of this study to pursue a specific story line, the teachers were able to provide greater insight into the daily challenges they experienced while teaching in this complex cultural environment.

Secondly, a context chapter was essential to this dissertation. The context of this study is extremely difficult for outsiders to understand. I relied on critical friends to inform my writing about the Second Space because this study took place in a cross-cultural context,. Although I did not include community members as participants in this study, I did engage support and clarification from Aboriginal pre-service teachers who, in turn, confirmed the information I outlined in Chapter Two was accurate and allowed to be shared with the general public.

Lastly, by following the layout of a standard dissertation, I was better able to mask teacher identity and thus retain their anonymity. Pseudonyms were devised by dividing the alphabet in half then matching the first letter of one half with the last letter of the other half. Letters bear no similarity with participants' names. If this dissertation had been presented in narrative form, participants could be identified more easily by other people working at the school at the time despite using pseudonyms. As it was, participants and critical friends who reviewed sections of this dissertation could not resist asking me if they had accurately guessed pseudonyms; of course, I did not respond.

***Participant involvement in reporting the findings***

When reporting the findings, ethnographers have to make decisions pertaining to participant involvement (Lather, 1991; McQueeney & Lavelle, 2015). Karnieli-Miller, Strier and Pessach (2009) advise the consideration of several questions to determine participant involvement after data collection: "What parts of the data analysis can be reported without reservation? What parts raise qualms and uncertainty? Whose interest is served by exposing the data analysis to the participants, and who might be harmed by the disclosure?" (p. 283).

Knowing the difficult politics between teachers, the school's senior leadership, the NTDET and the community, I decided to exclude participant involvement in the formal data analysis such that the formal control and power of the critical ethnography (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009) was with me. Having supported teachers on several occasions during data collection, senior leadership and visiting NTDET leaders developed a general perception of me as defending teachers and critiquing school practices. While their perception was warranted, neither group provided an opportunity to expand on my reasons despite my inviting both groups to engage in discussions on numerous occasions. These perceptions distanced me from a number of people in the School Leadership team and NTDET although I was able to maintain working relationships with both groups.

Unlike for the data analysis process, I did seek critical friend feedback in the writing up of the project. I shared drafts of the context chapter, particularly the section about Second Space, that is, the community, with critical friends. At their request, I read the context chapter with them to which they provided feedback. After having out of school

discussions with family members about the context chapter, critical friends would relay recommendations to improve or better represent the Second Space. This process occurred over several years and numerous drafts. Despite the support provided by critical friends, I accept full responsibility for the final draft of Chapter Two presented in this dissertation.

After having written the Findings chapter, I sought participant feedback. I invited several participants who continued working at the school to read the Findings chapter. Two participants took up this offer. Both participants agreed with my findings noting my accurate representation of their experiences.

In addition to sharing the context and Findings chapters, I agreed to inform appropriate stakeholders when I completed this dissertation. I agreed to make a copy of the completed dissertation available to NTDET, the school leadership, Yuyabol, participants and critical friends upon their request.

### 4.2.8 Conclusion

The application of critical ethnographic principles and techniques to this project enabled me to collect rich data via dialogue with teachers, my research journal and multiple artefacts provided to teachers. The teacher talk, artefacts and my research journal together provided data that could be triangulated for patterns of behaviour that reflected institutional and personal unspoken values, beliefs and attitudes contributing to the current social fabric of the school and, most significantly, Aboriginal students' poor academic outcomes. Processing data through the analytical frameworks outlined in this chapter enabled me to identify the challenges experienced by white teachers in this remote Aboriginal community school and draw conclusions about why teachers experience these challenges. The findings are now presented in Chapter Five.

# Chapter Five. Findings

In this chapter, the findings from the analysis of the data are reported. The data were analysed at two levels that, together, answer the two questions shaping the study, namely:

1. What are the challenges experienced by white teachers in a remote Aboriginal community school?
2. Why do white teachers experience the challenges they do?

Level one analysis of the data occurred in two parts. In the first part, I sought to identify the elements of practice emphasised by teachers during their talk and in my journal. I utilised the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2012) to categorise the episodes of the teacher talk into domains and elements of teacher practice, thus revealing the aspects of practice that preoccupied teachers the most. Coding the episodes of teacher talk against the Professional Standards provided partial answers to research question one, but failed to explain why teachers were experiencing these challenges.

Part two of the level one analysis focused on coding the prompts or triggers that generated the episodes. This coding identified the influencers on teacher practice. As anticipated, there were two dominating influencers: the institution and the community. This level of coding also revealed that interactions between teachers and community members, other than students, were very limited. To maintain Third Space distinctions between First Space and Second Space, the episodes were regrouped according to the "space" they predominantly belonged, in preparation for the second level of analysis.

The second level of analysis was undertaken to further investigate the challenges that teachers experienced from interacting with fellow members of the education institution itself and with Aboriginal people from the community. The intent was to identify the conditions generated by each space that shape teacher practice and that produce the challenges that teachers experience. Teacher sayings, doings and relatings (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014) were scrutinised to determine the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements that enable or constrain teacher

practices. Therefore, the primary purpose of the second level analysis was to respond to the second research question.

Findings from the level one and level two analyses are reported in this chapter and summarised in the conclusion. They are discussed in Chapter Six.

## 5.1 Level one findings: Identifying challenges to teacher practice

In level one analysis, the episodes were coded in two parts. In the first part of the coding process, 458 narrated, recorded and transcribed episodes were categorised in the first instance to identify teachers' recounts of attending to quality teaching using the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers (AITSL, 2012). This categorisation provided a sense of how challenges to their practice were dispersed across the seven domains in the Professional Standards. Episodes were then categorised into the 37 Professional Standards for teachers. From the 37 Professional Standards I then identified the 10 standards that dominated teacher talk about challenges to their practice thus reducing 458 narrated episodes to 349 episodes.

In the second part of the coding process, I returned to all 458 narrated episodes categorising the antecedents that prompted each episode. The antecedent to teacher talk gave insight into who influences teacher practice clearly and distinguished between institution professionals and the local community.

### 5.1.1 Level one, part one: Elements of teacher practice causing teacher concern

The dominant element of teacher practice emphasised in each episode of talk was categorised using the AITSL Professional Standards. Conscious of my possible influence over what I chose to record, I did a blind allocation of episodes to Standards not knowing how many episodes were assigned to each Standard until after all episodes were distributed. Table 12 shows the distribution of participant reported episodes (including those of the researcher) across each of the AITSL Professional Standards. It is immediately followed by Table 13 that provides a quote from the range of episodes categorised into each Professional Standard to provide insight into teacher concerns regarding that standard.

Table 12 Distribution of episodes categorised according to Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership Professional Standards for Teachers

| AITSL Professional Standard | | Total # of episodes | % of total episodes | # told by teacher | % of teacher episodes | # told by researcher | % of researcher episodes |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Know students and how they learn | 142 | 31.0% | 99 | 34.1% | 43 | 25.6% |
| 2 | Know the content and how to teach it | 43 | 9.4% | 24 | 8.3% | 19 | 11.3% |
| 3 | Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning | 28 | 6.1% | 22 | 7.6% | 6 | 3.6% |
| 4 | Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments | 55 | 12.0% | 45 | 15.5% | 10 | 6.0% |
| 5 | Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning | 19 | 4.1% | 12 | 4.1% | 7 | 4.2% |
| 6 | Engage in professional learning | 72 | 15.7% | 39 | 13.4% | 33 | 19.6% |
| 7 | Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community | 99 | 21.6% | 49 | 16.9% | 50 | 29.8% |
| | TOTAL | 458 | 100.0% | 290 | 100.0% | 168 | 100.0% |

Each quote pertains to the key elements of quality teaching outlined in the AITSL Professional Standards for teachers. These are referred to in the discussion following the tables.

Of the 458 episodes, teacher narratives generated 290 episodes, while 168 episodes were collected from my researcher's journal. Percentage columns in the table show how

episodes generated from the two sources were distributed across the seven AITSL Standards. Consistently, episodes generated by teacher talk in transcripts and episodes generated by the researcher in the journal showed that the teachers and the researcher were focused on similar Standards. For example, the teacher narratives generated the highest number of episodes in Standard One and Standard Seven, respectively. In turn, the researcher's journal generated the highest number of episodes in Standard Seven and Standard One, respectively. Teacher narratives generated the lowest number of episodes in Standard Five and Standard Three, respectively with the researcher's journal also generating the lowest number of episodes in Standard Three and Standard Five, respectively. The consistent pattern of how episodes were distributed across the Standards between teacher and researcher-journal generated episodes, indicates the researcher's reflections did not skew the data. The second and third columns of the table reveal the distribution of the 458 episodes across the Professional Standards and thus the kinds of challenges that preoccupied teachers the most.

Of the 458 episodes, 142 episodes particularly focused on Standard One "Know students and how they learn". This professional standard attracted the highest proportion of episodes (31%). In terms of numbers, the three next most significant areas of practice that teachers referred to in the episodes were engaging professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community (21.6%), engaging in professional learning (15.8%), and creating and maintaining supportive and safe learning environments (12%). Teachers were preoccupied to a much lesser extent, with Standard Two to do with knowing the content and how to teach it (9.4%), Standard Three to do with planning for and implementing effective teaching and learning (6.1%), and Standard Five concerning the assessing, providing feedback and reporting on students learning (4.1%). While it may appear that teachers were relatively unconcerned with curriculum, teaching and learning, and assessment and reporting this was not the case.

The AITSL Professional Standard of "Know students and how they learn" overrode all other Standards because the participants in this study were non-Aboriginal teachers and they were overwhelmed by their lack of knowledge about their Aboriginal students. Teachers' preoccupation with their limited knowledge about their students and their quest to find out more information, resulted in teachers narrating relatively few episodes about knowing the content, specific pedagogy, planning and assessment and reporting. From my role as senior teacher, I know that teachers regularly encountered situations in which more knowledge of the students' language and culture and the goings on in the community would have been helpful in responding to students in the classroom. Teachers explained that they often did not know why students acted in particular ways in the classroom and so they did not know the best way to handle the situation. Teachers also reported the unpredictability of each day in terms of the number of students they would have in the classroom. The amount of time since a student had last attended school also required teachers to have intimate knowledge of students and where they were at in their learning. It is essential to note that teachers can have up to 27 students in a full class who must each have their individual needs met within the classroom environment. Two episodes provide insight into situations in which teachers' knowledge about students is paramount so they can devise and adapt plans for how to support student learning.

The first episode occurred at the start of a particularly challenging week. Two experienced teachers in their first term of teaching in this school and in their first experience of a remote Aboriginal community were discussing how poor school processes contributed to their not having the knowledge they needed about the students to appropriately adjust their practice. One of the teachers (QG) narrated her story about realising something was not right with the students and her efforts to try and find out why her students were acting differently from other days in the classroom. Although she was told at the beginning of the school week that a boy from one of the homelands had passed away the previous week, she couldn't account for the unexpected behaviours displayed by her students:

> QG: I heard in the meeting this morning that apparently there's more things happening [in the community] so I wanted to speak to the school counselor, because we don't know what else is going on and for the past two days I've been just noticing that my kids are out of control punching each other, hitting each other, doing everything they

> know they're not supposed to be doing. So I've been really… NOW I think, mean to them, um, really, really strict with them 'cause I think, well, you know what the rules are, you know you're not supposed to be doing this. And then at this meeting this morning I hear it's not just this boy that has died, there's much more going on, and then I thought, well, we should have really been told. I know we were told this morning but it would've been nice if it had been sooner. Like yesterday 'cause maybe I could have been more lenient towards the children. I would have understood their outrageous behaviour a lot better. I don't know. That's why I wanted to talk to [school counselor] but I couldn't get to her. So it just feels a bit like we're struggling because of outside [influences].
>
> (Transcript 24, Episode 189 coded Standard One)

In this narrative, QG acknowledges the connection between knowing her students, creating and maintaining supportive a safe and supportive learning environment and understanding what is happening in the local community. QG draws attention to the impact of a boy's death in the community on the children's behaviour. QG notes that this boy's death was not the only thing happening in the community as had been announced by the senior leadership conveying there was more unspecified upheaval occurring in the students' lives. Unbeknownst to QG, prior to the brief staff meeting, senior staff knew the boy's family were looking for a person to blame this death on which had resulted in inter-household fighting in addition to the grief from his loss. As a result of inter-household fighting occurring in multiple locations across the community, some people had to flee their homes to escape the hostility. When senior staff became aware of the ripple effect this boy's death was having across the community, they did not provide this information to teachers. The lack of information or warning from senior staff that students could be affected by lack of sleep, grief, fear or instability in their life due to the violent aftermath of this boy's death contributed to QG not knowing the reasons for students "doing everything they know they're not supposed to be doing". Another factor not raised by QG but in need of attention was QG not knowing who was related to this boy in either the school or the classroom. This episode illustrates the importance of school processes and information being made available to teachers in order for them to produce a safe and supportive learning environment that is responsive to how their students might be responding to community

happenings. Further, this episode illustrates the inability for teachers to teach when student behaviours are not conducive to learning.

In the second episode, the teacher draws attention to the unpredictability of each school day in the context provided by this school. This teacher (EB) indicated that while she submits planning, as per employment requirements, she has to be responsive to the unpredictable circumstances of each day. She highlights flexibility as a necessary part of her role, noting that resources, staff and students change daily.

> EB: You can plan as much as you like but then you have to go with what's presented to you on a day as in what resources you have access to, what staff you have access to, how many kids turn up. You just have to be flexible, more flexible than you ever thought you could be or would be.

(Transcript 21, Episode 159 coded Standard One)

EB notes that her planning for the school day was dependent on many variables that are comparatively stable and taken for granted in mainstream schools. She notes the number of local employees and students at school influence here ability to advance her planning to the implementation stage. As discussed in the context chapter, students and assistant teachers in this school are frequently absent from school with the teacher not being informed of an absence whether it occurs at the beginning of a school day or during the school day. Quite often, a small number of assistant teachers and students repeatedly leave class for a lunch break and then do not return to class after the break. Teachers have to wait until the school day or a session starts before drawing their own conclusion as to whether the student or assistant teacher is coming to class. On occasions, a parent or assistant teacher gives advance notice of an absence, but this is extremely rare. In terms of knowing the students and how to teach them, EB identifies the relationship between planning and teaching a specific cohort of students. Although EB plans the learning for students prior to the school day, she has to make adjustments to the plan to cater for the needs of students who actually come to school for the day. Mainstream schools have comparatively little variance in student attendance on a day-to-day basis. In contrast, at this school, EB indicates variations in student attendance are frequent events that increase her workload when she has to quickly identify the students, work out where they are at in terms of learning the curriculum then make adjustments to the teaching and learning program for the day.

Both QG and EB, in their respective episodes, draw attention to the importance of knowing their students well so they can provide students with the explicit support needed to respond to individual student needs. When teachers don't know students very well due to infrequent attendance or if they don't know how students respond to various circumstances, they are unable to support students in ways appropriate to meet their specific needs. Poor knowledge of students results in teachers being poorly prepared to meet the other Professional Standards.

A range of challenges was expressed in teacher narrations. To provide an insight into how the teachers in this study spoke about the various elements of their practice, excerpts are provided in Table 13 below for each Professional Standard.

Although episodes were assigned to a specific professional standard for the purpose of analysis, it is apparent that the teachers' statements address multiple elements of quality teaching. In the above, for example, while NC identifies the need to set student learning goals (Professional Standard Five), she is also keenly aware that other variables influence a child's ability to reach that goal. As noted in the context chapter, lack of sleep, poor and sporadic attendance, inappropriate school behaviours and parental inability to fulfill a child's basic needs, to name a few, influence a child's ability to reach a learning goal. Even though a teacher can set learning goals for a student, NC argues that teachers need to realise there are numerous factors that will inhibit or enable a child's ability to achieve that goal and many of these factors rest with students or their families. Teachers have little control over a child's home environment but their success in teaching requires a child having adequate sleep, coming to school each day and for the entire school day, having behaviours conducive to classroom learning and being supported by parents who value school and have the capacity to fulfill their child's needs. Further, teachers are unable to adjust their practices during a school day to make up for lost sleep and make up for lost time learning the curriculum especially when high absenteeism and continual poor behaviours dislocate the student from the rest of the class's learning progress. This is the scenario that teachers at this school encounter regularly.

Table 13 Quotes exemplifying teachers' concerns

| | Key elements of quality teaching | Quote |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | Know students and how they learn | RH: I don't know much about their [students'] world.<br>(Transcript 29, Episode 273) |
| 2 | Know the content and how to teach it | LN: They're not thinking of kids in [this community] or kids in any Aboriginal community when they write this work [curriculum] up and say this is what you've got to do. They're thinking of city kids, Balanda [white, non-Aboriginal] kids. They're not necessarily Balanda but kids in the city have all that western experience and that's who they're thinking of. They're doing it because they want to be able to say that all kids in Australia are doing the same work and all kids in Australia are the same. All kids in Australia are not the same.<br>(Transcript 7, Episode 41) |
| 3 | Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning | KZ: You know this is the first term since I've been here [11 terms] that I've actually got a plan and followed it. But it still doesn't work. I mean [planning] has to move. [Planning] has to give. The only thing we end up sticking to is maths with [high school maths teacher] because he comes in.<br>(Transcript 5, Episode 25) |
| 4 | Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments | JW: Yesterday afternoon when I had no-one [no assistant teacher]. They… there was one boy in my class who fought with every other kid. We had punches. We had chasing around the room. [Student] is not my only problem.<br>(Transcript 13, Episode 90) |
| 5 | Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning | NC: Set them [learning goals]. Definitely set them. Buuuttt, when it doesn't come off, and 6 times out of 10 it won't come off because there's a million things that are completely, I'm gonna say HERE, but ESPECIALLY here, there are a million things that are out of your control and there's a good chance that the kid's not gonna hit that goal.<br>(Transcript 29, Episode 260) |
| 6 | Engage in professional learning | SJ: I find this [school leadership initiated professional learning session] a bit, with all due respect, a bit of a waste of time and I'd rather look at |

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| | | where our students are in their learning rather than focussing on general outcomes our students are nowhere near achieving so we can use [what school leaders want us to learn]. Do you know what I mean? This is an exercise, just to make it an exercise. It would be so much nicer if it could be something that we could actually use. We won't use this because it's too hard for us. They're [the students] not there yet. I don't know about yours, but mine aren't.<br><br>(Transcript 26, Episode 203) |
| 7 | Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community | Teacher re-enacts a conversation with a parent<br><br>EB: 'How do you spell [child's name]?<br><br>Parent: 'Don't know'.<br><br>EB: 'Okay. How old is he?'<br><br>Parent: 'ohhh…maybe four, maybe 6, maybe 2'.<br><br>EB: When's his birthday?<br><br>Parent: mmm…maybe…mmm…March?<br><br>EB: [thinking] right! [asks] When was he born?<br><br>Parent: aaah... I don't know.<br><br>(Transcript 27, Episode 218) |

The interconnectedness of the Professional Standards is evident in the excerpts in the table above. Particularly evident, is the dominant influence of Standard One "Know students and how they learn" on the other aspects of teacher performance and their effectiveness. Standard one, arguably more than any other, requires teachers to know the community in which their students and they live. For example, knowing the current affairs in the community is necessary because those events may be impacting student behaviours (Standard Four). Knowing the culture of the community in which their students live is essential to developing a repertoire of culturally appropriate strategies (Standard One) to attend to undesirable behaviours. JW's struggle to attend to students' violent behaviours (Standard Four) was influenced by a lack of knowledge about students (Standard One) and strategies that could be applied to correct the situation

(Standard Four and Standard Two). He states that he had no help (from the Aboriginal assistant teacher) indicating a reliance on a significant other from the community to engage in professional learning (Standard Six) that was immediate and essential. As members of the local community, assistant teachers have a greater awareness about what is happening in the community than the non-Aboriginal teacher. Unfortunately, many assistant teachers are frequently absent from work for a myriad of reasons resulting in being an unreliable partner for the teacher. As indicated earlier by QG in the episode concerning the community's unrest after a child's death, students' behaviours can be a response to what is happening in the community not just an immediate response to what is happening in the classroom. QG's statement about students behaving uncharacteristically, and QG having no idea why, is reflective of NC's warning that "millions of other things … are out of your control" (reference to data source).

As illustrated, teachers attend to multiple elements of quality teaching simultaneously. One element of practice going awry can have a ripple effect across the teacher's ability to fully realise other elements of practice within the Professional Standard. The ripple effect continues into elements of practice in other Professional Standards. To identify what teachers focused on in each Professional Standard, I sub-categorised the episodes into elements of practice using the descriptors in each element of practice within each standard provided by AITSL. Each episode was allocated an element of practice determined by the content of the episode. Appendix H outlines the distribution of elements of practice across the seven Professional Standards. Distinctions were made between researcher and teacher reported episodes for each element of practice. Because my school roles were related to school leadership and teaching local Aboriginal adults to become registered teachers, my journal reflected my focus on the broader perspective of systemic requirements and the need for teachers to have the requisite skills, knowledge and understanding to meet the needs of their Aboriginal students. Hence, I was able to provide additional information not necessarily reflected in teacher talk.

While episode alignment with aspects of practice indicates a relationship between the role fulfilled by the teachers and to what their attention is drawn, low numbers of episodes made it difficult to draw conclusions. This more fine-grained coding provided a clearer understanding of the elements of practice that concerned the teachers in this

study and enabled me to identify the dominating ten elements of practice in which teachers narrated challenges. Upon identifying the dominant elements of practice in which teachers shared stories about challenges, I was able to reduce the episodes from 458 to 349.

The 349 episodes indicating challenges to teacher practice were distributed across 10 elements of practice and emerged from five of the seven Standards. Each element emphasises a type of practice within the Professional Standard. Table 14 focuses on the distribution of episodes across the 10 elements of practice that dominated teacher concerns. For Standard One, which relates to knowing students and how they learn, the coding of the episodes indicated two types of challenges to teacher practice (1.1, 1.3/1.4). In Standard One, I merged elements 1.3 and 1.4 because the students in this school are Aboriginal. Standard Two indicated one type of challenge related to teachers not having literacy and numeracy strategies (2.5). Standard Four, creating and maintaining supportive and safe learning environments, indicated two types of challenges to teacher practice were managing challenging behavior (4.3) and maintaining student safety (4.4). Standard Six, engage in professional learning, indicated two types of challenges to teacher practice were engaging in professional learning and improve practice (6.2) and engaging with colleagues and improving practice (6.3). Finally, Standard Seven, engaging with colleagues, parents/carers and the community, indicated three of the four elements within the Standard were challenging to teacher practice. These were meeting professional ethics and responsibilities (7.1), complying with legislative, administrative and organisational requirements (7.2), and engage with parents/carers (7.3).

As indicated earlier in this section, the Professional Standards are inter-related such that challenges experienced in one Professional standard, even in one element of practice within the Professional Standard, has ramifications in other Professional Standards and constituent elements of practice. Determining the importance of an element of practice in this context was not restricted to the number of episodes reported by participants. In Table 14, Professional Standards Three (plan and implement effective teaching and learning) and Five (assess, provide feedback and report on student learning) are notable by their absence. Their absence does not mean teachers did not consider these Professional Standards but rather, it means that the challenges expressed by teachers did

Table 14 Foremost challenges experienced by teachers categorised by elements of practice in the Professional Standards

| Elements of Practice | Total number of episodes | % of episodes dominating teacher concerns | Teacher reported | % reported by teachers | Researcher reported | % reported by the researcher |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds AND 1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students | 96 | 27.5% | 61 | 28.6% | 35 | 25.7% |
| 6.3 Engage with colleagues and improve practice | 51 | 14.6% | 25 | 11.7% | 26 | 19.1% |
| 7.2 Comply with legislative, administrative and organisational requirements | 49 | 14% | 24 | 11.3% | 25 | 18.4% |
| 2.5 Literacy and numeracy strategies | 29 | 8.3% | 12 | 5.6% | 17 | 12.5% |
| 4.3 Manage challenging behaviour | 26 | 7.5% | 25 | 11.7% | 1 | 0.7% |
| 7.3 Engage with the parents/carers | 24 | 6.9% | 17 | 8.0% | 7 | 5.1% |
| 4.4 Maintain student safety | 23 | 6.6% | 16 | 7.5% | 7 | 5.1% |
| 7.1 Meet professional ethics and responsibilities | 21 | 6% | 5 | 2.3% | 16 | 11.8% |
| 1.1 Physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students | 17 | 4.9% | 16 | 7.5% | 1 | 0.7% |
| 6.2 Engage in professional learning and improve practice | 13 | 3.7% | 12 | 5.6% | 1 | 0.7% |
| TOTAL | 349 | 100% | 213 | 100% | 136 | 100% |

not fit into these Professional standards or their constituent elements of practice. Teachers are obligated to meet the Professional Standards that govern their work as

professional employees. The lack of or minimal allocation of episodes to an element of practice can be explained by looking to the elements of practice with high numbers. As a co-participant in the study, I became aware of teachers' preoccupation with elements of practice that overwhelmed them. Frequently, teacher attention was focused on challenges in the elements of practice outlined in Table 14 because they were more prominent in teachers' direct interactions with students, colleagues, and the local community.

Table 14 provides an overview of which elements of practice within the seven Professional Standards dominated. The entries in the table are presented in descending order beginning with the element of practice with the highest number of episodes distinguishing between the number of episodes reported by teachers and those reported by the researcher. By ordering the elements of practice in this way, the total number of episodes and percentage of episodes dominating teacher concerns highlights the elements of practice in which teachers experience the reportable challenges. Dominating the teachers' concerns, as evidenced by the distribution of episodes across the elements of teacher practice, is teachers' lack of understanding about their Aboriginal students. Teachers identified their lack of knowledge about their Aboriginal students diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds expressed in numerous episodes related to teachers attending to students' learning and wellbeing.

Significantly, teachers highlighted their lack of knowledge about the world their students live in (see 1.3/1.4) and how this influences the teaching and learning process. QG recalls the difficulties she experienced during her first two terms teaching in this school. Little knowledge about her students resulted in her being unprepared for the students' responses to what she thought was a standard classroom learning practice:

> QG: At the start I found it really hard. I thought they [the students] must all hate me 'cause they're not telling me anything. EVERTHING that we did was coming from me. I didn't get anything back; not in stories or on Monday mornings when we talked. So I prompted… "We had two days of no school. So I baked a cake in the kitchen and I planted a tree in my garden and went to the beach. I went fishing. What did you do?" And there's… there was just nothing! Nothing coming. And I thought, well, they can't all be secretive. It's just that [I thought] they don't know how [to talk in a group or in front of the class]. So I kept at it and was really persistent and only just now [two school terms] they are starting [to share stories]. But never in a circle setting. Always when

> everyone else is working they come up to me and they say “I go hunting with my dad”. At the start, it’d be like, “Okay. So listen everyone. [Student] has told me he went out hunting with his dad”. And then he was on the floor like [models curled up in the foetal position], like “I don’t want everyone to look at me. Stop talking.” But they do want to share it with me, just not with everyone else.
>
> (Transcript 28, Episode 222)

QG did not predict the students’ responses to what is generally a very standard classroom activity in mainstream contexts. QG was either unable or did not realise a need to check her assumptions with a significant other from the local community. Fortunately, QG was sensitive to students’ responses and indicated the need to gauge which practices to persist with and which to change.

Many of the issues identified by teachers as presenting challenges do not relate directly to aspects of the school curriculum that would be of significance in most mainstream schools. That is, the institution of education assumes that students come to school prepared for the schooling environment and that they share sufficient socio-cultural norms with teachers to enable a level of social order conducive to quality teaching and learning. In this school, teachers have to constantly remind students to blow their noses. If teachers didn’t tell students to blow their noses students would sit in class with mucous dripping from their nose, sometimes into their mouth. Teachers also had to model hand-washing and frequently remind students to wash their hands. Failure to do so would result in damage to valuable classroom resources which became permanently marked with orange hand and fingerprints from students eating salty plums (a dried prune cured with a sugary, salty liquorice mixture and usually bright orange) or students eating their lunch with dirty hands. MB recalled telling children to “Go wipe your nose [and] wash your hands” (Transcript 12, Episode 179).

Issues highlighted by teachers were likely significant issues in Australian schools in the past but social norms shared by the broader community and the school have relegated incidences, such as those noted above, to being rare occurrences in mainstream schools. The recurring issue of toileting was rarely referred to by teachers because it was such a familiar event over the two and a half years of this study. The toileting issue was raised

in my research journal, noted primarily for its lack of change and its apparent normalisation in the school context:

> R: Toilet paper is put in the children's toilets. It gets thrown around inside the toilet block and stuffed into toilets rendering them unflushable. Kids go to the toilet and return to class smelling like faeces (very unpleasant). There are a limited number of spare clothes to go home but parents do not return these so teachers are reluctant to give them to children unless the child has soiled his/herself. As a mother, I am angry that my seven year old is unable to toilet the way she has been shown at home because no-one has tackled the toileting issue at school. I don't know if it is because of a lack of courage or if it is a defeatist attitude. Some people have tried talking to kids about correct toileting procedures but the children they don't talk to, because they are away, or the children who are determined NOT to do what Balanda say, end up continuing improper behaviors.

(Journal, Episode 446)

While teachers were unhappy about this recurring issue, they relegated it to the periphery of issues because as teachers, they focused on attending to student learning.

With respect to teachers engaging with colleagues and improving professional practice (6.3), the episodes that occurred most often concerned teacher partnerships with assistant teachers employed from the local community. EB who had several assistant teachers working with her, particularly expressed the ongoing challenges associated with assistant teachers which I had summarised as a list in my journal:

- Going to lunch and not returning to work.
- Helping self to breakfast after being told that breakfast is for the children only.
- Getting a sand bucket out of the sandpit, cleaning it, then keeping it for a tea cup despite the teacher saying the bucket was for sandplay.
- Sitting down and watching the class teacher do all the work.
- Doing a job poorly with the consequence that they aren't asked to do it again.
- Not coming to work. Not calling in. Not explaining absence upon return.
- Only looking after one child when paid to look after all [of the] students.
- Smoking [in school grounds] next to a sign that says 'no smoking'.

(Journal, Episode 445)

Throughout this study, EB repeatedly expressed frustration when assistant teachers exhibited these behaviours. In some instances, one assistant teacher could exhibit several of these behaviours in any single day. Although EB tried to address these

behaviours when they occurred, she noted the assistant teacher would stop the inappropriate behaviour for a day or two before returning to old ways.

Teachers were challenged by the lack of professional support and quickly discerned professional qualities that enable or constrain appropriate support. In this episode, LN distinguishes between a teacher's experience, meaning the number of years a teacher has been teaching, and a teacher's skill level who comes to this school:

> LN: I guess it's less about you being experienced and more about what skills you've got because you can be experienced but you haven't got any skills and you can probably be skilled but without having much experience.
>
> R: So which would you put emphasis on? If you were employing a teacher at this school, would you want someone who is more skilled or someone who is more experienced and why?
>
> LN: Definitely more skilled because a lot of the teachers – this is just a personal opinion – but I've seen a lot of the teachers that come out here with experience, lots and lots of experience, are here because they're waiting for study leave or waiting for retirement cheques or want somewhere they can hide out. All they've got to do is put up with living in a remote community for six months to a year for their retirement package and they're done, they're finished. Or they stay until they get their study leave. If you had a small core of teachers that are experienced [and appropriately skilled] that are willing to give advice and help, then you could have mostly first year out teachers [who are more enthusiastic].
>
> (Episode 33, Transcript 7)

LN notes that experience does not necessarily equate with skill. He also identifies the enthusiasm graduate teachers bring to teaching as opposed to the energy levels of some teachers reaching retirement or biding their time until they leave this community. LN notes that experienced teachers with the appropriate skills and a willingness to support graduate teachers could be a source of professional support within the school.

In endeavours to provide quality teaching and learning, teachers noted that while some students' behaviours were conducive to the classroom environment, attending to students' behaviours (4.3) and maintaining safe learning environments (4.4) were an ongoing challenge. JW was one teacher who took approximately 10 students within

POD 2 (Year two and three students) who were disrupting student learning across three classrooms. Rather than allowing this group of students to block learning for all POD 2 students, he negotiated with the two other POD 2 teachers and school leadership to put all students with behaviour problems in one classroom. As noted earlier in Table 14, JW (Transcript 13, Episode 90), student behaviours included chasing each other around the classroom and punching other students such that the class turned into chaos. JW also noted student behaviours tended to become a serious issue when there was no assistant teacher in the classroom to help with behaviour management. JW had to abandon teaching and learning planned for one afternoon session to address behaviours so he could gain a modicum of control in the classroom. From my experiences with JW and this class, behaviours reported in this episode regularly occurred with this class. In contrast, the two other classes, from which these students were removed, were able to get on with teaching and learning because these students with extreme behaviours had been removed from the classroom.

In summary, the analysis reported so far shows that a significant quantity of teacher talk was directed at students, professional relationships, professional learning and creating and maintaining supporting and safe learning environments. Teacher talk directed at students indicated challenges regarding student attendance, student wellbeing, and student ability to participate appropriately in classroom teaching and learning. Teacher talk directed at professional relationships emphasised concern regarding assistant teachers and their inability to perform duties expected of an assistant teacher, and the lack of on-site collegial support for teachers inexperienced in Aboriginal communities and teaching in general. Teacher talk directed at professional learning indicated that institution and school leadership directed professional development lacked a specific relationship with what teachers needed to perform their duties effectively in this school. Finally, teacher talk directed at creating and maintaining supporting and safe learning environments highlighted how students' poor classroom behaviours dominated the teachers' attention such that teachers spent a lot of time and energy on ensuring student safety to enable focus on student learning. Preoccupation with these four Professional Standards resulted in the remaining elements of teacher practice being relegated further down on white teachers' prioritised concerns.

### 5.1.2 Level one, part two: Prompts for episodes of talk

Using all 458 episodes teacher talk and journal reflections were recoded for the prompt or trigger that generated the episodes. These prompts may have been events, interactions or practices in which the teacher had directly participated or had observed without direct participation. In coding for the trigger or prompt for each episode, the groups of people that impacted teachers' working lives were also revealed. The inductive coding approach produced six categories of prompts that were the names of groups of people with whom the participants encountered while undertaking their work. These were the school's leadership team; the institution, NTDET; the Aboriginal employees within the school; the Aboriginal families or community; the students; and other teachers.

The first four categories, the school's leadership team, NTDET, the locally employed Aboriginal staff and the Aboriginal families produced teacher talk about decisions and actions made by these groups. The first category, the school's leadership team, included events initiated by the school leaders' practices, responsive actions taken by school leaders and teacher observations about the effects of events or actions primarily influenced by school leaders. Category two, NTDET, comprised episodes of school-based activities directed by NTDET policies and/or NTDET personnel either during a visit to the school, or through other modes of communication. Category three, Aboriginal employees within the school, comprised episodes influenced by Aboriginal employees either physically located within the school or acting on behalf of the school when physically located beyond the school gates. Category four, Aboriginal families, comprised episodes influenced by local families either within or beyond the school and included teachers' observations of family practices within the school either in school grounds or in the broader community.

Categories five and six were identified as teacher talk prompted by student and teacher practices. Category five comprised episodes influenced by teacher talk with students or observations of students. Category six comprised episodes influenced by teacher talk with other teachers and observations of other teachers. Table 15 summarises coding of episodes in each Professional Standard in terms of prompts that generated teacher talk.

Table 15 Groups that prompted episodes of teacher talk

| | AITSL Professional Standard | Total # of episodes | School Leadership team | NTDET | Aboriginal employees in the school | Aboriginal families or community | Students | Teachers |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | Know students and how they learn | 140 | 22 | 18 | 1 | 9 | 55 | 35 |
| 2 | Know the content and how to teach it | 43 | 12 | 5 | 2 | 1 | 6 | 17 |
| 3 | Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning | 28 | 9 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 3 | 8 |
| 4 | Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments | 57 | 13 | 2 | 4 | 5 | 24 | 9 |
| 5 | Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning | 19 | 8 | 7 | 0 | 1 | 2 | 1 |
| 6 | Engage in professional learning | 72 | 33 | 12 | 9 | 4 | 2 | 12 |
| 7 | Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community | 99 | 33 | 23 | 4 | 17 | 4 | 18 |
| | TOTAL | 458 | 130 | 74 | 20 | 38 | 96 | 100 |

Talk was mostly prompted by practices of the school leadership (130 episodes teachers (100), students (96 episodes) and NTDET (74). The distribution of these categories across the Professional Standards revealed that they were clustered. School leadership practices prompted teacher talk about professional learning (33) and engaging professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community (33). Student practices prompted teacher talk about teacher knowledge of students and how they learn 55), and creating and maintaining supportive and safe learning environments (24). Teacher practices prompted teacher talk about knowing students and how they learn (35), engaging professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community (18) and parents/carers and the community (18) and knowing the content and how to teach it (17). NTDET practices prompted teacher talk about engaging professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community (23) and knowing students and how they learn (16).

Table 15 highlighted a distinct difference between the number of episodes prompted by other institution professionals (School Leadership team, NTDET and teachers) and those prompted by the local community (students, families and locally employed Aboriginal staff. Of the 458 episodes, 154 episodes were prompted by local Aboriginal employees (20), local families (38) and students (96). In contrast, 304 episodes of teacher talk was prompted by School Leadership team (130), NTDET (74) and other teachers (100). The number of episodes prompted by the local community was significantly lower than those prompted by institution employees. Episodes prompted by Aboriginal employees and families generated no talk regarding planning for and implementing effective teaching and learning, or assessing, providing feedback and reporting on student learning. The lack of talk about planning for effective teaching and learning and the assessment of student work with local Aboriginal employees suggests that white teachers have limited interactions with community members about planning, teaching or assessment.

I anticipated more episodes to be prompted by the community because this study took place in a remote Aboriginal community school.

In a remote Aboriginal community where white teachers represent one culture and the Aboriginal students represent the other culture, it is critical that white teachers gain information about their Aboriginal students from the people who know them best: families, community and local Aboriginal employees. The lack of talk prompted by local Aboriginal employees and the local community identified the need for further analysis. Because this study is theoretically framed by Third Space theory and the two spaces that come together in the school are the institution and the community, I returned to all 458 episodes to identify teacher practices with institution professionals and teacher practices with the local community.

### 5.1.3 Summary of level one findings

Level one, part one analysis provided insight into challenges experienced by white teachers in this context, question one, but failed to answer research question two. The AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers identified the existence of challenges experienced by teachers but failed to provide details about the challenges. Only partially answering research question one, the Professional Standards proved an insufficient tool to identify challenges experienced by teachers in this remote Aboriginal community school. The first indication of insufficiency came from having to merge professional standards 1.3 and 1.4 that differentiate between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal students. Professional standard 1.4 is problematic in this community as Aboriginal culture, cultural identity and linguistic differences dominate school culture such that it subsumes professional standard 1.3 which attends to student diversity.

The second indication of insufficiency came from the institution's assumption of sameness, as implied in the way the Professional Standards are written. AITSL presumes all schools are quite similar that teachers come to know schools and communities through the same processes. High quality teaching is assumed to comprise the same processes with no suggestion of the impact of community on school processes.

The third indication of insufficiency came from the ambiguity of language used in the AITSL Professional Standards that is open to interpretation by educators. There is no process for the community to have input into such standards as professional standard 2.4 "understand and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians" (AITSL, 2012). All Aboriginal clan groups, regardless of their community, identify as different rather than

as a homogenised group. Teacher demonstration of, understanding of and respect for Aboriginal people is open for interpretation primarily by other white people.

Level one, part two analysis provided more insight into challenges experienced by white teachers in this context, question one, but also failed to answer research question two. Prompts to teacher talk indicated a distinct lack of interaction between teachers and families and teachers and local employees. In this school, in which two distinctly different cultures come together, it is concerning that teacher talk was minimally prompted by the local community (excluding students).

### 5.2 Level two findings: Teacher practices with First Space and Second Space

Level two analysis sought an answer to research question two focused on why teachers experienced the challenges they do. I returned to the 458 episodes utilising Third Space theory to distinguish between the First Space, the institution, and Second Space, the community. I grouped episodes of teacher practices with institution professionals, members of the First Space, and teacher practices with the local community, members of the Second Space. According to Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon (2014) "conditions shape how we think, what we do, and how we relate to others and the world" (p. 7). To gain insight into the conditions affecting teacher practice during this study, I interrogated teacher practices with institution professionals in level two, part A and teacher practices with the local Aboriginal community in level two, part B. Of the 458 episodes, 146 episodes were initially categorised as teacher practices with institution professionals and 195 episodes were initially categorised as teacher practices with the local community.

Findings from teacher practices with institution professionals are discussed in level two findings, part A, First Space while findings from teacher practices with the local community are discussed in level two findings, part B, Second Space. A summary of findings for teacher practices with institution professionals is provided after level two, part A findings have been discussed. A summary of findings for teacher practices with the local community is provided after level two, part B findings have been discussed. The summary has been provided after discussions about teacher practice in relation to each space, First Space and Second Space to maintain distinctions between influences of each space on teacher practice.

### 5.2.1 Level two findings, part A: Teacher practices with the First Space

After returning to all 458 episodes for level two analysis that focuses on identifying the conditions affecting teacher practices, I sought episodes explicitly focusing on teacher interactions with institution professionals. In the first instance, I excluded episodes not directed at interactions with institution professionals. I included episodes from transcribed conversations, the final interview and my researcher journal. 146 episodes were directed at teacher practices with institution professionals. I reduced these 146 episodes to 120 episodes by excluding 26 episodes that originated from my journal.

Seeking contradictions, confusions and conflicts within and across episodes that would suggest the conditions that led teachers to experiencing challenges in their work, I identified six dominating themes:

- disparity between teacher expectations and reality;
- inadequacy of professional development;
- information deprivation;
- unrealistic expectations placed on teachers;
- negative judgments about teacher performance; and
- teacher welfare concerns.

Each of these six themes is explained by providing an example of the theme and determining First Space member practices and social arrangements that maintain social order in the institution of education. First Space members' understanding and knowledge of the Second Space (the community) and the in-between space of the school are included in the explanation provided for each theme.

#### *Theme 1: Disparity between teacher expectation and reality*

The strongest theme emerging from episodes was the disparity between teacher expectations and the reality of what they experienced in the school. In accepting a job in this school, teachers expected student literacy and numeracy levels to be below benchmark, but they believed they had the training and capacity to bring students to benchmark through carefully considered planning, teaching and assessment.

Teachers anticipate teacher practice to remain generally constant regardless of contextual factors such as geographical location and student background. Teachers expect to draw on the Territory and Australian curriculums to guide planning that has been carefully considered to meet their students' needs and progress student outcomes. In this school, teachers noted standard teacher practices such as planning become

problematic. During a POD 2 meeting, JW had completed his term's planning only to be presented with a new group of students who had previously been absent from school:

> JW: I don't know where to go Tracey. All that stuff I wrote down was on the proviso I had much the same kids. That we could now count up to 10. We could … I've got none of the same kids. What do you do with kids who are never at school that you don't really know? That you don't know what they're saying.
>
> (Transcript 13, Episode 91)

JW was overwhelmed. He had planned for students and had provided a progressive curriculum only to be presented with a large group of students who could not do what had been planned. JW realised planning from the previous term would be more suitable to this new group of students. However, to submit and implement planning from a previous term was problematic because school leadership expected planning to show students progressing through the curriculum not regressing.

Noted earlier in this chapter, EB also draws attention to the institution's assumption that quality teaching begins with the teacher developing a plan to progressively implement the curriculum then delivering it to the students. EB also notes the role of planning in preparing the school day for lessons. She found the institution's assumption of teacher planning guiding preparation was not the case in this context:

> EB: You can plan as much as you like but then you have to go with what's presented to you on a day as in what resources you have access too, what staff you have access to, how many kids turn up. You just have to be flexible, more flexible than you ever thought you could be or would be.
>
> (Transcript 21, Episode 173)

While EB emphasises the need to be flexible, it is apparent planning for a progressive curriculum is challenging when the circumstances that support the delivery of the program are not in place. EB highlights the erratic nature of a school week when material and human resources are unavailable and when students are absent for the prepared lessons. This episode, recounted by EB, demonstrates the difference between what happens on paper, that is, the planning, and the reality of the context, the teaching and learning.

The institution identifies the explicit link between planning, teaching and assessment. When the conditions upon which the institution's planning, teaching and assessment model are founded are not present, teachers are unable to follow their plans as submitted to school leadership, thus making the planning process unproductive and in some cases, redundant. The planning process becomes synonymous with a batch processing factory model that assumes the conveyor belt will progress the same batch of students at the same pace. Although the school leadership demands teachers develop and submit term, weekly and daily planning, teacher plans are immobilised when resources are unavailable, students do not retain previous learning; students and assistant teachers attend school sporadically; classrooms spaces are unavailable; and lessons are continually interrupted such that lessons do not flow from introduction to conclusion.

A second disparity between teacher expectations and the reality was that generalised statements about student academic outcomes failed to provide pertinent information to inform teacher planning, delivering and assessing an appropriate curriculum. Although teachers were informed students were below national benchmark levels for English literacy and numeracy, when they entered their classroom and began working with their students, they were shocked. The generalised information provided by the NTDET hierarchy did not prepare teachers for the precise characteristics presented by students. MB, an early years with no prior experience in remote Aboriginal schools recalls when she realised students' academic levels were lower than how they were portrayed in school leaders' generic use of the phrase 'below benchmark', initially thinking she was wrong in her interpretations of the data. Turning to students' age as a potential influence on literacy and numeracy levels and thinking that perhaps students were developmentally unready for the concepts taught in the classroom, MB found student ages were appropriate for the year level. She explained, "I wasn't prepared for the level of, how do you say it, children's level. It just shocked me. Then I kept questioning myself" (MB, Transcript 22, Episode 76).

MB recalled being told about students' low literacy and numeracy levels but was unprepared for the lack of data, the unreliability of the data due to students' sporadic attendance patterns or the slippage of learning retention during school holidays when students do not use the skills or knowledge taught in the classroom. MB also expressed ongoing frustration at the lack of information about individual students. Student

assessment portfolios comprise previous report cards and samples of student work. Regular attenders had more samples of work and a completed report card. Students whose attendance fell below 50% did not have a report card and had very few work samples in their portfolio. Students whose attendance was infrequent and averaged at 15% or less often did not have a portfolio. As well as being frustrated by the limited academic information available, MB felt unable to teach well because of the absence of personal information. Teachers did not know which students had troubled lives nor the impact of a students' personal lives on their ability to participate effectively in school.

Generalised statements made by school leaders and expressed in student portfolios lacked critical details teachers needed to provide appropriate instruction and support for students. Confidential information from doctors, visiting specialists and the student support team are kept in a separate file with the specialist team with no record of its existence provided in classroom student learning portfolios. The lack of embedded school processes pertaining to information made available to students provides an opportunity for leaders to change school procedures that are not necessarily beneficial for teachers. MB had to wait five weeks until a member of the student support team informed her that she had students either diagnosed as requiring additional support or that an investigation was in process to verify teacher concerns that a student had special needs. While attendance data were provided as a percentage, attendance patterns were not included in this data set. Teachers had to find school time to access students' electronic profiles for information such as age, parents, siblings because electronic profiles containing this important information could only be accessed at school.

Another condition underpinning planning is data accuracy. When a student is absent from lessons, data pertaining to student learning and/or ability to complete a task cannot be collected. Student attendance affects the frequency with which a student can be assessed, thereby affecting data accuracy at the time of planning. Attendance percentages do not convey the number of hours in a school day, the exact days in each week or which weeks in the term the student has been in attendance at school. The teacher is then unable to align attendance patterns with daily planning that has been delivered to identify the parts of the curriculum the student has accessed.

Long periods away from western concepts presented in the classroom result in learning regression which also affects data accuracy. When students are out bush for months at a

time, they are in a context that does not require oral English, English literacies, or mathematical concepts learned in class. The lack of practice negatively affects retention of concepts learned prior to going out bush, such that teachers have to re-teach previously delivered content with those students who have been absent. When teachers record a student as having achieved learning outcomes, questions are raised about the ability of the teacher by the subsequent teacher when students no longer demonstrate the previously achieved learning outcomes. Tensions build among teachers when students do not demonstrate outcomes that have been recorded as being achieved, frequently contributing to a culture of blame and distrust between teachers, and school leaders and teachers that is difficult to change.

The conditions presented in this context create disparities between what the institution expects and what teachers can actually access and deliver. In this school, the conditions presumed by the institution and required to enable teachers plan, implement and assess student learning are not in place. For teachers to comply with institution demands they require significantly more hours of work that have not been anticipated by the institution when considering the workload associated with teacher practice. There are not enough hours in a day for teachers to comply with institution demands to the teachers' professional satisfaction.

***Theme 2: Inadequacy of professional development***

The second dominating theme that emerged as impacting on teacher practice was the quality of professional development (PD). Teachers are expected to participate in 25 hours of PD per school year to maintain teacher registration. The PD teachers are able to access can be either mandated or not mandated by the employing institution; endorsed or not endorsed by the institution; and/or provided by either the institution or a private service provider. The school formally supports teacher PD that aligns with the School Leadership devised Annual Operation Plan with time away from teaching and financial support. The school particularly focuses on PD to support staff competence in implementing policy and professional practices. PD independently pursued by teachers is rarely acknowledged or formally supported regardless of its relevance to teacher practice. PD is acknowledged when it aligns with the Annual Operation Plan that directs the schools foci for 12 months. PD ranges from short workshops to enrolment in longer courses and can be delivered by trainers of explicit PD packages, accredited training organisations such as a university or college, or staff with a particular interest.

In this school, literacy is a key concern because students do not have English as their first language and students' NAPLAN Reading and Writing results are well below national benchmarks (ACARA, 2016f). At the time of this study, there were a number of literacy PD packages in the market, each with their own advocates. Teachers are often introduced to packages but rarely receive the full benefits of training because changes in management direction lead to training usually being stopped before course completion. Because there is no consistency in leadership knowledge, skill or understandings of teaching and learning or context, leaders make decisions based on inconsistent experiences that are often not related to remote Indigenous education. During this study, the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Early Childhood delivered by CDU and a Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) course were endorsed by NTDET. While two teachers completed the Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Early Childhood, of the teachers who enrolled in the TESOL course, most were unable to complete the course due to school demands such as workload and lack of release time.

To illustrate the inadequacy of PD as reported by teachers, I provide a chronological account of the literacy PD provided during data collection. This account does not provide details about all literacy PD sessions that occurred during this study. Rather, I have extracted episodes that were inextricably linked and that provide insight into circumstances affecting PD provision in this school.

During the period in which this study was taking place, school leadership was responding to a number of institutional factors. These included the Rogers Report (2009), the NTDET transitioning from the Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) to the Australian Curriculum and renewed efforts by NTDET to address student literacy outcomes via the new Literacy and Numeracy Policy (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2010a). Each of these actions drew attention to the need for professional development to support teachers in fulfilling new demands on teacher practice.

The Rogers Report (2009), referred to in Chapter Two, was a study conducted about the quality of education provided by this school early in ***Year 1*** of the study and expressed concerns about teaching English and literacy and the newly developing curriculum. The principal also found teachers were neither ESL trained nor confident to teach English.

Additionally, the Literacy and Numeracy Policy required all Northern Territory government schools to "provide a learning program that maximises the opportunity for all students to develop [Standard Australian English] literacy and numeracy and meet territory and national age-cohort expectations as described in the Transition to Year 9 Diagnostic Net" (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2010a, p. 2). The Transition to Year 9 Diagnostic Net (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2011) drew on a program called First Steps Reading and Writing books (Western Australia Department of Education and Training, 2015a) and was aligned with levels of achievement outlined in the Australian Curriculum. Under advisement from the curriculum leader in NTDET, the principal directed English and literacy PD at learning about the Australian Curriculum, particularly focusing developing understanding about functional grammar embedded in the subject area of English.

During ***Year 2***, this school supported teacher learning to explicitly teach English and literacy through learning about the Australian curriculum emphasising the ESL status of our students. In staff meetings, we used drafts of the Australian Curriculum to explore the demands of English, outlined in English learning descriptors (ACARA, 2016a), English and literacy instruction in their respective classes. Because English was highly emphasised yet teachers indicated a lack of knowledge and skill about teaching English, the Principal introduced an accredited functional grammar course, "Language and Literacy in the classroom" (Dare & Polias, 2006). In my role as curriculum leader, I supported teachers to develop individual professional learning action plans pertaining to teaching English. I provided PD sessions for teachers by aligning the "Language and Literacy in the classroom" course to the First Steps Reading and Writing books (Western Australia Department of Education and Training, 2015a) in lieu of the Transition to Year 9 Diagnostic Net (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2011), and the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2016b) to tie all elements of English and literacy instruction together. Where possible, reference was also made to explicit front-ended assessment tasks, particularly in conversations with small groups or individual teachers. In the internal school review, two NTDET leaders noted a strength of the school was "the implementation of professional learning plans" for each teacher (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2010b). Soon after this report, a new principal was appointed to the school.

With the arrival of the second principal, the individual professional learning action plans and my support ceased (Journal, Episodes 413, 415). In the following year, a new senior leader was moved from curriculum leadership in NTDET's head office in Darwin to school-based support for this school and another nearby community school as per the 2009 Structural Review of NTDET (Ladwig & Sarra, 2009). And thus the cycle of identifying teachers' lack of knowledge and confidence in teaching English began again. The English outcomes of the soon to be made redundant Northern Territory Curriculum Framework (NTCF) were compared with those in the Australian Curriculum (Transcript 26, Episode 202). High teacher turnover prior to 2011, resulted in many teachers in 2011 having little to no experience with NTCF. Teachers from ***Year 2*** of the study had experience with the Australian Curriculum. During the PD, teachers noted the lack of relevance of the outcome levels examined in this session to the outcomes demonstrated by their students (Transcript 26, Episode 203).

During perusal of NTCF and the Australian Curriculum English documents, teachers in POD 2, with whom I was working, indicated a lack of knowledge about how to teach genres. I directed them to First Steps Writing books as they outline how to explicitly teach genres. The teachers indicated they had seen multiple copies of these books in the library. Tensions arose between the new senior teacher and me as she did not like First Steps and would not be directing teachers to this resource (Journal, Episode 440).

At the start of this study, teachers indicated a lack of skills and confidence in teaching English to students in this school (Journal, episode 328). In the final teacher interview, teachers again indicated a lack of skill and confidence in teaching English to their students (Transcript 29, Episode 263). This seeming lack of progress in teacher learning over a two and a half year period indicates inadequacy in professional development.

There were several contributors to this lack of progress in teacher learning indicating inadequacy of professional development. The first contributor to inadequate PD is teachers being unprepared to teach in a remote Aboriginal context. Because most teachers are not skilled ESL teachers, remote community schools are burdened with providing PD to develop teachers' ESL teaching skills. In Transcript 20, Episode 159, EB notes, "how much university doesn't prepare you" for teaching in a remote Aboriginal community school. All participating teachers noted how unprepared they were to teach English to remote Aboriginal students who did not have English as their

first language. The teachers stated that their lack of capacity to teach English had to be addressed by the School Leadership team because the institution had not mandated teacher qualifications in teaching English as an additional language during the application process for teaching in this school.

A second contributor to inadequate PD is the lack of guarantee that people espoused as experts and leaders in NTDET have the requisite expertise in either the field in which they are providing leadership or in their ability to contextualise their area of expertise to suit the explicit characteristics of Aboriginal students in this remote community. Teachers taking up leadership positions do not have the requisite knowledge or expertise. Teachers are aware that decision-making pertaining to PD is largely out of their hands unless they pursue PD at their own personal discretion and cost. When the institution provides PD, teachers are subjected to the interests of bureaucrats, externally mandate policy directions and institution leaders who are no longer in the classroom. Many institution leaders do not have long tenured experience in remote Aboriginal communities and lack the ability to critically examine the multifarious aspects affecting education in remote contexts. As noted by LN, opinions provided by bureaucrats or institutional employees who do not teach in classroom are flawed. He explained, "I struggle with people who weren't cut out to be a classroom teacher or didn't really want to be a classroom teacher being the ones who are making decisions regarding how we work and how we implement the stuff" (Transcript 7, Episode 32). The Literacy PD account indicates the disconnect between the leadership, teachers and the context. The leadership and direction of literacy teaching seems to be at the inclination of whoever holds the portfolio in the institution and the principal so that teachers are buffeted by literacy storms. The constant turnover of teachers and School Leadership results in a situation in which PD is not progressively augmented thus reducing the school's corporate capital.

A third contributor is a lack of understanding of the impact high teacher turnover has on professional learning. Comparing an outgoing curriculum, NTCF, with the incoming curriculum, the Australian Curriculum, with teachers who knew little about NTCF highlights a lack of knowledge about the audience. The senior teacher's use of NTCF reflected the systems lack of knowledge about the instability of staffing in a remote community. Rather than being guided by what the school presented in terms of staff

from all over the country, the senior teacher was guided by NTDET strategies to support the more stable staff in Darwin.

The inadequacy of professional development emerging from teacher practices with institution professionals indicates there are no easy answers in addressing teacher ability to teach literacy within this school but clearer recommendations could be made in relation to school leadership.

### *Theme 3: Deprivation of information*

A third theme emerging from teacher practices with institution professionals was teachers being deprived of information. In this community, government agencies regularly communicate incidents of concern with each other. Incidents such as deaths, fights between families or households, community meetings to address problems in the community, and removal of children by the Department of Children and Families are shared between the government agencies including the police, the health clinic and the school as quickly as possible. These incidents are stressful situations from which children are rarely shielded. The police, health clinic and school need to be aware of what is going on in the community so they are prepared to respond to potential fallout from these incidents. Additionally, some families require more support than others from these government agencies. Hence vital information pertaining to these families is maintained and shared across agencies.

Information about students is extremely important for teachers to know their students and how to teach them (AITSL Professional Standard 1.1). During the final interview, RH noted how little she knew about her students' world (Transcript 29, Episode 273). Because most teachers come to this context with little to no experience with remote Aboriginal students, they rely on the skills and knowledge of other staff including assistant teachers, senior teachers, senior leadership and other teachers. EB recalled her lack of knowledge about students and their needs when she first arrived at this school.

> EB: I blundered through [my year level] at the start of last year, going, "This is driving me nuts". Then I spoke to [senior teacher with over 10 years' experience in this community] and she said that's part of their culture. [Learners] watch [teachers] do it.
>
> (Transcript 21, Episode 174)

This episode is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, as a new teacher, EB was not given the level of support she required as expressed in her statement about blundering through her teaching when she first began in this school. Secondly, it would seem reasonable that a Senior Teacher with over 10 years' experience would be an appropriate resource person for new teachers. EB's assertion that she blundered her way through teaching at the start of the year before speaking is concerning because a more direct relationship with the senior teacher would have alleviated EB's blundering. EB relied on a Balanda rather than a local Aboriginal employee to tell her about Aboriginal culture. Given the high number of Aboriginal students, families and local employees in the school, the reliance on another white teacher for information about community practices indicates a lack of community presence in the school. Further, it indicates a school culture in which information is not sought from local people, belying institution claims that NTDET employees engage with parents and community. There continue to be tensions between who is authoritative and who is accessible in remote school contexts.

Events within the community also affect student behaviour and attendance. When teachers observe children behaving differently from the usual, they need to be informed of the incident to know how to respond to students' behaviour. Lack of information about significant incidents can lead to inappropriate responses from the teacher which can further exacerbate a challenging situation. For example, when a significant community member passes away, negative backlash from the community in the form of grieving and sorting out power relations, is often acted out by students. The teachers, not knowing of the death, put pressure on students to continue learning as usual and demanded students fix their behaviours. School leadership often do not pass pertinent information about community events on to teachers.

Teachers need to know standard responses to various situations in the community so they can be prepared to act in a timely manner either by adjusting their behaviours to accommodate student need at a particular time or prevent a situation from getting out of control. For example, fights between clan groups are likely to spill into classrooms, therefore teachers need to keep students from the clan groups separate as much as possible. A death results in the deceased's name not being spoken as per clan protocols. Fights and trouble in a particular area of town often results in students not getting sleep, therefore teachers need to know which students are tired and not at full learning

capacity. Teachers also need information to interpret how an incident may unfold and how people involved in the incident will respond either negatively or positively. Predictable patterns of behaviour need to be discussed with teachers, although it can be difficult for teachers to understand until they experience the negative repercussions of some situations. Communities can be volatile places. As residents in the community, teachers can avoid situations, support people appropriately or further exacerbate a situation bringing negativity and potential threats to teachers in general or to a specific teacher.

***Theme 4: Unrealistic expectations placed on teachers***

A fourth theme emerging from teacher practices with institution professionals was the unrealistic expectations placed on teachers by NTDET and reiterated by School leadership. During the final interview with teachers, we discussed the difference between what the institution expects students to be achieving and how students present in classrooms. When teachers come to this school, they are told students are below benchmark NAPLAN benchmarks. During the final interview amid discussions about student academic performance, BZ clearly states her initial shock at how far below academic outcomes her students were.

> BZ: How do you get a 10 year old with no reading to where the school and the department expect you to have that child at benchmark at a certain time? And it's like, "Well how do you go from zero to that?" And it's overwhelming sometimes. How are you going to get from here to the expectations of the school, the school board, everything? It's not a little climb like this [shows with hand]. It's a massive hill and you're like okay, where do you start? And sometimes I think support for teachers would be a bit more or maybe a few more PDs or something. To go back to basics to help the teachers, okay this is where they're at. Reality. This is where they're at. This is what we need to do. They will NOT be at benchmark by the end of the year.
>
> [Several teachers murmuring in agreement]
>
> … if you set [benchmark] up here where it should be, it's setting the teachers up to fail, and it's also setting students up to fail. And at the end of the year you go, "I have had a HELL of a year. Forget it. If this is what it's about, forget it. I'm not doing anyone any service and I must be a shit teacher. Forget it."
>
> (Transcript 29, Episode 256)

Teachers understand the curriculum as a progressive program in which teaching and learning is organised around subject areas and incrementally delivered from Transition to Year 10. According to the Australian Curriculum,

> the Australian Curriculum sets the expectations for what all Australian students should be taught, regardless of where they live or their background. For [foundation] -10, it means that students now have access to the same content, and their achievement can be judged against consistent national standards. Schools and teachers are responsible for the organisation of learning and they will choose contexts for learning and plan learning in ways that best meet their students' needs and interests. (ACARA, 2016b)

The institution sets expectations regarding what students learn and when they learn it. Each year, a child advances to the next year level in correlation with student chronological age. In this school, teachers note students do not progress at the desired pace set by the institution. This lack of students' academic progress at the institution's desired pace has resulted in a situation in which teachers are pressured to rectify the undesirable situation.

BZ's reference to "back to basics" could refer to any number of things. Evident in BZ's unchallenged reference to 'benchmark level' is the implied meaning that "back to basics" is often interpreted as basics of literacy and numeracy as a general capability required across all subject areas (ACARA, 2010c). This interpretation is supported by NAPLAN (ACARA, 2016b). However, BZ also makes reference to the school year during which time the teacher is required to teach all subject areas such that students reach expected standards. From this perspective, "back to basics" could be interpreted as reviewing a student's academic performance in all subject areas in their schooling career and identifying at what point in time, students' achievement standards began to fall below expected standards. This interpretation of "back to basics" would require teachers to revisit teaching and learning from previous years with students until they achieved expected standards.

The institution's expectation represented by the senior leadership's request that teachers get students closer to benchmark during a school year is a big demand on both teachers and students when teachers have a Year "5/6 class not even knowing the ABC" (Transcript 29, Episode 225). The institution  demands students and teachers traverse the academic distance between performance equivalent to an academically successful

Transition year level and an academically successful Year 5 level. Despite students beginning Year Five at an academic level expected of Transition students, teachers are expected to bring students up to Year five standard quickly. Teachers query if the institution and senior leadership understand the intellectual rigour during progressive years of the curriculum and the unreasonableness of teachers being able to achieve in 12 months what previous teachers could not achieve in five years.

***Theme 5: Negative judgment about teacher performance***

A fifth dominating theme emerging from teacher practices with institution professionals was the teacher belief that negative judgments were made by School leadership and NTDET about their performance as a teacher in this school. There is significant pressure on schools and teachers for students to reach national academic benchmarks. In a group discussion about students' very low academic outcomes in all year levels, teachers noted that current talk in the institution of education, across the country, puts emphasis on the role of the teacher as the major influence in a student's academic performance. This group of teachers commented on how institutional talk about the teacher's role in a student's academic performance affected them in this context:

> MB: We get labeled.
>
> NC: The pressure. The pressure.
>
> MB: And teachers aren't doing their jobs because students aren't learning. Oh, hello.
>
> EB: And now the government is going to pay teachers according to their performance.
>
> MB: And that's
>
> EB: Stack the odds against us

(Transcript 29, Episode 263)

In this episode, teachers express the pressure of being labeled as incompetent teachers because the students in this school are not achieving at or above national academic benchmark standards. NC identifies the pressure from the government, specifically the Department of Education, for teachers to get students to benchmark level. EB expresses a concern that teachers in remote Aboriginal community schools will not receive the same pay as non-community counterparts because their students do not perform as well

as their non-remote counterparts. EB further expresses her belief that the government, via the Department of Education, does not appreciate that the odds are stacked against the teachers in remote Aboriginal community schools in that teachers deal with more than just delivering the school curriculum. Teacher talk progressed to indicate feelings of being blamed by the institution of education for the educational failures of remote Aboriginal students:

> MB: higher up [school leadership] tell us, "We're not at benchmark. What are you doing?" And it makes you feel like you're useless and you're not stepping up. You might be a really good teacher, I mean there's some really good teachers here, trying their best, doing their damnedest but you go and listen to someone in [school leadership] say well this shows this, this and this, you guys are the teachers, hey, what's going on?
>
> EB: (downhearted agreement)
>
> MB: You know, we all discuss it. We all sit around. We've just discussed how, like LN just said, there's not one or two, five, ten things, there's a million things that contribute to the learning of our students in this community. You know, that.
>
> BZ: It's the reality.
>
> MB: But, how, how, are teachers meant to remain confident and do their best when they are in a way degraded, they're put down a bit?
>
> (Transcript 29, Episode 264)

At the bottom of the hierarchy, teachers have become the primary focus of questions about remote Aboriginal students' inability to perform comparably to non-Aboriginal peers and as anticipated by the institution. Because the majority of Australian students are able to comply with the conditions of curriculum progression in accordance with chronological age, anomalies are not readily accepted by the system, thus placing pressure from the top of the institution hierarchy down to teachers to fix the problem. In Australia, a quality educator is judged by the institution of education against the AITSL Professional Standards. Further, according to the institution, a quality educator is readily recognised by student academic performance as assessed by NAPLAN. Teacher practice is positioned between the AITSL Professional Standards outlining what a teacher knows and does and student NAPLAN results. When student outcomes fall well

below national NAPLAN benchmarks, the institution automatically questions teacher practice (Hattie, 2009).

Most teachers work in a range of different schools during their career. The time teaching at this school is but one part of their career. Teachers are conscious of how their performance is judged each year as it impacts future career prospects. Principals and assistant principals who perceive a teacher as being ineffectual in his or her practice do not provide a positive referral and can limit a teacher's ability to successfully apply for employment in other jurisdictions.

***Theme 6: Teacher welfare concerns***

The final theme reported about teacher practices with institutional professionals is teacher welfare. Concerns about teacher welfare were recorded in my journal and reported by teachers in episodes. Teacher welfare refers to teacher emotional and physical wellbeing. Teachers identified being witness to and victims of student physical violence. The violence, self-imposed pressure to be quality teachers and increasing stress levels negatively affected teacher emotional and physical wellbeing.

Student violence towards the teacher mostly occurred in the early years of schooling, where teachers and parents often work together to help young children transition from home to school. As an early childhood teacher, EB realised both students and their mothers required support to separate when students arrived at school and it became time for mum to go home or to work. EB developed the 'grab and run' strategy which worked in the long term but put her at physical risk in the interim:

> I do the grab and run strategy. I grab the kid and tell mum to run. [Laughs] Did that with [student 1]; he now happily sits and stays. Did that with [student 2] whose mum is an attendance officer. Yeah, so not sure which theorist that belongs to but we call it grab and run. I do the grab; they do the run. [Laughs] I tell them, yes your kid will scream and boy, do they scream. I've been scratched, bitten, kicked, punched, everything, but I say to the parents, "If you consistently drop your child with me every day and you walk away… You say, 'I'm going now, it's time for [class]' and you walk away, they will stop crying. It might be an hour, generally 10, 15 minutes. But if you do it every day and you're consistent with it, your child will separate from you and there will not be a problem.
>
> (Transcript 20, Episode 153)

In EB's attempts to support students adapting to school discourses, she introduced a standard practice in early childhood classrooms for separating a child from his/her mother at the start of the school day. During the process, the teacher was physically assaulted. Because this teacher taught very young children, she had to endure very physical responses used by young children to demonstrate their unhappiness at a situation:

> EB: I got told fuck you, fuck off, punched in the face, open slapped in the face to the point where I got tears.
>
> R: You don't take any of this stuff personally do you?
>
> EB: No. I figure it's stuff going on at home with the kids or they don't know better. So I just say to them, you don't say swear words to me in class. You don't punch your teacher, you don't hit your teacher and I just reinforce and go over, "This is a place where we don't do hitting. We don't do swearing." If they swear and they say fuck you or fuck off, now, this term, they sit on the thinking chair for three minutes.
>
> R: Would you consider yourself to be a particularly sensitive person?
>
> EB: Yep.
>
> R: So how do you separate yourself from these very, quite personal actions?
>
> EB: I don't. I go into my office and cry where the kids can't see me. Or I cry at lunchtime. Or I cry at home.
>
> (Transcript 20, Episode 154)

As attested by EB, teacher welfare is greatly influenced by student physical reactions to situations. Other teachers reported having to physically break up fights only to be warned by colleagues that touching students had resulted in teachers from other schools losing their jobs (Transcript 13, Episode 88). Because teachers are accountable for student wellbeing, they frequently find themselves on the front line of responding to violent and aggressive student behaviours in order to protect other students. Teachers are caught in a conundrum between removing violent students to protect other students and endangering their career because they have physically removed a student. In addition to responding to students, teachers have to plan, develop resources, and assess student learning which also takes significant amounts of time.

During this study, all teachers noted that they spent significantly more time on preparation and resource development than in previous non-community schools. In a conversation with QG and RH, having five years and sixteen years teaching experience prior to this school respectively, RH identifies the enormous workload associated with teaching her students:

> RH: Um I think I am doing lots and lots of hours. I always have but I'm not feeling like I'm making progress linked to how many hours I'm putting in.
>
> QG: That's um, yeah [in agreement]
>
> RH: And also the energy that it takes through the day to get children engaged, oh, I'm finding that really exhausting.
>
> QG: To then, after school to sit down and get your head around the planning document or whatever, it's too much, it really is. Yeah.
>
> RH: And the assessment even, that I said I was going to do. I haven't done it and yes..
>
> R: And are you beating yourself up over that then?
>
> RH: Of course I am. Because that's what I mean about the quality world and the reality world.
>
> (Transcript 24, Episode 200)

RH identified the difference between "the quality world and the reality world". In RH's "quality world", she would have been up-to-date with her intended daily schedule of student observations and assessment of student learning and children would be stimulated to learn. In contrast, in RH's "reality world", RH had not anticipated how hard she had to work to engage students in classroom learning and how exhausted she and the students would be during and at the end of a school day.

### 5.2.2 Summary of level two, part A findings

The ways in which teachers talk, act and relate to others in this school are shaped by other institutional professionals' knowledge, position and authority in the NTDET hierarchy; NTDET policies that direct school foci and what is and is not permissible in teacher talk, action and relationships with other; and the institution's ability or inability to cope with demands from the local community. In this school, teachers are irritated at

the lack of timely information provided by school leadership and are cautious of breaching institution protocols and procedures that could lead to them either being negatively labeled or losing their job. Teachers are confused by conflicting information provided at various stages in their career and frustrated at the lack of appropriate support from line managers and visiting NTDET specialists. Further, teachers are angry that the institution expects them to bring students to academic benchmarks despite the circumstances presented in the classroom which are largely disregarded by institution leaders. Finally, teachers are exhausted from trying to cope with the demands placed on them by both the system and themselves as they strive to prove to the institution they are a quality educator.

### 5.2.3 Level two findings, part B: Teacher practices with the Second Space

In this remote Aboriginal community, white teacher practices involving the local community are a part of what teachers do. Level one, part two findings indicated that of the 458 episodes that formed the data set of the study, 38 episodes were prompted by families (8%), 20 episodes of teacher talk were prompted by local Aboriginal employees at the school (4%), and 96 were prompted by students (21%). The low number of episodes prompted by reference to local Aboriginal employees and families in level one, part two analysis, prompts to teacher talk, suggest a lack of connection with the local community.

After returning to all 458 episodes for level two analysis that focuses on identifying the conditions affecting teacher practices, I sought episodes explicitly focusing on teacher interactions with the local community. In the first instance, I excluded episodes not directed at interactions with the local community. I then excluded my interactions with students because I was focused on teacher stories. One hundred and ninety-five episodes were directed at white teachers' practices with the local community. I further categorised teacher practices with the local community into teacher practices with families, teacher practices with local employees and teacher practices with students. Of the 195 episodes, 54 episodes were directed at teacher practices with families; 58 episodes were directed at teacher practices with local employees; and 83 episodes were directed at teacher practices with students.

Findings from teacher practices with families, local employees and students answer both research questions:

1. What are the challenges experienced by white teachers in a remote Aboriginal community school?

2. Why do white teachers experience the challenges they do?

Within each category of teacher interactions with the local community, findings are presented in two stages. During episodes of teacher talk, teachers clearly discerned teacher practices with families, teacher practices with local employees and teacher practices with students.

In the first stage, teacher practices with the community are described and contextualised. The first stage of analysis sought answers for research question one, although some insight is provided in response to research question two. In the first stage of analysis for each category, teachers' first hand experiences and my observations of teachers conducting practices with the group draw attention to the challenges experienced by teachers in this context. I selected episodes of teacher talk to illustrate the nature of the challenges providing the circumstances shaping the account reported in the episode.

In the second stage of analysis I look across episodes of teacher talk with that sector of the community and provide an overview of teacher sayings, doings and relatings with each category. Research question two is answered by bundling together the sayings, doings and relatings in the project of the practices with the sector of the community to conceptualise why teachers talk, act and relate with the group in the ways they do. Level two, part B analysis focuses explicitly on challenges produced by practices with people form the Second Space, the community.

***Teacher practices with families***

Fifty-four episodes provided insight into teachers' interactions with families. Findings for this category were analysed in two stages. Firstly, episodes were coded into types of interactions with exemplifying episodes described and contextualised to identify challenges within the practices between teachers and families. Secondly, teacher sayings, doings and relatings in their practice with families were deduced from the 54 episodes. These elements of practice are described and explained.

*Stage One: Describing practices between teachers and families*

While it may be assumed that teachers do interact with parents, there is no guarantee. Thus the first level of coding coded for no interactions as well as for interactions. Table 16 outlines the types of interactions between teachers and families utilising four levels of coding.

Initial coding established that four of the 54 episodes were about not interacting with families. Episodes indicating interactions between teachers and families were then sorted into direct and indirect interactions. Direct interactions (40) were defined as teachers and students' families sharing a "space of enunciation" (Bhabha, 1994, p. 50) while indirect interactions (10) were defined as teachers connecting with family through print media sent home with the student including student work, reading books, letters to parents, newsletters and report cards. Episodes in which a third person, such as a family member or another member of school staff acted as a mediator between the parent/carer and the teacher were also included as an indirect interaction.

Table 16 Types of interactions between teachers and families

| Direct Interactions between teachers and families (40) | | Indirect interactions (10) | No interaction between teachers and families (4) | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teachers going beyond the school gate into the community (10) | Families entering the classroom / school (30) | School material sent home with the student or a message is conveyed (10) | Tacit agreement (2) | No attempt (2) |
| Personal relationship with families (3) | | | | |
| Official home visit with the family (4) | | | | |
| Collecting students from the community (3) | | | | |

Direct interactions between teachers and families

Direct interaction involved teachers and parents engaged in direct dialogue either in the school grounds or beyond the school gate within the community. Students' families are a familiar component of school communities. Within this school, teachers interact with parents/carers in the classroom, in formal meetings and/or in passing in the school

grounds. In keeping with other schools, some parents/carers choose to have limited contact with the school. Unlike practices common in other schools, most parents/carers have limited English, have little contact with the school and do not update contact details with the school. In consideration of these factors, teachers do not always have up-to-date information about the relationship between the students and the adults who are taking responsibility for the students' education.

### Teachers going beyond the school gate into the community

To engage in direct dialogue with parents, teachers would venture from the school into the community. Episodes revealed that teachers sought dialogue with students' families for three reasons: to build personal relationships with families, make official home visits and tackle student non-attendance. Teachers went beyond the school gate into the community because it was more appropriate to visit someone's house with whom a personal relationship had been established; parents were unable to be contacted by telephone or were unavailable to come to the school; or parents, like their child, did not come to the school grounds.

The first category, 'personal relationship with families', results from teachers' choosing to establish relationships with families in their personal time. These personal relationships were formed by a private agreement between the teacher and the family suggesting two teachers' dispositions to seek and sustain these relationships. The second category, 'official home visits with family', comprised episodes in which the teacher visited homes during the teacher's work hours with the child being the central reason for the dialogue. Finally, 'collecting students from the community' was aimed at increasing student attendance and enrolments. The school principal solicited teachers to make contact with students' families by conducting home visits. Teachers were asked to remind parents to send their child to school, to find out why children weren't coming to school and, from the school's perspective, to proactively address student non-attendance before parents/carers were fined by the government. During this study, this community was one of the first communities in the Northern Territory to trial the Northern Territory Government's "school enrolment and attendance measure" (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), 2016). If parents did not have a reasonable reason for their child's absence, a process could be initiated by the school which included fining parents or suspending welfare payments until the child returned

to school. These three categories progressed from consensual and negotiated partnerships with families, to the potentially invasive and unannounced home visits, to the policing of student attendance by school staff.

### Personal relationship with families

Some teachers who come to this community build friendships with individuals and families from the local community. Rather than limiting contact to school business, these teachers enter into personal relationships with a family at the encouragement of the family. While the teacher may be on friendly terms with several families, one family will tend to care for the teacher, bringing him/her into the family. Personal relationships between teachers and families do not develop for all teachers but some teachers will build enduring relationships with a family.

During this study, several teachers made determined efforts to go beyond the school gate and their houses to build personal relationships with families in the community. These teachers entered these relationships with families knowing that they were crossing into another culture and that they would develop cultural understandings with the support of those families. Some families welcome these relationships with teachers while others do not seek such relationships. It is at the discretion of individual teachers and families to pursue personal relationships and this is neither supported nor discouraged by the school.

Those teachers who were building personal relationships with local families identified the positive impact of this relationship on their understanding of their students and their ability to create and maintain a supportive and safe learning environment. CR was employed at this school after her final teaching practicum in which a previous teacher who had become a lecturer at CR's university brought a group of undergraduate students to this community to experience living and working in a remote Aboriginal context. During her final practicum, CR and other undergraduates went with the lecturer to various homeland sites with local families and began to build rapport with these families. As a graduate teacher, CR explained how her understanding of one child developed through her relationship with that child's family and enabled her to respond to the individual child in their teacher/student relationship:

> CR: I guess I'd spend a lot of time with her family going with her family out bush a few times and I think just in class often she'd come in early in the morning you know. I'd let

> her look at the books in the classroom or whatever because I knew, you know, some kids I'm not happy having them in the classroom before school but some kids like her I know won't bug me and won't destroy the room.
>
> (Transcript 19, Episode 123)

Because CR was included in this child's family, she maintained her personal relationship and care for this student even when this student moved to another class in the following year. The teacher continued to be viewed as a support for this student and her family as the child came to terms with a new class.

During the final group interview with teachers, one teacher, LN, indicated his personal relationship with a family in the community provided him with insight into the students' lives to which teachers without these personal relationships would never be privy. By living with his partner and sharing her family obligations, he was involved in numerous experiences in the private lives of some community members after school hours and on weekends. In this episode, LN identifies his deeper understanding of students' lives than other teachers in the school who did not have connection to the private lives of the community:

> LN: 'Cause we [teachers] are well protected, hey. You've [teachers without personal relationships with families] got no idea. There's just no way that you can comprehend it, what's going on. And the stuff they [students] have to deal with.
>
> (Transcript 29 Episode 274B)

When teachers tried to probe LN for further information he was selective in what he conveyed to teachers who did not have personal relationships with families and lacked insight into students' lives. This proved to be prudent on his part as several teachers struggled to interpret what he was saying because they were using their First Space (white) lens. As the group interview progressed, QG asked if other teachers had a similar experience to her when talking to students about where they live:

> QG: How many kids ask you where you sleep? Not where you live but where you sleep... that really struck me at the start.
>
> LN: Or where do you stop.

Others: Yeah, yep, exactly.

QG: It doesn't matter where your house is. 'Cause that one could be your house, or that one, it's so there's no home. And so…

LN: …(inaudible) People in the home changes.

MB: … I just heard you say how the women run their houses. Is it the women that run them?

LN: No, no, no, no. There are some women, here whose houses are… (after being bombarded from several teachers about who runs the household)… a lot of people run their houses.

[a discussion about the role of men and women in running houses in different cultures]

LN: No, no, no, no. What I'm saying…

NC: You were just saying that there are.

LN: There are some houses in [this community] that the family, they've lived in, they do, they care about school, they care about their kids getting a good night's sleep. They care about that sort of stuff. And they do their level best as best as is possible, to get it run and I was saying that some of the ladies who are in here now are in that group. I don't know all the ladies here. But some of them do. They do a really good job…But there are a lot of places in [this community] and it's for lots and lots of different reasons like there are too many to get into now, but they don't or they can't run their house like that.

MB: Is it mainly the women that want that or do the men, some men want that as well?

LN: Mate, some men, some women. There are some mothers out there that, there are good mums in [this community] and there aren't so good mums.

MB: I understand that.

EB: But that's everywhere.

(Transcript 29, Episode 275)

In this episode, teachers sought to understand who is in charge of households in this community. Although the pre-service teachers from the community were sitting in the

room at the time, teachers seemed to forget their presence as they realised LN could provide insider knowledge to their queries about who is in charge of households. LN and I often discussed having to be careful about what we said to teachers because the teachers would focus on one word and go off on a specific tangent that neither of us had intended. When LN made reference to the pre-service teachers in the room who were also mothers and grandmothers in charge of households he was trying to make the teachers aware that they were othering the pre-service teachers, the people with whom they had made claimed affiliation and respect. In their desire to understand, MB and NC in particular did not take the hint and continued probing LN for answers about men's and women's roles in local households. When EB tried to get teachers to understand there was as much variance in local households as in teachers' households, MB continued to push for clarification as to women's and men's roles. Within this episode LN again made it clear there were many more variables at play in local peoples' lives and this was neither the time nor the place for those discussions. I know, from being in this setting, LN largely avoided teachers at social gatherings so he wasn't in a situation to be quizzed.

When I spoke to him about this level of interrogation from teachers, we agreed there was a desire in both of us to protect our friends and family from white ignorance. While we understood that ignorance could only be overcome with information, we were reluctant to provide information that had come to us out of relationships of respect and trust. We both felt we would be disrespecting the people closest to us be sharing private information about them. If local family and friends wanted this information shared, it would be from their mouths, not ours. Both of us had learned from experience that private information in the hands of malcontents and/or ignorant people was dangerous for both our friends and family and us. We had observed family and friends had been hurt badly by other community members and other white people acting on partial or decontextualised information. We believed teachers had to develop authentic relationships to gain insider information.

Official home visits (4)

In this remote Aboriginal community, the classroom teachers are expected to visit their students' homes. The Home Visit protocol is not a practice usually undertaken by teachers in schools outside Aboriginal communities. In attempts to improve student outcomes, school leaders in remote Aboriginal communities encourage their teachers to

incorporate the practice of home visits into their core business. Having taught in remote Aboriginal communities since the mid-1990s, I can attest this practice is the norm in these contexts, such that teachers who do not engage in the practice of visiting their students' homes are perceived by school personnel, including school leaders, teachers and ancillary staff, as not valuing relationships with parents. Encouraged but not enforced, teachers are asked to "regularly" make contact with families to share students' successful learning stories with them. Although reluctant to conduct home visits due to the amount of time they consume and the challenges of communicating with parents, most teachers persevere because they are opportunities to share learning success with parents. Home visits are also perceived as opportunities for teachers to gain insight about a student's home life and show a student and his/her family that they are seeking a partnership to provide optimal support for their child.

On occasions, angry adults in the community have been known to verbally and/or physically attack teachers and/or demand teachers' removal from the community. These situations usually, but not always, arise when teachers exercise poor judgment during interactions with families. This poor judgment can be the result of teacher ignorance about cultural protocols, teacher inability to accurately interpret a social situation or teachers simply making mistakes. Negative consequences such as violent behaviour, swearing at a teacher or repeated class disruptions are handled by school leadership who make contact with parents either by telephone or a home visit. Most home visits are conducted by the ST1: Attendance and Participation who has a sound knowledge of families and community protocols developed over her fifteen years in this community. Where necessary, a strong community leader employed within the school accompanies a school leader to assist in smooth negotiations. Teachers are discouraged from bombarding families with negative news about students as it has led to trouble in the past, with teachers being evacuated from the community.

Rather, teachers strive to align themselves with parents as an advocate for the child. Central to home visits is communication between the teacher and their students' families. The social purpose of visits to their students' home include:

- Building positive relationships with parents/carers who have limited contact with the school/teacher.

- Conveying student academic development and progress with parents/carers. This may be to report positive changes as well as concerns with teachers seeking to partner with the parent to progress student learning. Teachers partner with parents/carers to initiate homework including reading books and activity sheets. Teachers also conduct a home visit to deliver report cards so the content can be discussed directly with parents/carers. Additionally, teachers conduct a home visit to celebrate a learning milestone or event with a student by emphasising the success to the parent in front of the child to reinforce the teacher's pleasure.

- Highlighting issues (including physical, emotional, behavioural, health) noticed by the teacher, particularly issues that may be interpreted by the teacher as having gone unnoticed by a parent/carer or to support parental understanding of what the issue may signify.

- Attaining signed permission for a school activity (including excursion, participation in a specific lesson outside the usual school day). Teachers present permission letters to parents to ensure that parents understand what they are signing and to provide a pen with which the parent/carer can sign the paper as many homes do not have stationery.

In the event that 'bad' news is to be discussed with family, teachers are advised to sandwich this discussion between two good news stories so that they leave the child's family with a positive story about their child.

Notably, home visits are unannounced. Many homes do not have landline telephones and mobile phone numbers frequently change. Unless a teacher establishes a home visit routine with a family, home visits are not expected by families with teachers arriving at the family home as an uninvited visitor. Home visits are a somewhat 'hit and miss' affair based on whether the family is at home or not.

When teachers conduct a home visit, they take a school vehicle, which is typically a 'troupie' (four wheel drive wagon with the capacity for 13 people, including the driver) emblazoned with the NT Government emblem. Teachers are often accompanied by the assistant teacher with whom they are partnered in the classroom, another local assistant teacher with whom they and their students have regular contact, or a senior leader who has an established relationship with specific families. The teacher and the significant

other, usually the teacher's assistant teacher, strive to visit several students' houses during a 'home visit' session because accessing a school vehicle and finding time to conduct home visits can become difficult.

While the school day is between 8.35am and 3pm, teachers' standard work hours are between 8am and 4:20pm. Assistant teachers are employed from 8am – 3pm although the assistant principal can permit additional hours for such activities as meetings and home visits. Home visits usually occur during school hours when the teacher has non-contact time or after school hours during the teacher's standard work hours. The teacher negotiates when they will conduct home visits with the assistant teacher, their assistant principal and the front office. On occasion, such as the end of semester when report cards are provided to parents/carers, the assistant principal supports teacher/assistant teacher home visits through the allocation of additional non-contact time.

The involvement of Aboriginal assistant teachers is critical because they can usually speak several local languages and dialects. The assistant teacher is an important person in the communication process between the teacher whose dominant (often only) language is English and the family who often has limited English. Additionally, the assistant teacher, as a member of the community, understands and abides by clan practices guiding teachers in their attempts to establish and sustain effective relationships with the community. Furthermore, the assistant teacher often has knowledge about where the student is living at the time of the home visit. As members of quite large families, students sleep at different houses in accordance with family business. Also, many families are affected by housing developments in the community that address overcrowding and/or fixing run-down houses. When families are relocated to temporary housing, they often do not inform the school. As a relatively small community, the location of a family quickly becomes common knowledge within the community if not the school.

Home visits are not pre-arranged with the parent/carer and the primary parent/carer is not always immediately available to meet with the teacher. Life is full of unpredictable circumstances that can result in the primary parent/carer being absent for an extended period of time and therefore not at home when teachers conduct home visits. In the event that the primary parent/carer is not in the community, the assistant teacher usually knows other key family members and significant adults with whom the teacher can

discuss the student. If assistant teachers do not have this information, they can find out through their understanding of kinship and personal knowledge of family members. Sometimes, the teacher just has to wait for the primary parent/carer to return to the community because there is no other person with whom they can converse for reasons of privacy and confidentiality.

When the teacher and assistant teacher arrive at a student's residence, they remain in the vehicle. Most houses have upwards of four dogs to protect the family both at home and as they walk around the community and they are also used for hunting. Dog attacks are a prevailing risk in this community and as such, school staff are advised to remain in the school vehicle. The community perceives school staff remaining in the school vehicle as a sign of respect. It is disrespectful and dangerous to enter a person's yard and knock on the door. There are accounts of Balanda being chased from yards amid a shower of abuse for entering a family's private space. As the assistant teacher and teacher reach a student's house, they negotiate who and how dialogue will be initiated with the family based on the circumstances they encounter upon arrival at the house. For example, if there is no-one outside of the house, the driver will beep the horn to gain the attention of people inside the house. When a person, from toddler to elderly person, comes to see who is beeping the horn, the assistant teacher will either call out the name of the primary parent/carer or instruct the teacher to do so. If the person at the house door is a poison cousin to the assistant teacher, the teacher may be instructed to either drive off and visit later on their own, get out of the vehicle and walk to the fence to talk with the poison cousin or the assistant teacher may look away until the poison cousin either re-enters the house or leaves the house and yard.

One teacher, BQ, reported that home visits were not always predictable, even when supported by appropriate staff such as the assistant teacher. The poison cousin relationship made a home visit quite difficult:

> BQ: That was like when I did my parent visits in the first term. I took [assistant teacher] and I drove round with her, but then it was like we'd get to this house and she was like – I had to drive round the other way and park on a different side. I had to then – I couldn't toot that time because it would draw attention to her, so then I had to walk to the fence, but talk to a fella who had no English. I had to try and say I'm the teacher of your child, etc. So, then [assistant teacher]'s waiting for me to come back to the truck

> [troupie] so she can say to me ask for the [fellow's] sister. But she couldn't go like this [hand sign] and wave me over to say [ask for the sister]. She was just hoping I'd come back soon so then she could tell me 'go to the sister' because otherwise, if she waited it was drawing attention to the poison cousin thing. So, then I came back [just as the assistant teacher had hoped] and she was like 'ask for the sister'. Then I'm going back to this fella and trying to be like, oh, you know, 'your sister'. I'm like 'what's going on?' Then he goes off somewhere and just walks off down the community somewhere, so then [assistant teacher] could get out of the truck and then talk to this sister because she was able to talk to her.
>
> (Transcript 2, Episode 13)

BQ raises community rules of kinship as making a home visit a complex interaction between the teacher and assistant teacher and the parent/carer. Unbeknownst to BQ, the assistant teacher was unable to talk to the man who was at the student's home. BQ highlights her confusion and her need to fumble through the initial stages of the home visit until she could talk to her assistant teacher about what was clearly causing the assistant teacher distress. From my own experiences, when the assistant teacher displays distress without an explanation, this causes a level of distress for the teacher who does not know what is going on and is cautious of how to proceed 'correctly' and not exacerbate a potentially harmful situation.

Another circumstance that the assistant teacher and teacher must navigate is when people at the household are engaged in a personal dispute such as an argument. The assistant teacher will decide if this is a good time for a home visit or if they should try again later. The assistant teacher makes the decision based on how often the teacher has been able to make contact with the parent/carer, the urgency of the reason for the visit and whether the parent/carer is directly involved in the argument or not. Frequently, the teacher does not understand what is happening because almost all dialogue at students' homes is conducted in a clan's language. Clan languages are spoken and gestural. Assistant teachers are able to communicate pertinent information with people in the house through hand signs. Often the white teacher is oblivious to this form of communication because it is fast and less common in white society; therefore, the white teacher is frequently unable to decode most or all of the communication.

Most home visits are conducted at the vehicle or at the house fence. Again, the assistant teacher identifies which location is the most suitable for the parent/carer and the teacher. For example, if the teacher is fearful of dogs then the assistant teacher will call the parent/carer to the vehicle. If the parent/carer is happy to talk to the teacher at the fence line, then this will be conveyed to the teacher. Home visits generally range from five to fifteen minutes. The teacher and assistant teacher are clear about why they have visited the parent/carer and the parent/carer is usually brief in his or her response. It is common for the parents/carers to tell the teachers what they want to hear to get them away from the house and stop drawing attention to the family home.

If the person sought is unavailable, the teacher and assistant teacher make the decision to either find that person within the community or to visit again at a later time. Assistant teachers know key days that direct community activity such as payday, visiting specialists and significant meetings that involve specific individuals. If the situation demands that a conversation with the parent/carer is important, the assistant teacher will direct the teacher to drive to the shop or other location to try and find the parent/carer.

In the event that a critical incident occurs during a home visit, the teacher and/or assistant teacher reports the incident to their assistant principal or ST1: Attendance and Participation. A critical incident would include a dog attack, a personal threat, a suspicious story leading the teacher and/or assistant teacher to be concerned for the child's wellbeing, or following up a request made by a senior leader prior to the home visit.

Collecting children from the community (3)

The institution of education associates remote Aboriginal students' continuing poor academic outcomes with high levels of truancy. To address poor outcomes, schools are directed to identify attendance targets and strategies to meet those targets. Australian law requires all youth between the ages of six and fifteen to attend a public, private or independent school. In public education in the Northern Territory, at the time of this study, students are removed from the 'active' roll after 20 days of continuous absence to a 'passive' roll until they return to school. Even if the student returns for one day, they are returned to the 'active' roll for another 20 days. A student can only be removed from a roll when there is evidence s/he has enrolled in another school. In NTDET, student enrolments on the 'active' roll determine staffing numbers. In this school, where student

attendance and enrolments on the 'active' roll fluctuates daily, student attendance is elevated to a prominent school concern.

Addressing student attendance and subsequently, student enrolments, the principal solicits senior leaders, teachers and local employees to engage in direct dialogue with parents/carers about student attendance. As identified in the researcher's journal, senior leaders were required to actively participate in 'drive arounds' in either a school troupie or school bus with Attendance and Participation officers to discuss student attendance with primary parents/carers:

> R: Admin do 'drive arounds' to visit homes and remind parents to send kids to school. When we drive around we ask parents why they don't send their kids to school. Reasons include: no clothes; don't want to; someone is picking on the child; sore foot; sick. We try to negotiate solutions with parents but I feel like it is all empty air space filled with words not actions. Sometimes we don't get a reason just told 'tomorrow, tomorrow'.
>
> (Journal, Episode 421)

During the 'drive arounds', a senior leader goes with attendance officers from 9am – 10am to visit families whose name and house lot number were supplied by the ST1: Attendance and Participation. This list targets a specific group of students to increase their attendance. Senior leaders accompanied the attendance officers because attendance officers lacked the confidence to put parent responses in writing and also, they were frequently abused by parents/carers. Senior leaders selected one or two mornings a week to accompany attendance officers and recorded the reasons for student absenteeism given by parents/carers. These reasons were then included in data pertaining to the school's strategic plan to increase student attendance.

Practices related to collecting children from their homes and/or telling parents to bring their children to school are so entrenched in the school culture that it is referred to as 'rounding up'. 'Rounding up' is such a regular practice in this school's culture that one teacher reported visiting homes to ask parents/carers to send their child to school only to find out later that school for that particular age group was not compulsory. The following episode does not name the participant, the sector of the school or the number of students to ensure that the teacher cannot be identified:

> [unnamed]: Well, last year I started with [number of students] on the roll at the beginning of Term 2. At the end of the year, I had [double the number of students] on the roll and no-one thought to tell me at the start that [school sector] was not compulsory. The general notion around the school is if your [students] aren't coming [to school] you get in the troupie and you go round [to their homes] and round them up. So two or three times, I took my assistant teachers, 'Right we've got to find this kid, they haven't been coming, this one, this one, this one'. The assistant teachers would call out at them, 'You've got to bring them kids to [school sector]'. So they'd come and I eventually had [number of students] on the roll.
>
> (Transcript 21, Episode 161)

This episode testifies to the schools' frenzied response to increasing student attendance in remote Aboriginal communities. This teacher adopted the school administration's mantra of rounding children up without applying critical awareness of the age of compulsory attendance. Further, the school administration embedded the notion of student attendance as being of such importance without monitoring teacher interpretation or actions associated with increasing student attendance. Diligent in their duties, teachers can interpret principal requests to the extreme, particularly when parameters are not stipulated or monitored by senior leaders. This incident indicates a propensity for teachers to feel pressured to adopt practices that would be questioned elsewhere under the guise of 'doing what is best for the students'.

### Families entering the classroom/school (30)

Thirty episodes were categorised as families entering the classroom or school. In most episodes, teachers reported their frustrations at parent behaviours when they accompany their child to school. In this episode, two teachers told the researcher that parental involvement in the classroom is a controversial topic. Although as teachers, they are happy to see parents supporting their children, they are frustrated that parents don't behave in ways similar to those of parents in other schools. After having heard about a number of incidents, I reflected on what the teachers had said:

> Parents do the work for their child in class - reported by EB and MB. When the work is complete, the child gives the work to the teacher. There are tensions between parent, child and teacher in regards to 'who' is learning and demonstrating the learning. EB and MB think parents haven't had a lot of experience with these types of activities themselves, or they might be bored or they want their child to do well at school. Both

> teachers said if a child made a mistake s/he would rip up the work and demand another 'sheet'. While they could see a connection between students' desire for perfection with parents' desire for the children to be correct, they said this wasn't what school was about. I asked if parents knew that. Both teachers looked at me quizzically. They said that all parents know that. I responded, "apparently not". Teachers are distressed they have limited samples of children's demonstrated ability and are encouraging mums to drop the child at school and go elsewhere. My critical friends say it is the mother's role to watch their children. Parents don't want their child to be picked on by other children or parents.
>
> (Journal, Episode 395)

This episode highlights teachers' assumptions that parents know their role in the school/family partnership and that parents understand the learning process according to white society. The teachers' assumptions are so taken-for-granted they found it difficult to process a direct challenge to their assumption that parents know what school is about. At the time of this episode, the teachers found it difficult to understand that parents might not have the same understanding as teachers about a parent's role and a student's role in the teaching and learning process in a school. Although teachers noted that perfection was a priority for students, they did not consider that the perception of perfection equating with learning might be coming from the parent. Rather, the two teachers focused on parent and student behaviours as two sets of independent behaviours both of which were preventing them from fulfilling their professional duties of having samples of student work as evidence of student learning. They came to the conclusion that the parents were an inhibitor to student learning and sought to discourage them from the classroom. There was no suggestion that parents might be co-learners with their child from the teacher's instruction.

Some parents did have a good understanding of school. During conversations with POD 1 teachers, two POD 1 teachers, MB and BQ, noted they each had one Aboriginal mother who told her children why they had to come to school and learn to read and write. These mothers stood out from other mothers because they talked and acted in ways the teachers expected parents to behave in schools. This episode is noteworthy because it is the only episode in which a teacher gives a detailed example of the parent, with whom she had interactions, indicating an understanding about schooling in white society. As BQ explains:

> She has an understanding. She has an understanding. She says to [her daughter] all the time, "[daughter], no!" Because [daughter] sometimes has a whinge - not often, but once in a blue moon - and goes oh I don't want to do it or whatever. Her mum's like, "Oh. You're a bit lazy. I'm not going to do it for you. You do it. You need to read and write. You're not going to get Centrelink when you're older". She's got the whole schooling to employment thing. She's really good with the kids. She won't just work with her daughter. She'll work with all the kids.
>
> (Transcript 2, Episode 14)

Even though the student would try and get her mother to do her work, the mother would resist the child's demand and tell the child that she, the student, needed to learn to read and write.

### Indirect contact with families (10)

Teachers often have indirect contact with families. In most Australian schools, indirect contact occurs through school newsletters, notes home to parents, communication books and homework. In this context, indirect contact with families includes a weekly newsletter with lots of images; a 'brainy bag' program in which students take home board-games, children's books, activities and basic stationery; permission notes for activities away from the school for which a pencil is also provided for parents to sign their names; and students taking home work completed in the classroom. Students do not have homework to be done at home. Although many teachers have tried, and parents have made requests, homework and the stationery to complete the homework, rarely come back to school. Of the parents who request homework, very few follow through with returning it to school. In this episode, HX recalls an incident in which she sent student work and appropriate resources with an assistant teacher to a ceremony to support bush school. At the request of families attending this particular ceremony, HX and other teachers, supported by their principal at the time, prepared additional work for the attending assistant teacher to take and deliver to students during the ceremony:

> HX: But you know last year [prior to this study] we sent [assistant teacher] and … all this work out to [the students at ceremony]. And pencils, scissors, everything. And then I think it was [a Homelands teacher] told me, "oh they're not doing any of that". I never got anything back to see and she said … "they're just re-using the paper for their fires.
>
> (Transcript 12, Episode 78)

HX assumed the assistant teacher fulfilled the role of mediator between the families and the school and would take on the role of teacher at ceremony in a similar manner to assistant teachers being in charge at homelands school. As HX relayed this story, it was clear she was upset that work was not returned and frustrated that all of her extra work in providing school work and resources for students at ceremony came to naught. It is also clear that HX is offended that worksheets were used to fuel fires. Contact with families was not direct, therefore HX and the other teachers had to rely on the assistance of the assistant teacher and other community members who made the request for student work to be completed during ceremony. During ceremony, the assistant teacher continued to be paid because she was continuing her assistant teacher duties at ceremony. That nothing was returned brings into question whether the assistant teacher attempted to teach the students using school work and what happened to the school resources that then had to be replaced. Further, this incident substantiated the teacher's belief that any resources sent home would not be cared for or returned, thus supporting teachers' decisions not to send homework with students.

This incident resulted in upset teachers and cast doubt on the integrity of the assistant teacher that continues to this day. Because teachers did not directly interact with each student's family about sending work out to ceremony, it is unclear who agreed to participate in doing school work during ceremony. In this community, it is common practice for teachers to listen to a small group of local people as representative of the broader community. However it would have been more prudent to seek the input from the ceremony Djunguy (leader) as to the feasibility of sending school work out to the ceremony. This episode indicates a high possibility of disparities between the decision-making processes of the school and those of the community. In this instance what teachers thought was indirect communication with families contributed to a situation that left teachers bemused and negative towards the assistant teacher and families.

No interaction between teachers and families

Episodes indicating no interactions between the teacher and a student's family occurred for two primary reasons. Firstly, the teacher did not seek an interaction with the family because they were of the belief that they shared a tacit agreement with the family. In these cases, the teachers assumed that parents understood schooling business as an integral part of their child's life and that parents knew how to support their child's education. These assumptions, which frequently go unchallenged in most Australian

schools, form the basis of teachers not identifying the need to open dialogue with a student's family. In the instances where no attempt had been made to interact with parents, the teachers were consumed with school business and did not see the family as a significant partner in addressing issues that arise in the classroom or school.

Through four episodes, teachers indicated they had not directly interacted with families. In mainstream schools, it is not uncommon for teachers to have few interactions with families because teachers do not visit students' homes and some parents are unable to visit the school due to other activities such as work. Of the four episodes in this category, two were related to teacher belief there is a tacit agreement between teachers and parents, while two demonstrated the teacher not attempting to interact with families.

Teacher belief there is a tacit agreement (2)

During the final interview, I asked 'where are students headed in their life?' This generated a conversation about a child's life journey in this community, then changed into a conversation about the role of schools in society. While emphasis was placed on the role of schooling in the broader social context, one of the teachers indicated the tacit agreement between parents and schools assumed by the institution of education:

> R: Schools are everywhere. I don't think you've got any country without a school.
>
> NC: To manufacture people.
>
> [Everyone bursts out laughing]
>
> GV: Well, its fodder for the machine. You know. That's a strong argument.
>
> BZ: Trying to teach them life skills.
>
> FT: Trying to teach them how to cope with the world around them really.
>
> NC: It's a life skill.
>
> MB: Why can't parents do that?
>
> (No-one responded to MB's question)
>
> (Transcript 29, episode 272)

MB's response clearly indicates assumed role assignments between teachers and parents. While teachers recognised the role of teachers in teaching students life skills and teaching them to cope with the world around them, MB's comment draws attention to the lack of clarity between the role of teachers and parents in this context. Teachers as a manifestation of the institution of education realise their role in preparing students for the world they will live in and assume that parents also understand their role. Although the teachers were asked 'where are students headed in their life', no-one ascertained what students' futures were or discussed students' futures in relation to the purpose of the school. In a school where the cultural differences between the school (including teachers) and the community (including students) are obvious, it is interesting that no-one in the room clarified or questioned what school was preparing students for with MB's question "Why can't parents do that?" drawing attention to a schism between parents and teachers regarding the role of the school and the role of the parent/carer.

Teacher does not attempt to interact with families (2)

Because of the strength of art and craft within the community, the principal and I, in my role as curriculum support, introduced a New Basics task: Historical and Social Aspects of Craft (Rich Task, Suite 1) (Northern Territory Government, 2016b) to POD 2 teachers during Term 4 when teachers could travel to homelands with their students and their families:

> I briefly met with POD 2 teachers to inform them they would be doing the 'craft' task in Term 4 as it was a task that had been successful for students in Cape York contexts (similar to here). It had an arts/SOSE focus and it could be done in the afternoon session allowing time for teachers to pursue more intensive literacy and numeracy skilling in the earlier part of the day – as requested by teachers.
>
> JW responded that 'these kids can't do this task'. I outlined the task pointing out that students had to make a craft object and then work with their group to talk about making the craft as they engaged with it and to find out where it came from and the social aspects of the craft – e.g., entertainment, social/political statement, only done by men/women/children, etc. JW became frustrated saying his kids were flat out sitting down. I asked what craft could be done [that students would be interested in].
>
> (Journal, Episode 408)

Although JW had been in this school for 3 school terms prior to this assessment task, he indicated he was unable to do this task. JW could have asked families for guidance regarding a local craft the students could learn. Rather than focusing on students' cultural capital, JW focused on what the students did not have and could not do. JW demonstrated an inflexibility to adapt teaching and learning to the context and an unwillingness to try something new.

For the most part, teachers indicated a desire and expectation to interact with families. Episodes of teacher talk showed that most teacher and parent interactions occurred in the school grounds, specifically in the classrooms. An unusual school practice revealed in the episodes was teachers making official home visits with the family and school employees collecting students from their homes. Episodes also indicated indirect interactions with families were problematic due to language differences and a lack of shared understanding about the purpose of school material. The reliance of both the white teacher and local Aboriginal families on an interlocutor suggests school practices are not perceived as a shared project between the school and the community.

*Stage Two: Elements of teacher practice with families*

The dominating elements of teacher practice with families are described in Table 17. 'Sayings' conveys the ways teachers talk and think about families and their practices with families. 'Doings' conveys teacher activities with families. 'Relating' conveys how teachers relate to families. Although teachers displayed a range of sayings, doings and relatings with families, I synthesised episodes of teacher talk to identify the orders and arrangements influencing teacher practices with families.

By synthesising episodes of teacher talk, I identified the most prevalent challenges evident in teacher practice. For example, teachers do not speak any of the local languages but most teachers learn key phrases of a local language during their time in this community. When the data indicated an anomaly exhibited by one or two teachers, the anomaly was not included in the elements of teacher practices as it was not representative of the majority of participants.

Having identified discrete elements of practice in teachers' sayings, doings and relatings, the ways these elements of practice interrelate reveal three key influences to teacher practices with families: language differences; teacher lack of knowledge; and

Table 17 Teacher ways of talking, doing and relating with families

| Elements of practices | Examples |
|---|---|
| Sayings | Teachers use English to communicate with families<br>Teachers think local family households operate differently from their own households but not sure how<br>Teachers think that parents *should*<br>• know school is about learning through mistakes;<br>• teach their children health and hygiene practices;<br>• send their child to school every day;<br>• make sure their child is prepared for school (clothed, fed, rested);<br>• drop their child off at school then leave;<br>Teachers think parents stay at school because<br>• they are bored;<br>• it's cooler than home;<br>• it's a break from home; or<br>because parents<br>• are inexperienced with school work;<br>• want their child to do well at school;<br>• want guarantees their child will be safe |
| Doings | Teachers visit family homes<br>• to show families they care about their child;<br>• to share positive stories about their child;<br>• to find out why the student is not coming<br>even though they find it difficult to communicate with the family because of language differences and often feel like the parent wants them to go away. Even with support from an assistant teacher, the support becomes complicated when clan kinship rules impact on the ability of the assistant teacher to be at the house and talking to parents.<br>Teachers find family presence at school challenging especially when it has little impact on students' education outcomes.<br>Teachers are burdened by attending to requests from parents such as<br>• helping with tax;<br>• explaining government policies and processes;<br>• providing breakfast, lunches and first aid. |
| Relatings | Teachers think they support parents by<br>• giving advice about child health, wellbeing and parenting;<br>• intercepting violent adult/child practices in classrooms;<br>• explaining school discourses to parents;<br>• developing strategies to help the parent to leave the school;<br>Teachers are relieved when a parent doesn't need their advice.<br>Teachers come to realise personal relationships with families are conditional but are not always sure what the conditions are.<br>Teachers seek advice about families from other people. |

teachers and families do not have a shared understanding of the conditions underpinning learning readiness. Teacher practices with families are immediately challenged by the lack of shared language. Teachers take time to learn, if they have an interest, linguistic

features of local Aboriginal languages such as vocabulary, sentence structure, sound articulation, gestures, and socially shared rules of when to speak and with whom.

Challenges associated with linguistic differences are further compounded by teachers' lack of knowledge about Aboriginal people in general, and more explicitly, this community. When teachers come to this community, the differences between their culture and that of the community become apparent through talk and social interactions that happen around them, and the physical environment in which the talk takes place, particularly when the talk occurs outside the school. Teachers have little to no knowledge of local history, social relations between clan groups, nor kinship structures within and between clan groups. Thirsty for knowledge about their students' families and students' lived experiences, teachers often seek this knowledge from people with whom they are more comfortable but who might not be the most accurate source of information. Teachers inexperienced in cross-cultural situations often make assumptions about another culture based on what is and is not acceptable in their own culture. In this study, teachers used their own culture as a reference point to guide social interactions as indicated by the heavy use of 'should' in teacher talk. Teacher musings about what families 'should' and 'should not' know and do in regards to schooling influence how teachers interact with families.

As outlined in Chapter Two, information is a valuable commodity for the local community and is not readily given away to people until mutual trust is established. Due to an extremely high turnover of white people in this community, it takes years for a teacher to build the level of trust required to obtain accurate and detailed information about the community and families. Mutual trust also requires teachers to move outside their comfort zone to develop relationships with local families. Building relationships with families does carry a level of risk in each interaction, as teachers can unwittingly insult people by applying their social mores within the context of a different culture with different social rules. When trust is established between a teacher and a family, there is a tendency for the teacher to become reliant on members of that family to provide information with the teacher not cognisant of tensions between clan groups or family members.

For teachers in this school, there is a contradiction between institution assumptions about what teachers know and understand and the reality experienced by teachers. The

institution assumes teachers have knowledge and understanding required to accommodate student diversity and cater for the specific needs of Aboriginal students. Contradicting this assumption, this study found that language and cultural differences between the teacher and local families, teacher lack of knowledge of Aboriginal families and readily available, unbiased information make teacher practices with families a demanding facet of teacher practice in this school. Teachers don't have enough information about families or time to gather information to accurately inform other elements of practice. Further, formally arranged opportunities, negotiated between the institution and the community, are not in place to enable teachers to talk through new information with people who can and will challenge assumptions and misinterpretations in a personally and professionally safe environment.

***Teacher practice with local Aboriginal employees***

Fifty-eight episodes provided insight into teachers' interactions with local Aboriginal employees at the school. Findings for this category have been analysed in two stages. Firstly, episodes were coded into types of interactions with exemplifying episodes described and contextualised to identify challenges within the practices between teachers and local employees. Secondly, teacher sayings, doings and relatings in their practice with local employees were deduced from the 58 episodes. These elements of practice are described and explained.

*Stage One: Describing practices between teachers and local employees*

Locally employed Aboriginal staff fulfill the roles of cleaners, grounds-staff and assistant teachers. At the time of this study, the cleaners were all women and the grounds-staff all men. Teacher interactions occurred when cleaners came to a teacher's classroom and the teacher was present at the time of the cleaning. If teachers had requests related to cleaning, they usually approached the head cleaner who was a Balanda. Similarly, if teachers had requests related to the school grounds or equipment from the shed, they usually approached the head grounds-man who too, was a Balanda. Attempts by school leadership to employ a head grounds-man or head cleaner from the local community resulted in arguments in their respective groups leading to the request that the head grounds-man and head cleaner be Balanda to stop inter-clan disagreements.

In contrast, the assistant teachers comprised both men and women and these had the most direct contact with teachers. Assistant teachers were allocated to classrooms in numerous ways. In some instances, the assistant teacher was attached to a specific year level or room. In other instances, the assistant teacher and/or the teacher requested to work with a specific teacher or assistant teacher or group of students. At the time of this study, some assistant teachers were pre-service teachers, studying to complete a Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Primary (BTLP) (refer to Chapter Two). These assistant teachers were distinguished as pre-service teachers and were allocated to different classrooms to fulfill teaching practicum requirements. Cognisant of the politics amongst assistant teachers, between teachers and assistant teachers and the focus of each classroom, in my role as ST1: RITE lecturer I engaged in rigorous negotiations with the AP: Primary, class teachers and pre-service teachers to allocate pre-service teachers to classes. It is necessary to note that while pre-service teachers and assistant teachers were employed at similar classification levels in the school, pre-service teachers differed from assistant teachers based on their study commitments that included their classroom teaching practicums under the guidance of their mentoring class teacher. Pre-service teachers worked in classrooms for the equivalent of three to four days a week dependent upon their study load, while assistant teachers worked in classrooms all day, five days a week.

Fifty-eight episodes provided insight into teachers' associations with locally employed Aboriginal staff. Episodes were first categorised based on the presence or absence of a sense of partnership between themselves and local employees. The term 'colleague' is interchanged with 'local employee'. Due to the nature of assistant teacher's work, teachers had more interactions and were more likely to develop a relationship with their assistant teacher as reflected in the higher number of references made about assistant teachers than other local employees. However, it is not to be assumed that teachers only developed relationships with assistant teachers.

Teachers having a sense of partnership were defined as teachers expressing a sense of affinity, a sense of collaboration or a sense of 'both/us' when discussing interactions between themselves and the locally employees. In contrast, a lack of partnership was defined in terms of **no** sense of affinity or collaboration but rather, a sense of 'us/them'.

A thematic analysis of the content of the episodes expressing a sense of partnership produced three categories: teachers being given a skin name; teachers working collaboratively with local employees; and teachers seeking advice from a local employee. The episodes expressing a sense of non-partnership produced four themes: different expectations between non-Aboriginal teachers and local Aboriginal staff; teacher ignorance; local employees not having the required skill sets; and community obligations dominating a situation within the school context. Table 18 summarises the coding of the 58 episodes referring to interactions between teachers and Aboriginal staff.

Table 18 Types of interactions between teachers and local Aboriginal employees

| Teacher has a sense of partnership with local employee/s (12) | | | Teacher lacks sense of partnership with local employee/s (46) | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Teacher given a skin name (1) | Collaboration with local employee (3) | Advice sought from employee (8) | Different expectations between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal staff (13) | Teacher ignorance (3) | Local staff member unable to fulfil duties (23) | Community obligation (7) |

Twelve episodes indicated teachers had a sense of partnership with local Aboriginal employees. Forty-six episodes indicated teachers lacked a sense of partnership with local Aboriginal employees.

Teachers have a sense of partnership with local Aboriginal employees

Teachers expressing a sense of partnership took three different forms. The first form came from the local employees by giving the teacher a skin name. The act of giving a skin name is not fully understood by most teachers. The obligation that accompanies a skin name can be as minimal as ‘a name’ or as extensive as those obligations expected of a family member requiring regular contact and sharing resources with family. The second form was the teacher working collaboratively with local Aboriginal staff. The notion of collaboration in this analysis means teachers identify a task to be completed, consult their assistant teacher to devise a course of action and, together, act accordingly. The third form of partnership refers to teachers seeking the explicit advice of a local employee; that is, the teacher went to their Aboriginal colleague to seek counsel in matters pertaining to their understanding of the goings on originating in the community.

Teacher given a skin name (1)

When a teacher comes to this community to teach, a local Aboriginal staff member of the same gender usually gives the teacher a skin name to locate them in the kinship structures of the local community. In one episode, I indicated that this action provided me with a sense of acceptance and gave me a local person to whom I could pose challenging questions. However, I had been adopted into two other Queensland communities and initially believed that I had to reject the skin name as it would compromise my ongoing relationship with my 'families' in the other communities:

> R: Someone tried to adopt me and I said I am sorry. While I appreciate the gesture there is conflict of interest as I have family in [community 1] and [community 2].
>
> (Journal, Episode 377 part i)

I thought there was a conflict of interest as I had considerable obligations to family in the other communities and did not think it possible to stretch myself even further into another community. Also, at the time, my family was unhappy I had moved to the Northern Territory and I worried a skin name given to me in this community would be perceived by my Queensland families as a form of betrayal. At this point, I inquired further into the adoption/skin name process:

> R: I then asked what would happen if I came from one of those places. I was told I would still get a skin name. Well, okay then. But I need to warn you that I have family obligations to [community 1] and [community 2] and I don't think I can stretch the obligations to include [this community]. [The assistant teacher] respected that and said that she understood and that was okay.
>
> (Journal, Episode 377 part ii)

I accepted the skin name of the assistant teacher and informed family from the other two communities, relaying this process to all parties concerned. I continued, in this episode, to reflect on the positive effect of sharing a skin name with [the assistant teacher].

> R: I have a closer, more honest relationship going on here.
>
> (Journal, Episode 377 part iii)

This episode demonstrates how the assignment of a skin name to a Balanda opens pathways for communication between local Aboriginal people and Balandas. The allocation of a skin name is an act of acceptance into the group of people who share that skin name and also into the broader kinship group within and across clans in the community. Through sharing a skin name, Balandas are able to enter into dialogue and ask questions as they are accepted as learners within the group. Some teachers maximise the value of the skin name in learning about local culture thus developing a relationship with the person who gave them the skin name and other local staff. Most teachers, however, view the provision of a skin name as a token gesture because they do not hear local staff refer to teachers using the skin name. The problem is a mixture of teachers not recognising the skin name when it is spoken and teachers not being referred to by their assigned skin name until they have established a very close relationship with the person who assigned the skin name and other local employees.

Teacher working collaboratively with local Aboriginal colleague (3)

Three episodes related to a teacher working collaboratively with local Aboriginal colleagues with a defined sense of purpose. One came about in Transcript 5 when KZ and a pre-service teacher experienced difficulties in progressing their middle primary students to complete a front-ended assessment task in which they planned and delivered an Under 8s day to POD 2 students, aged 7-8 years of age. The pre-service teacher and KZ had collaborated to fulfill the planning stages of the task but realised students were struggling to complete the procedural text for their activity station in the Under 8s day which had to be completed before the Under 8s day could take place. Together, the pre-service teacher and the teacher consulted me in my role as Senior Teacher who had instigated the assessment task.

Prior to this conversation, the pre-service teacher and KZ had told me that they worked well together as teaching partners. In this conversation, the pre-service teacher and KZ again indicated they had equal voice in their partnership with tasks and issues of power equally distributed in the planning, pedagogy and assessment of this task. The predispositions of the pre-service teacher and KZ enabled them to identify a shared purpose, that is, of students meeting assessment task demands, and a shared concern, that students had reached a stumbling block that neither of them could resolve. They relayed to me the lesson that had led to a stumbling block in which the students didn't

understand the teachers and the teachers couldn't work out how to get the students to understand how to write a procedure.

As the three of us came together, the pre-service teacher, with the support of KZ explained the aspects of procedural text with which the students were struggling. While KZ talked, he was firmly in the First Space where print is normalised and thus the intricacies of print English were not apparent to him. In contrast, the pre-service teacher was acting out the steps in the procedural text while she highlighted the parts of the text with which the students were having troubles. As she spoke, her unconscious actions indicated her affinity with her students and her unconscious understanding of the problem. Neither the pre-service teacher nor KZ were conscious of the different mindsets they brought to the same conversation or that the solution was right in front of them. While KZ relied solely on elements of text, the pre-service teacher, unknowingly, brought a physical element to the text. Below is an excerpt of the conversation in which KZ and the pre-service teacher are trying to work out how to show students that a process can be recorded in a written procedure. Focusing on the process of paper quilling, the teachers were trying to get the students to move from the physical process of paper quilling to writing the process as a series of steps in a written procedure:

> R: You were telling me one.
>
> KZ: mm
>
> Pre-service teacher: Yeah [(thinking] put the pencil [starts acting it out]
>
> R: Yeah
>
> Pre-service teacher: And you wind it which one comes first
>
> R: You didn't just look at the words though
>
> KZ: You looked at the pictures
>
> R: But you didn't just look at the pictures. No, I'm talking about what [pre-service teacher] just said and did.
>
> KZ: Oh [thoughtful] okay. [Laughing – confused]

Pre-service teacher: Gee [laughing – confused]

R: Tell me again. No. I'm serious. Just pay attention to what you're doing. Just…

Pre-service teacher: I don't know. [repeating action] I picked up a pencil and wrapped a piece of paper around it.

KZ: Oh [understanding dawning] oh yeah.

R: Right. In mathematics we call that 'act it out' don't we?

KZ: Yeah

R: And if a child's not understanding something in mathematics they look at the diagrams, well you've just said they're looking at the pictures

Pre-service: The pictures

KZ: Mmm

R: They act it out …you just did it. As you were talking you didn't even do it consciously. You just started going how do you get [making a movement with hand], and it's like you you've just acted out the solution

(Transcript 5, Episode 25)

The issues experienced by students were beyond the print and involved students understanding the social function underpinning the procedural text. Students were having trouble linking the actions of curling paper around a pencil to writing the actions in words to create a procedural text. When the teachers explained to me what they wanted students to do in the lesson on the procedural text, they each brought their own understanding of the text, about texts and about the social purpose of texts. During the pre-service teacher's explanation to me about what she wanted students to do, she used actions, a typical local Aboriginal way of explaining something. During KZ's explanation about what he wanted the students to do, he used words and identified the role of pictures in the procedural text, a typical teacher way of engaging with procedural texts. While both teachers were technically correct, they needed to merge how they understood and explained the way to write a procedural text so students could see the direct relationship between doing, according the topic of the procedure, and writing the steps of the procedure.

As the pre-service teacher repeated her story, I pointed out her inclusion of gestures to act out the procedure while talking about the steps in the procedure. The pre-service teacher was using hand gestures that are dominant in Aboriginal cultures to gesticulate through the task at the same time as she used English to talk through the task. The pre-service teacher was unconsciously bringing white Australian emphasis on print texts together with Aboriginal students' emphasis on constructing the item in the procedural text with less reliance on print. KZ was not aware of the intricacies of printed English or the pressures placed on Aboriginal students as they strive to access print English.

While the ingredients of wanting to work together, having a shared purpose and a shared concern existed between KZ and the pre-service teacher, they were unable to co-construct a shared Space because they needed help to understand each other. It took a third person, me, to make the unnoticeable, noticeable; to draw attention to a dominant local learning strategy of 'act it out' before both the pre-service teacher and the teacher realised they had to support student text development by going beyond the print. A third person acted as translator by articulating observed similarities and differences in the practices of two people from two different cultures with different ways of saying, doing and relating to both the task and the students. The spirit and raw materials present in this interaction are referred to as a glimmer of Third Space. A glimmer of Third Space was defined as an event or situation in which actors from each group attempted to establish new practices and/or social arrangements to address issues that arose when members of the institution and the community come together. In this situation, the combining of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal practices was instigated by the Aboriginal pre-service teacher but were not recognised by her because she had taken this combined practice for granted in her style of teaching local Aboriginal students. Also, working together in the Third Space was not an articulated activity in this context so there was no need for either the pre-service teacher or KZ to be trying to talk about how practices from both cultures come together, or not.

Teacher seeks advice from local employees (8)

Teachers found themselves frequently trying to work out why students were or were not responding to their teaching as anticipated. While the school administration expected teachers to discuss challenges with colleagues, they did not clearly articulate with whom specific issues could and should be raised. During the final interview, teachers raised the dearth of knowledge amongst non-Aboriginal teachers about the community,

the Second Space. The final interview took place in the room where the pre-service teachers were doing their studies. When teachers came to the room for the final interview, they indicated they did not mind if the pre-service teachers continued working and could join into the conversation if they wished. I ensured that all participants knew this interview would be recorded and transcribed.

During the interview, conversation turned to how teachers learned about the students and the local community. EB, and the other teachers, who looked to the pre-service teachers for clarification during the final interview, identified the pre-service teachers as a source of information to help teachers understand the Second Space of the community. LN and I acknowledged that, unlike most teachers within the school, we had greater insight into life in the community from local Aboriginal perspectives because of our close relationships with Aboriginal friends and family in this community and other Aboriginal communities. In contrast, BZ noted teachers having knowledge about local Aboriginal perspectives was far from the norm:

> BZ: When you come up [to the community] if you don't converse with the community when you first come up here... I remember a little kiddy was falling asleep and I was like, "No, no. You've got to wake up. You've got to wake up". Unbeknownst to me, his family was sitting up late just with bonfires, just family visiting and stuff like that, but that's culture. I had no idea and I thought, no, no, you've got to wake up, you've got to wake up. Until somebody said [what was happening] and I was "alright". So when he has a bit of a sleep now – that's okay. But a lot of teachers, you come in from an urban area.
>
> NC: Really naïve.
>
> BZ: We don't know anything. And you're coming into a classroom and basically blind. I mean if you were going to Thailand or somewhere to teach you'd buy a book from Lonely Planet and look up what you're doing and what the language is. You normally research where you're going don't you. And that's what I'm saying about talking to the pre-service teachers. What better resource? The ladies here. Ask the ladies you know.
>
> (Transcript 29, Episode 276A)

This episode identifies teachers' reliance on members of the local community to help them understand the local community. The pre-service teachers were identified several

times during the final interview as a vital source for information and as a sounding board for teachers. The pre-service teachers had worked with most of the 10 teachers participating in the final interview. The relationship between pre-service teachers and teachers was that of pre-service teacher and mentor with the mentor (non-Aboriginal) teacher supporting the pre-service teacher to fulfill expectations of an Australian teacher. Teachers perceived the critical role the pre-service teachers played in developing their understandings about what was going on in the students' lives. Teachers did not, however, identify pre-service teachers as a colleague with whom a hybrid space with elements of the school and the institution of education could be negotiated. Rather, pre-service teachers were perceived as being aligned with assistant teachers who are perceived by the system as supporting teachers to help students act in the First Space. The pre-service teachers with whom teachers talked about their practice during teaching practicums were in a unique position where they were increasing their depth of understanding of the teachers' First Space while already having deep knowledge about teachers' Second Space, the community.

I had many years of experience and very close personal relationships with local community members both in this community and two other communities. During other episodes, LN and I had noted the difference of interpretation around the word 'relationship'. I noted that the institutional meaning of relationship was related to the teacher developing enough understanding to teach students under the terms set out by the institution of education:

> R: Every workshop, induction I've ever been to, these so called 'old hands' in Aboriginal education stand up the front and go on about how 'relationship is the most important thing'.
>
> (Journal, Episode 376)

According to the institution, the relationship between the local community and the school develops primarily through the teacher's relationships with community members, particularly those employed within the school.

During the final interview, during a conversation about learning to see the world as Aboriginal people see it, I explained to the teachers how I learned to look at the world through a different cultural lens. I recounted how I had learned by having a genuine

partner from the local community to challenge what I say and how I interpreted what I saw:

> R: [In another community] I was looking at the world the way I was used to looking at the world. There was stuff happening right in front of my eyes and I didn't even see it. So I got taught how to look. Yeah? Nearly all these ladies [pre-service teachers], when I tell them that story they kill themselves laughing. But it's not just about worldview; it's about the physical, different way of tuning in. And then I got told back [from the assistant teacher], our kids are expected to tune-in in particular ways in schools and stuff. It was a really new phenomenon for me in that way.
>
> EB: That's the sort of stuff that would help ALL of us teach in this context because if you're not TOLD how to look and what to look for, it just goes by because we are trained and programmed a certain way and how we've lived and how we've been taught and stuff does alter how you look at the world and what you look for.
>
> NC: And I read that induction book that I was given but hearing it from [pre-service teacher], it made sense. But reading it, I just went oh yeah, yep, yep, yep.
>
> EB: Because it's out of context.
>
> NC: But then when [pre-service teacher] was explaining everything to me there was an interpretation.
>
> EB: And she could say 'See this…' and 'When you do this…'. Whereas reading it in the book you're like [pulls face to indicate confusion].
>
> NC: It didn't mean anything.
>
> (Transcript 29, Episode 276B)

The participants in the conversation quoted above note that generalisations made about communities and Aboriginal people have little relevance on the particularities of context. EB further notes that teachers are trained to perceive the world and school in specific ways that are dissimilar to the ways the local community perceive the world.

Although this last episode was about white people seeking information and support from locals about their Aboriginal cultural Space, it also drew attention to the importance of a local support person awareness of how white people understand the world. In this last episode, I indicated my reliance on a local person to teach me how to

look at the world though an Aboriginal lens. My Aboriginal teachers understood the broader Australian culture as well as the culture of the education institution with which I was familiar. I was reliant on my Aboriginal teachers to understand both perspectives so they could interpret what I was and was not doing and knowing and teaching me what I required to develop my Aboriginal cultural lens. Further, these Aboriginal teachers were in a position to teach me because I shared my time with them.

The institution identifies local staff as being the intermediary between the school and the community. The institution expects teachers to learn about the community from local Aboriginal assistant teachers and employees, then local Aboriginal employees require the capacity to understand the perspective of the teacher, the education institution and the broader Australian culture from which teachers originate. Further, Aboriginal employees are called upon to identify what students and their families do not understand about the First Space. There is an assumption that local Aboriginal employees have the capacity and will assume the role of cultural and linguistic translator and are in a position of authority to share information about the local community. This is an assumption that requires further interrogation on the part of teachers, schools and the institution. In this study, it was only the pre-service teachers who had the kind of insight teachers assumed and relied upon. The pre-service teachers gained this insight by training to be teachers and having a lecturer with whom they could critically discuss ideas and observations of both First and Second Space and how they did or did not come together. Of the 18 teachers who participated in this study, only five stayed in the community for four or more years resulting in the pre-service teachers who continued their study having to reinitiate partnerships and develop the understandings of a new set of teachers each year.

Many teachers do not have a sense of partnership with local Aboriginal employees

Forty-six episodes indicated teachers did not have a sense of partnership with a local Aboriginal employee. Episodes revealed that teachers did not feel a sense of partnership for four reasons: different expectations of the non-Aboriginal teacher and local Aboriginal employees (13); teacher ignorance (3); local Aboriginal employees lacking the skill to fulfill their employed duties (23); and obligations to fulfill community cultural requirements (7). Distinctions made between the four reasons for teachers not having a sense of partnership with a local Aboriginal employee were based on how teachers talked about working with local Aboriginal employees. The first category

‘different expectations of the non-Aboriginal teacher and local Aboriginal staff’ was identified in response to teachers labeling staff actions as being acceptable or not acceptable based on a person’s status as either a local Aboriginal employee or a white teacher. The second category ‘teacher ignorance’ was identified through teachers’ responses to situations that required an understanding of the local Aboriginal perspective but which they appeared to lack. The third category ‘local Aboriginal employee unable to fulfill duties’ identified that the local Aboriginal employee lacked the necessary skills to complete their duties as described in the generic job description outlined by NTDET. Finally, the fourth category referred to episodes in which community (Second Space) obligations were prioritised by school staff over institutional (First Space) and/or school (in-between space) practices resulting in staff absenteeism.

Different expectations of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff (13)

Teachers reported 13 episodes of assistant teachers being treated differently from non-Aboriginal teachers by school leadership. This section has been given special attention due to the significance of ‘othering’ in contexts such as this remote Aboriginal community as particularly indicative of what happens when First Space and Second Space come together in the in-between Space of the school. While differentiation is expected by virtue of staff members’ positions, the differences in expectations evident in these 13 episodes were related to staff attitudes towards each other based on race. NTDET provides guidelines for staff in the Code of Conduct which states

> Individuals are expected to comply with all relevant laws, regulations, policies and procedures, be honest and fair, dress appropriately, act in a professional way that shows respect for others and models appropriate standards for students (Grauf, 2001; Luke et al., 2000).

In an incident between the principal and a particularly aggressive local Aboriginal assistant teacher who was also a Traditional Owner and ‘songman’, this assistant teacher threatened “to have all the Aboriginal staff walk out of the school if he didn’t like what was going on in the school” (Journal, Episode 306). Despite this assistant teacher not abiding by the code of conduct, the principal weighed up the situation and decided not to respond to this statement. Within the community, this man does have the authority to direct employees and students to ‘walk out of the school’. Given the very

low student attendance and the tensions between the 'white way' and the 'local ways' of education this threat resulted in the principal proceeding cautiously with all cultural (Second Space) matters. While the school had employed a cultural advisor to support staff understanding about the Second Space, this person was rarely at the school to fulfill the required duties.

More frequently, episodes indicated that leeway was given to Aboriginal staff for behaviours not tolerated from non-Aboriginal teachers. For the duration of this study, teachers noted that assistant teachers were absent from staff meetings and student free days. On the first student free day of ***Year 2***, I noted that almost all of the assistant teachers, with the exception of three out of a potential fifteen assistant teachers, were absent. Seeking to find out where the assistant teachers were, I was told by the three assistant teachers "that they had been told school doesn't start until Wednesday when the kids come back" (Journal, Episode 342). At the time of this incident, school leadership was intent on building collegiality among all staff members. The first student free day of the school year is utilised to set the tone for the school year. Contrary to the school leadership's objective, the business manager who was the line manager for the assistant teachers, told assistant teachers not to return to work until the students returned which was the following day. The business manager made an assumption based on prior patterns of what assistant teachers did and did not do in previous years. This action by the business manager undermined an important aspect of the school's annual operation plan and established differentiation in expectations regarding staff attendance and participation between assistant teachers and registered teachers.

During the first four months of this study, the principal made a point of all staff being dressed appropriately as role models for students. Teachers disagreed with this request believing this was "excluding students because they don't have shoes or clothes at home" (Journal, Episode 327). The principal pointed out that many parents prioritised activities such as smoking, drinking, gambling and toys over children being dressed and shoed. In discussions with YuyaBol, some Aboriginal staff agreed with the principal's viewpoint, also providing accounts of families demonstrating the behaviours identified by the principal. Interestingly, a week after this meeting, some of those same Aboriginal people who had agreed with the principal during the YuyaBol meeting were talking about how racist the Principal was because "she expected everyone to dress white" (Journal, Episode 327).

Contrary to staff belief that clothing and footwear was a black/white issue, the principal was making requests, particularly about footwear because it is a critical aspect of occupational health and safety and, as the school leader, the principal is ultimately accountable for all school community members to abide by laws and policies associated with occupational health and safety. Ironically, if a student or staff member cut a foot because of the lack of footwear, this would need to be officially documented by the school. Some staff, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, disregarded, either knowingly or unknowingly, the legal ramifications of abiding by the dress code in the *Code of Conduct* (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2008, p. 2).

Coinciding with this incident was another observation that hinted at teacher attitudes towards Aboriginal staff. Within this school, language barriers between local staff and white teachers enabled a small number of white teachers to take positions of authority either speaking on behalf of 'others' or influencing the thoughts of 'others'. During this study, I observed a few Aboriginal staff looking to one white teacher for direction. On a number of occasions, I observed this teacher give a signal to these Aboriginal staff who would then stand up and begin making political statements that were unclear and unrelated to the meeting taking place. Further, I observed white teacher reactions that ranged from a look of "here we go again" to utter confusion as to why Aboriginal staff were talking. Rather than helping Aboriginal people to have valued input in meetings and discussion, this white teacher was creating a situation in which Aboriginal speakers were not being listened to or heard. I noted in my journal my concerns about the relationship between this teacher and this small number of Aboriginal staff.

> R: There is a distinct sense of one staff member directing what Aboriginal staff say and do. This is disturbing as it opposes my values of equal rights and people having the capacity to have their own thoughts and beliefs by making their own judgments. This [situation set up by one staff member] feels dangerous and subversive. It makes it difficult to discern what is the individual's concern/idea/resistance and what is someone else's concern/idea/resistance.
>
> (Journal, Episode 329)

As relayed in this episode, oppression comes in many forms and can be established through the perceived 'good intentions' of an ally. This situation is complex, as many local employees have limited English skills and lack confidence, relying on allies with

English competency to explain the meaning of information delivered in English. This act of translation is rarely neutral with translations being provided and shaped through the translator's biases and opinions regarding matters pertinent to the information. Alternatively, if someone does not help local Aboriginal people with the meaning of information provided in English, they are perceived as unhelpful and are then ignored.

Numerous incidents revealed paternalism from Balanda staff towards Aboriginal staff. In another incident, most teachers were skeptical about local assistant teachers becoming qualified and registered teachers through the Remote Indigenous Teacher Education course. In contrast, other teachers believed that 'coming to school every day' indicated potential candidature (Episode 337, Journal). Other episodes, recorded in my journal, indicated that historical, social arrangements between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians continued to influence staff perceptions of each other:

> R: Aboriginal staff are treated abysmally. There is a real sense of paternalism in the relationships between teachers and assistant teachers. There is a blanket of lies here that is being named 'political correctness'. Teacher aides are being told to their face they are doing a great job then being run down behind their backs.
>
> (Journal, Episode 314)

Unbeknownst to most white teachers, Aboriginal staff comprise highly respected community leaders. Some of these leaders wield significant power in this community, as illustrated earlier in this section. For the most part, local staff ignore the paternalism realising teachers who treat local staff badly will soon leave the school and the community. Some behaviours by non-Aboriginal staff are overlooked by the school's senior leaders because he or she has highly valued skills the school cannot afford to lose. Rarely is a non-Aboriginal staff member held to account for the way he or she treats or talks about local staff. When another teacher does hold a person accountable for inappropriate behaviours, dissension is often created amongst the staff.

One interaction between an assistant teacher and me, the researcher, indicated the culture of 'othering' was not limited to non-Aboriginal teachers 'othering' local Aboriginal employees. In ***Year 2,*** there was an unusually high number of deaths within the community averaging at least one per week. The strain from this amount of personal loss was evident in the talk of all school staff. One day, I was talking to the pre-service

teachers about the high number of deaths and the impact of this on people's wellbeing. One of the pre-service teachers interpreted how different groups feel about death:

> R: [Pre-service teacher] told me white people don't feel death the way 'we' do. I asked her what that meant. She said when black people die they feel it deeply. I told her about my mum passing away in 2006 expressing my continued grief [four years later]. I was really angry [pre-service teacher] used colour of skin to decide who is hurt by death.
>
> (Journal, Episode 374)

When this incident occurred, I did not show my anger because I was in shock and I quickly realised the futility of talking to this person about this belief in a direct manner because she was quick to anger and her English, which was the only language I shared with my students, albeit inequitably, was limited. This episode is an example of the misunderstandings that occur between two different cultural groups and the lack of forums available to state and discuss these misunderstandings. Another interpretation of this episode could suggest that it is an example of how misunderstandings lead to expressions of racism.

Throughout this study, teachers frequently expressed the personal impact of isolation from their family and friends such that I noted in one journal entry:

> R: Teachers are missing their family and friends – the people who make their life normal. I hear Aboriginal people and Aboriginal education 'experts' talk about the importance of relationships and it is so one-sided, like white people don't have the same need for relationships. I think this is an example of focusing on one and not the other. I've been reading heaps and reflecting on what is going on here – and what I've experienced in other contexts. There is a lot that is not discussed about the teachers.
>
> (Journal, Episode 373)

In very remote Aboriginal communities such as the context for this study, there is so much emphasis on local students and local development that the social and emotional needs of teachers receive little attention. Misunderstandings between local Aboriginal employees and their families and teachers contribute to the ostracism felt by teachers.

Teacher ignorance (3)

When teachers accept a position teaching in a school, it is anticipated by the institution of education that they know the context in which they teach and there is appropriate induction at the school level. Further, there is an unspoken understanding that the values, beliefs, attitudes and practices of people from the community context and the school are closely aligned. Three episodes indicate that a situation can quickly escalate when a teacher is ignorant about their location and their positioning as a white Australian within an Aboriginal community. Teachers do not understand the impact of limited resources on how Aboriginal people live their lives in this community. Teacher ignorance is complex terrain because institutional value judgments about the teacher do not include his/her ability to incorporate local Aboriginal practices, inherent in Second Space into the First Space of a standard Australian school. To negotiate and blend the idiosyncrasies of First and Second Spaces is the subject of this thesis and, as such, is proving to be beyond the scope of the institution, at this point in time, and not given the salutation by the institution to be worthwhile committing teacher time and energy to. Teachers are accountable to enacting policies and standards that are not inclusive of clan voices and practices. Rather, attention to many Second Space particularities often become a distraction to teachers getting on with their real job of teaching students.

Within this community, housing is a precious commodity. At the time of this study there were 32 teacher houses that increased to 38 in 2011. To support the pre-service teacher program, two assistant teachers, who were sisters and lacked housing within the community, as their time was divided between this community and an eastern state capital city, were provided with a teacher house. During 2011, teachers were increasingly vocal about the inappropriateness of these non-teachers having teacher housing while some teachers had to share accommodation. Some teachers refused to share with other teachers resulting in the usual teachers agreeing to share their non-share assigned houses. Teacher disgruntlement at Aboriginal pre-service teachers being in teacher housing resulted in a negative undercurrent between several white teachers and the Aboriginal pre-service teachers. Given the presence of the pre-service teachers within the school and the assistance pre-service teachers willingly gave to teachers in their own time, this teacher disgruntlement resulted in a number of pre-service teachers withdrawing their support to those teachers raising the concern.

The pressure from teachers was so intense that these two pre-service teachers reacted to what they perceived as teachers acting 'precious' when the rest of the community and the pre-service teachers' family, were doing it tough:

> R: [pre-service teacher started shouting] "these teachers have no idea they are alive and that they need to work out how good they have it and that they live like kings in this place. [Teachers] have more rights than the people who own the country". The other pre-service teacher was quieter about it but upset that people come to this community and expect everything to be like Brisbane or Darwin. They both agreed that most teachers have no idea what it is like for a family to live in one room; to have no hot water or electricity or air conditioner on a hot night when you can't sleep; for a kid to have to go and find their own food because the adults are all sitting in the gambling circle instead of spending money on food; to have to buy food every day because there is no fridge; to be hit by a bully because you have money that you have saved for your family and they have spent their money on drugs and alcohol or gambling. The pre-service teachers cannot believe how selfish some teachers are when they get free housing and electricity but refuse to share.
>
> (Journal, Episode 425)

We discussed during lectures that teachers were largely uninformed about the living circumstances of the community to which the pre-service teachers pointed out that teachers "are naïve. They don't come out of their houses unless they go to work or the store. They have blinkers on. They don't want to see it" (Pre-service teacher in Journal, Episode 425). When I pointed out that teachers might be overwhelmed the response was a resounding "they should open their eyes. We have to" (Pre-service teacher in Journal, Episode 425). The pre-service teachers concluded that they needed teachers to withhold judgment and develop understanding so they could help people rather than [responding negatively] to things they thought they could control like local Aboriginal employees accessing teacher housing.

The pre-service teachers were under intense pressure completing the tertiary course as full time students, teaching in classrooms part time and meeting the pressures from family related matters. Hearing teachers complain about them directly and via rumours passed from one person to the next, the pre-service teachers were loath to support teachers particularly those who were complaining about how hard their life was. Teachers did not appreciate that their complaints further fuelled divisions between

community and the school and maintained the existing 'them and us' attitude. While this episode appeared as an isolated incident in the data, the pre-service teachers reached breaking point and were no longer able or willing to tolerate teacher ignorance. Pre-service teachers distanced themselves, both professionally and personally, from teachers they perceived as being ignorant.

Local Aboriginal employees unable to fulfil duties (23)

Twenty-three episodes in the data set concerned local Aboriginal employees, particularly assistant teachers, being unable to fulfill their duties of employment. Assistant teacher duties include helping teachers with language and cultural differences, supporting student learning and assisting with behaviour management. This category included episodes in which teachers spoke about the lack of English, lack of necessary skills to do the job, unreliable work attendance or participation, and the consequential pressures that poorly skilled ancillary staff placed on teacher workloads.

Numerous episodes in this category identified the low literacy and numeracy of the assistant teachers. Assistant teachers were employed to support teachers in their task of teaching English as an additional language to their Aboriginal language-speaking students. Teachers' assumptions that their assistant teacher knew the students' language/s and academic English associated with the curriculum were quickly proved incorrect when teachers realised that many assistant teachers were unable to read and write and did not have the required English and, in many instances, only spoke one of the three dominant Aboriginal languages in the community. In the following episode, I make reference to assistant teacher reading levels. In this school, reading is assessed using the PM Benchmark kit (Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2008). PM is a collection of leveled reading books that increase in complexity from level one to level 30 (Smith, 2008). When a student attains PM level 30 they are considered to be an independent reader. In urban settings most students reach PM level 30 between the end of Year 3 and the middle of Year 4. Students require level 30 to manage the increasing literacy demands of the curriculum from Year 4 onwards.

In this community, most students and adults have low reading levels. As noted in my journal:

> R: Teachers come to this community assuming assistant teachers help students learn in the classroom and help teachers to make resources and prepare for lessons. They

> discover some assistant teachers are barely print literate; and some have several languages but are unable to construct a sentence or text in grammatically correct English. When the teacher asks the assistant teacher to read to students, the assistant teacher frequently cannot read above PM benchmark level 15.
>
> (Journal, Episode 444A)

Due to assistant teachers' low literacy and numeracy levels, teachers were unable to assign tasks to assistant teachers such as daily reading with students, reading instructions for group tasks, supporting students with English and mathematics tasks or being classroom role models for using English and engaging in the curriculum. As noted by CR "my assistant teacher is careful with her writing and quite slow so I don't get [AT] to do a lot of modeled or guided writing with students" (Transcript 19, Episode 118). According to CR, students were unable to gain fundamental support from their local Aboriginal educators. Students were inadvertently receiving the message that while the white teacher talked about reading and writing for employment, Aboriginal assistant teachers, who were also family members, did not need to read and write to gain employment. Adding further to teachers' workload, assistant teachers frequently asked teachers to complete the assistant teachers' timesheets (Episode 116, Transcript 19). For many teachers, assistant teachers who were making the effort to improve their English and mathematics, frequently sought assistance from their classroom teachers. These teachers felt obliged to support assistant teachers' in their enrolled courses negotiated by school leadership (Episode 444B, Journal) thus adding more work to their heavy workload.

Teachers raised concerns about the provision of professional learning for assistant teachers during school hours. Teachers reported being left alone in the classroom when assistant teachers went to workshops and courses to improve their literacy, numeracy and skills. Teachers noted that negative student behaviours escalated when the assistant teacher was absent (Episode 90, Transcript 13). They also observed that assistant teachers' skill did not improve despite the workshops and that visiting trainers failed to communicate with the classroom teacher unless the teacher sought out the trainer (Episode 16A, Transcript 2). On some occasions, assistant teachers were denied training because their literacy levels were too low (Episode 16B, Transcript 1).

The assistant teachers' lack of skill or attention to their duties was evident in recurring reports from EB. EB reported the following typical practices:

> EB: My assistant teachers help themselves to breakfast after being told that breakfast is for children only or they go to lunch and don't return to work. One assistant teacher will only look after her own child when she is paid to look after all [class] students. I even have assistant teachers smoking in preschool next to a sign that says no smoking.
>
> (Journal, Episode 445)

EB, like other teachers, reported having to tell the assistant teachers to do the same thing every day and limiting the type and number of jobs assigned to the assistant teachers (Episode 163, Transcript 21). Other teachers besides EB had the same lament.

Teachers noted assistant teachers' lack of time management skills made a partnership with their assistant teacher difficult. Teachers reported numerous incidences of assistant teachers not coming to work, arriving late and leaving early without communicating with their teacher or the school. This lack of assistant teacher attendance resulted in teachers being unable to plan with their assistant teacher or rely on their presence to complete a task so that when they did arrive, the teacher often had nothing for the assistant teacher to do, thus furthering a cycle of the assistant teacher not performing duties associated with their role.

Cleaners' lack of skills and fulfillment of duties also put pressure on teachers to clean their own classrooms:

> R: Cleaners don't clean. [The head cleaner who is a Balanda] was employed to train cleaning staff. They sit and watch her while she does the cleaning. Teachers have to clean their own classrooms. The Principal said that if teachers put all of their efforts into [cleaning classrooms] instead of core business [teaching and learning] then teachers would be given a 'please explain'. This is fine to say but the fleas in the carpet are disgusting. The carpet smells (when was it cleaned last?) because of spilled food and drink and mice faeces and urine. There are mice in the classrooms. I cannot believe children are being made to learn in this environment.
>
> (Journal, Episode 430)

After almost a year, the head cleaner finally gave up trying to train cleaners. On the Christmas break, between ***Year 1*** and ***Year 2*** of the study, the Principal employed two non-Indigenous university students for two weeks to gurney all buildings inside and out. Toilets were particularly focused on as these areas were constantly fouled by faeces and urine on walls and floors, and in areas outside the toilet suite and urinals. The smell of faeces and urine was often overwhelming when walking past the toilet block. While this end of year clean was beneficial, the positive effects did not last long.

Community obligations prioritised over work (7)

In a discussion about assistant teachers' inability to fulfill their duties, three POD 1 teachers identified obligations to family and other community activities as interfering with assistant teachers fulfilling employment obligations. Teachers identified the positive impact of assistant teachers when in the classroom but believed assistant teachers prioritised family and community over employment obligations resulting in numerous absences from the classroom. POD 1 teachers discussed the conflicting roles faced by their assistant teachers:

> HX: [A visiting trainer providing professional learning for assistant teachers] took [assistant teacher 1] as well. She only had to finish a little bit [of course materials] too, but she never comes.
>
> BQ: [assistant teacher 2] is good when she's here, but she's heavily involved with that last young fella [who passed away].
>
> HX: You know what? [assistant teacher 1] is the local babysitter, I think, for her...
>
> R: Yeah.
>
> HX: Yeah she is.
>
> R: She's always got kids in tow.
>
> HX: She was coming with them and it wasn't working out.

(Transcript 2, Episode 18)

HX's assistant teacher was a mother and grandmother whose primary role in the family was to care for young children. Despite being valued in the classroom and school as

HX's collaborative teaching partner, the assistant teacher could not simultaneously be an assistant teacher and carer of young children. As a result, HX often taught without her assistant teacher who prioritised caring for young children over her role as an assistant teacher. All teachers with locally employed assistant teachers reported the ongoing problem of assistant teachers being absent from work although the severity of the issue varied according to the gender and familial role of the assistant teacher. Assistant teachers who were mothers and/or grandmothers were more likely to be absent from work than aunties without young children or grandchildren. Additionally, clan culture did not expect men to care for young children thus placing pressure on women to prioritise their familial role. Within the primary sector of the school where this study took place, all assistant teachers were women. Further, within the school culture, classes were assigned one registered teacher and one assistant teacher with no opportunities for sharing a fulltime workload across two part-time positions. When an assistant teacher was absent, school leadership was unable to replace the assistant teacher because there was no relief assistant teacher group to call upon.

*Stage Two: Elements of teacher practice with local employees*

The dominating elements of teacher practice with local employees are listed in Table 19. 'Sayings' convey the ways teachers talk and think about families and their practices with local employees. 'Doings' convey teacher activities with local employees. 'Relatings' convey how teachers relate to local employees. Although teachers displayed a range of sayings, doings and relatings with local employees, I synthesised episodes of teacher talk to identify the orders and arrangements influencing teacher practices with local employees.

Similar to the teacher practices with families, teacher practices with local employees are immediately challenged by language differences. Teacher communication with local employees is hindered by general linguistic differences and by teacher reliance on education and teaching jargon as they perform their duties in the school. In addition to linguistic differences, I identified four other key influences on teacher practices with local employees by making connections between teachers' sayings, doings and relatings. Firstly, there was a shortage of local people able to perform assistant teacher duties with the exception of pre-service teachers. Secondly, time was not allocated to enable Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff to learn about each other's world with the intent of building informed relationships. Thirdly, school leadership is hesitant to

Table 19 Teacher ways of talking, doing and relating with local employees

| Elements of practices | Examples |
|---|---|
| Sayings | Teachers use English to discuss all matters pertaining to school.<br>Teachers think assistant teachers are caught between family and work pressures.<br>Teachers think local employees do not have the skills, understanding or knowledge required to fulfil their duties effectively in accordance with expectations of white education.<br>Teachers are surprised and relieved when an assistant teacher has good English and performs duties at the same standard as teachers have experienced in other schools.<br>Teachers think if they performed their duties at the same sub-standard as many ancillary staff, they would be out of a job but school leadership makes allowances for local employees. |
| Doings | Teachers encourage their assistant teacher and cleaners who show an interest in their job and try to perform duties as expected.<br>Teachers find collaborating with local employees at school challenging especially when it has little impact on students' improved education outcomes.<br>Teachers attend meetings and workshops in which ancillary staff attendance is not enforced. |
| Relatings | Teachers rely on pre-service teachers who they perceive as having a vested interest in school and education to provide information and to talk to local employees and families on behalf of the teacher.<br>Teachers think they support local employees instructing them in their duties, phoning them to be at work on time, being flexible with work arrangements.<br>Teachers are burdened by attending to requests from local employees such as:<br>• Phoning so he/she gets to work on time;<br>• Encouraging enrolment in Certificate courses provided by Batchelor Institute and supporting assignment completion;<br>• Helping to complete forms as per government requirements;<br>• Lending money.<br>After months and years of observing little change in local employee capacity, teachers give up relying on cleaners cleaning and assistant teachers to complete their duties and do the task themselves. |

address many behaviours demonstrated by local staff due to the perceived political backlash from the community. Lastly, teachers and Aboriginal staff required the support of a significant other to engage in rigorous dialogue seeking to address issues. Despite the institution's insistence that ancillary positions be filled by Aboriginal members of the community school leaders struggle to find staff with appropriate skills and are unable to entice appropriately skilled staff from other organsiations within the community because positions are not accompanied by housing. School leaders employ

people from the community knowing they lack the appropriate skills but also knowing teachers require assistance in the classroom and cleaners and grounds-staff are needed to maintain school operations. To offset local employees' lack of skills, on-site training is provided to ancillary staff. In all instances except for the pre-service teacher education program, training is a hit and miss affair. Training is dependent on availability of the service provider, the quality of service provision, staff attendance and participation, and staff literacy and numeracy levels which are historically low.

Work attendance is a constant challenge for both ancillary staff and the school. Many of the school's ancillary staff are perceived as reliable family members who are asked to attend court, care for 'at risk' youth, accompany family members to Darwin hospital and other government services and to act as interpreters when interpreters are unavailable within the community. High levels of illness in the community and crowded housing also affect local employee health. Additionally, cultural demands such as ceremony and funerals both in this community and other communities take local employees from the school. When local employees don't come to work, they are reminded to telephone the school to inform them of the absence and the employees' pay is adjusted accordingly. It is common for some staff to receive limited pay due to a high number of absences. While decreased pay is an inconvenience for most local employees, royalties, gambling and money provided by other family members usually reduces the impact of the decreased pay.

The number of hours that ancillary staff are paid to work also limits their availability at workshops and meetings that occur after school hours. Ancillary staff, particularly assistant teachers, rarely attend meetings or workshops after school hours or on student free days that are intended for school staff to address shared concerns about education.

The current culture within the school demarcates teacher professional knowledge from local employee contextual knowledge with little room for the two types of knowledge to come together. When teachers are allocated non-contact time and professional learning sessions during school hours, assistant teachers are directed to accompany students to lessons with substitute or specialist teachers to manage student behaviours. While school leaders ask teachers to include assistant teachers in teacher planning, limited paid employment hours limits the time for assistant teachers to be available for planning. School leaders do not allocate time during the school week, term or year for

teachers to specifically plan with assistant teachers to ensure local Aboriginal perspectives. Teachers are expected to seek the advice of local staff as required.

In instances of pre-service teachers trying to bring local knowledge and teacher professional knowledge together, the teacher and pre-service teacher are left to find the time for working together because school leadership does not consider this relationship when allocating time for meetings. School leadership can only enforce one one-hour meeting per week which is usually allocated to staff and POD meetings. Teacher and pre-service teacher meetings were encouraged and supported by me in my capacity as the lecturer of the teacher education program. I was able to enforce pre-service teachers meeting with their mentor teachers as part of fulfilling the degree's requirements. Pre-service teachers knew they had to participate in program specific activities before and/or after school hours for which they were not paid as assistant teachers. These additional hours were carefully negotiated with mentor teachers and me to maintain a reasonable and productive workload.

Most teachers eventually give up trying to work with local employees after being confronted by numerous challenges day in, day out over several school terms. While they go through the motions of asking local employees for help, most teachers anticipate the assistance being unavailable when they need it and make alternative plans. Most teachers realise they are unable to rely on local employees to assist teacher practices with students.

***Teacher practice with students***

Teachers' core business is intertwined with students. Eighty-three episodes were related to interactions between teachers and students. In Stage One findings, episodes were categorised into four main categories. To identify the challenges within teacher practices with students, each category was further sub-categorised and accompanied with episodes that are described and contextualised. In Stage Two findings, the 83 episodes were synthesised to provide examples of teacher sayings, doings and relatings in their practice with students to identify the orders and arrangements influencing teacher practices with students.

*Stage One: Describing practices between teachers and students*

Interactions between teachers and students for whom linguistic and cultural traditions are very different to each other are complex and have significant impact on both students and teachers. In keeping with the practices in other schools, teachers attend to the students' academic needs as well as to attendance and participation and health and wellbeing.

Episodes were initially sorted into teachers' concerns about student wellbeing, student learning, student attendance and participation, and student behaviour. Table 20 provides an overview of how episodes were categorised and the number of episodes allocated to each category.

The 30 episodes in the student wellbeing category revealed five kinds of concern: students' basic needs not met; students exhibiting signs of stress, frustration or trauma; teacher attending to basic health matters in class; students needing to be familiar with a non-Aboriginal adult; and a mismatch between home and school hygiene practices.

The 20 episodes related to teacher concerns about student learning were categorised into five types of episodes: student academic low levels; language/conceptual barriers between teacher and student; unrealistic demands on student learning; limited learning progression; and a mismatch between student home and school life.

The 13 episodes related to teachers' concerns about student attendance and participation were coded into four categories: inconsistent attendance; unstable class; attendance does not equate with participation; and student lack of knowledge about classroom role.

Table 20 Focus of teacher concerns in interactions between teachers and students

| Wellbeing (30) | Learning (20) | Attendance and Participation (13) | Behaviour (20) |
|---|---|---|---|
| Students basic needs not met (4) | Student low academic levels (6) | Inconsistent Attendance (4) | Community issues spilling into the classroom (1) |
| Student exhibits signs of stress, frustration or trauma (10) | Language/ conceptual barriers between teacher and student (8) | Unstable class cohort (1) | Violence towards others (4) |
| Teacher attends to a basic health matter in class (6) | Unrealistic demands on student learning (3) | Attendance does not equate with participation (2) | Student not coping with school structures (1) |

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Student needs to be familiar with a non-Aboriginal adult (6) | Limited learning progression (1) | Student lack of knowledge about classroom role (6) | Destruction and theft (1) |
| Mismatch between home and school hygiene practices (4) | Mismatch between student home and school life (2) | | Behaviours preventing learning (13) |

The 20 episodes related to student behaviour were coded into four categories: community issues spilling into the classroom; violence towards others; student not coping with school structures; destructive behaviours and behaviours preventing learning.

Teacher concerns about student wellbeing (30)

Teachers articulated concerns about their students' wellbeing in 30 episodes. The common thread among all four categories was teacher contentions that, drawing on their own experiences, students in their classes were in a more precarious position than their non-Aboriginal counterparts.

Student don't have basic needs met (4)

Four episodes related to teacher concerns that students come to school without having their basic needs met. One teacher reported a Year One student coming to school naked, while another reported students coming to school tired and hungry. CR and NC reported an incident in which they had kept a child in class for ten minutes at lunch time only to have the child fall asleep.

> CR: Like (student). I kept her in 10 minutes yesterday at lunch and she fell asleep and slept on the floor for the entire lunch.
>
> NC: You can't move her. You can't pick her up…na.
>
> (Transcript 13, Episode 89)

CR and NC did not expect the child to fall asleep. When the child did fall asleep, she could not be left as the teachers have an obligation to maintain their duty of care. The child fell asleep on the floor of the classroom, rather than on cushions or a more comfortable sleeping area. The teachers further noted that while a child sleeping may not seem to be a notable concern, a child requires sleep for cognitive performance. The teachers expressed concerns the child was not having her basic needs of sleep met and then began to reflect on how much learning she was able to do while being so tired.

Student exhibits signs of stress, frustration or trauma (10)

Ten episodes related to teachers reporting students exhibited signs of stress, frustration or trauma. While teaching in the early years of school, EB witnessed numerous students exhibiting intense behaviours indicative of stress, frustration or trauma but lacked the experience and training to understand why students were demonstrating the behaviour or what to do about it. Prior to the incident spoken about in the episode, EB had attended an Early Childhood conference and had met an experienced educator who highlighted the relationship between the brain, learning and behaviour. EB was particularly worried about one student who continually exhibited signs of stress, frustration or trauma. EB reflected on her new learning in relation to intense behaviours exhibited by this student:

> EB: I have a child in my classroom I know her mum has a drinking problem. She goes long grassing (homeless in the city to enable a binge on alcohol) and stuff. This kid. If her older sister walks into the classroom and then leaves, she goes into a spin on the floor. Now this girl's four. She will spin on the floor, scream in terror, kick and you cannot get near her. You…. All I know to do is walk away and let her get out of it.
>
> R: But she's not alone [in the room]?
>
> EB: She's stuck in that reptilian mind um brain where it's life and death. 'Oh my god! I'm not getting that! So all I know what to do is scream in terror and kick.' Then mum gets angry with her and drags her out and…. All of this could be because she's just not getting her own way and it's a developmental age type tantrum. But I've never seen a tantrum like this and she throws them consistently. And it's generally when mum's there. There was a day when mum wasn't there and she was at school all day and she was a completely different child.
>
> R: A regular kid in the classroom?
>
> EB: Well… but to a different extreme. She didn't throw tantrums or things like she normally does. But she didn't talk to the kids. I couldn't get any words out of her. She'd play in home corner next to the kids and I'd say, what are you doing [student]? And she'd just look at me and then look away. It was just like 'I'm in this bubble. No-one else is around me.' I'm not experienced enough to say it's something. I don't know what it is.
>
> (Transcript 20, Episode 157)

EB is concerned the only strategy she has is to 'walk away and let [student] get out of it'. In her analysis of the child's behavior, EB demonstrates awareness of a relationship between the student's school behaviours, the student's home life and the student's relationship with her mother. However, EB does not suggest that she has access to a support person who can support her, the student and the mother to not only find out the causes of these behaviours but to also address their need for support.

Teacher directly attends to a health matter presented in the classroom (6)

Six episodes related to teachers directly attending to a health matter presented by students in the classroom. While the data indicated one episode of the 146 episodes directly related to a student coming to class with an obvious health condition in need of immediate medical attention, teachers relayed many incidences of students coming to class with seeping sores, sore ears, headlice, scabies, sore teeth, dehydration and itchy skin. Incidences of students having these medical conditions and infestations were so common, they became almost invisible in the grand scheme of teaching and learning. While teachers relayed their concerns about students' obvious medical conditions and infestations, teachers indicated they felt they were fighting a losing battle. As a norm, teachers determined that since the child had made the effort to come to school in spite of the discomfort from the medical conditions and infestations, they would make the effort to teach them. Only when students showed signs of highly infectious diseases or medical conditions causing students horrendous pain did the teacher alert the parent directly, if they were in the school or classroom, or send the student to the office to be taken home to parents who were then advised to take their child to the clinic. Often, students came to school unaccompanied by an adult so teachers would attend to a student's health needs within their power of authority. This attention usually comprised bandaids, modeling regular and correct hand washing and tooth-brushing behaviours, programs about health and nutrition, monitoring water intake and reminding children to tell an adult to take them to the clinic.

In discussions about student health and hygiene, EB and CR indicated that attending to seeping sores is a daily issue requiring time and resources. In this school, students call teachers by their first name:

> EB: If I pull out a bandaid for someone because sores are oozing you should see. I have a line up: 'EB. Me sore. Me sore.' And next minute I'm there for 20 minutes just

> covering open sores [with] betadine and bandaids. I look at the mums and the mums go, 'EB she needs bandaid' and I look at them thinking, 'It's called betadine and bandaid. Go to the shop. Use your green card. YOU buy them!'
>
> CR: Yeah and every time I go to Melbourne I buy a couple of the boxes of 100 packs no –name bandaids and I go through them every term.
>
> (Transcript 19, Episode 145)

The issue of oozing sores experienced by EB and CR plays out differently in their respective classrooms. EB teaches younger children and frequently has parents in the classroom. In contrast, CR teaches older primary students with limited parental involvement. While CR provides bandaids directly to students, EB feels the additional pressure of parents' insistence that she attend to students' sores. Although EB and CR know that the front office supplies bandaids for classrooms, CR highlighted that bandaids are regularly unavailable so she has taken on the responsibility of buying large boxes of bandaids. EB feels resentment that her teaching time is consumed with attending to a basic health need that, in her opinion, should be attended to by parents. Both teachers indicate that oozing sores are a significant issue in their classroom.

Student needs to be familiar with a non-Aboriginal adult (6)

Six episodes indicated students' need to be familiar with non-Aboriginal adult whether that person was their classroom teacher or a senior leader within the school. Students withdraw from unfamiliar non-Aboriginal adults until they develop trust. A regular teaching and learning practice in classrooms is for the teacher to demonstrate a skill or concept then support students to develop mastery. Recalling a writing lesson, CR noted one of her students was confident with her understanding of the concept being taught in the lesson but lacked confidence to share her work with the teacher. CR's recollection highlights the skills CR has in developing trust and encouraging the student to develop confidence.

> CR: You know [student] got really confident with [concept] and started then refusing to show me her work until she'd finished it. Then she'd be proud and show me what she'd written and she'd be like 'Is this okay?' you know… So then I wouldn't even tell her if she got a word wrong. I'd just be like 'Yes! Absolutely awesome!'

R: So the focus at that point was on her confidence as opposed to perfection in the actual…

CR: Yeah. And it'd be like 'its fine that you made a mistake you know. It doesn't need to be right.' Because, often, when she'd say 'How do you spell this word?' 'Well you tell me'. 'M'. 'Yeah'. 'A'. 'Yeah'. And I'd just, whatever letter she'd guess I'd pretty much say 'yes' because I just wanted her to actually be a …

EB: Take risks.

CR: Yes. Because if I said it's not an A it's an E it would be all [over] and she'd need me to spell the rest of the word.

(Transcript 19, Episode 127)

Within the Second Space of the community, learning success is equated with the perfect execution of a new skill or sharing of new knowledge. In contrast, learning success in the First Space of western education is a student's ability to have-a-go and try numerous strategies in their journey towards developing a new skill or conceptual understanding. The student's main priority in this episode was to perfectly demonstrate what the teacher had taught. The student's attitude towards her learning resulted in the student feeling vulnerable when she had to share her work with CR. CR demonstrates her awareness of the connection between student confidence and academic participation when she identifies the consequences of correcting the student's writing.

Mismatch between home and school hygiene practices (4)

Four episodes related to the incompatibility between Aboriginal students' home and school hygiene practices. Because home practices and school practices are very different, many students are unsure of acceptable hygiene behaviours in the school. In contrast, teachers are very clear about which student behaviours are and are not acceptable in the school environment. In this school, students bring hygiene behaviours that are acceptable at home into the school and classrooms. White teachers, such as MB, are often unprepared for students' poor hygiene and persistent littering and find addressing toileting and littering to be ongoing issues. In this episode, MB recalls hygiene behaviours she had not encountered during five years of teaching in non-Aboriginal schools. She discovered her boys were urinating in inappropriate places in

the school grounds and decided it was within her role, as their teacher, to address poor toileting behaviours:

> MB: It's like you're a parent… guys when you go to the toilet you don't go out there behind the building you go over to the toilet, clean up after yourself. Just - what else? - keep your hands to yourself.
>
> R: Is it more than when you were in mainstream?
>
> MB: Yes. We didn't have an issue with the toileting thing in mainstream. They knew they had to go to the toilet. I had to tell the kids yesterday about peeing behind the building. I had to make it fun. I'm going 'You don't go pssss like this.' [laughs].....the [ATs] are cracking up going 'Oh it's the witch psss psss'. 'Oh no! You guys you can't pee here. You get over there. You can't do it here.' [Students] just looked at me and they still do it there. You don't have that in mainstream to worry about.
>
> R: From the majority of kids anyway.
>
> MB: Yeah. Rubbish problems, littering. They just drop it.
>
> (Transcript 122, Episode 177A)

When MB tried to address the toileting issue with her boys, they continued to urinate in the schoolyard near her classroom. While MB wanted the behaviour to change, she did not believe demonstrating anger would change the behaviour. Further, MB was aware of the language barrier between herself and her students so she tried to address the issue through acting out and making urination noises. Unbeknown to MB, most students live in crowded houses with one toilet. A common family strategy to deal with the limited toileting facilities and accommodate for men and women's toileting practices being private matters not open for discussion, is for young boys to urinate outside.

Other teachers also noted that students' use of toileting facilities in the school was unhygienic. Students stand on the seat to defecate, clean themselves with their hands when toilet paper is unavailable, use almost an entire roll of toilet paper in one visit to the toilet, or smear faeces on the toilet walls. Many students refuse to use the toilets during the school day waiting until they go home. To support this solution, these students do not drink water during the school day. The ramifications on other areas of

student health are seldom considered by teachers because the teachers have little involvement in student toileting practices at school.

During this discussion about students' inappropriate school behaviours, MB also noted that littering was an ongoing problem. Students would drop their rubbish where they were standing indicating this was, for many students, a normal way of dealing with rubbish. While teachers realised this was possibly a standard 'home' practice as indicated by the high levels of litter in the community and in many yards, teachers worked endlessly to get students to put their rubbish in the bin. For teachers who come from mainstream Australia and have been immersed in a culture of 'keep Australia beautiful' and 'reuse, refuse, recycle', littering and the resulting rubbish that endlessly floats around the school are unpleasant and unhealthy. Teachers' and students' perceptions of 'normal' rubbed against each other repeatedly with the teacher asserting the authority of the First Space of the institution of education and expecting students to comply.

Teacher concerns about student learning (20)

Twenty episodes highlighted teachers' concerns about student learning. The common thread linking these episodes was teacher attempts to meet systemic demands that their students achieve national academic benchmark levels from a starting point well below the anticipated levels of students in specific year levels.

Low academic student levels (6)

Six episodes related to academic levels, in which teachers were disturbed by students' very low academic levels. As noted on numerous occasions by teachers, the majority of students were performing well below national academic benchmarks and below non-Aboriginal peers of the same age (Smith, 2008). At the time of the episode reported here, LN had been teaching in this school for two and a half years. In this episode, LN recalls the disparity between what the system anticipates students of a specific age group will learn at a particular stage of schooling and what is realistic for students of the same age group in this remote Aboriginal community:

> LN: For my first couple of years here, the stuff that was in the curriculum was just not going to fly at all. I mean I wasn't saying that it was never going to be able to fly. Last year I had Year Five and Year Six and they'd been to school over that period, less than 25 per cent of the time. So out of those six years they should have been at school, they

might have been at school a total of one year or whatever. So we're talking about kids with limited English and no reading and no writing.

R: So no print literacies?

LN: No print literacies. Most could identify all or nearly all of the letters and some couldn't even do that. Letter sounds were not happening. On top of that, there were little to no school behaviours. Like they hadn't been at school, they didn't know what was expected of them. They didn't know that at school, they've got to sit down, they've got to listen, they've got to be quiet while the teacher's talking; that sort of stuff.

(Transcript 7, Episode 35)

This episode highlights the impact of limited English, high levels of non-attendance at school and limited experiences with print literacies on a student's ability to engage with the curriculum. LN identified students' lack of understanding of their role in schooling or of the expected behaviours of teachers and students in the teaching and learning relationship as also contributing to students being well below national benchmark levels in their academic performance. If a student sustained an attendance pattern of "less than 25 per cent" of the school year from Transition to the end of Year Six, they would have attended school for a total of only seven school terms, equating to a student having completed the curriculum up to the end of Term Three in Year One. Yet this issue was not as simple as calculating the student completing the curriculum up to the end of Term Three in Year One because the inconsistent attendance patterns resulted in students having a hit and miss relationship with classroom teaching and learning. Students' inconsistent attendance leads to students simply tasting the curriculum rather than reaping the benefits of fully dedicated teaching and learning time to develop a skill, such as learning behaviours, or conceptual understandings in the curriculum. This episode draws attention to the situation that a student allocated to Year Five or Year Six in this community is not like a non-Aboriginal or Aboriginal student elsewhere in Australia at the same year level. While the system allocates students to a specific year level based on their chronological age, this criterion for streaming students is incompatible with the attendance patterns and background experiences of the students.

Language/conceptual barriers between teacher and student (8)

Eight episodes were categorised as language/conceptual barriers between teacher and student. The term 'language' in this category refers to the language spoken by a person as their home, or most familiar, language. In this school, the teachers speak English while the students speak a clan language. In this school, language barriers are frequently identified by teachers as being central to the challenges of the teaching and learning process.

During a POD 2 conversation, one of the pre-service teachers stated she believed that language barriers were problematic in the classroom:

> Pre-service teacher: I think the language is a barrier because they need an interpreter.
>
> JW: Ooh! Huge, Huge, HUGE.
>
> Pre-service teacher: Because when we talk to them in language [they have a better understanding].
>
> (Transcript 13, Episode 91)

JW's response indicates he is regularly confronted with the linguistic barrier between him and his students. While teachers discussed language barriers between them and their students, they did not articulate the link between linguistic and conceptual development. Frequently in remote Aboriginal schools, the language barrier between students and teachers is cited as *the* barrier to student learning. However, citing language as the barrier to student learning prevents opportunities for teachers to discuss conceptual barriers and other barriers that accompany linguistic differences. In Chapter Two I identified, from my researcher journal, that linguistic barriers are also closely linked to conceptual barriers.

Unrealistic demands on student learning (3)

Three episodes related to unrealistic demands placed on students to learn the curriculum at the same pace as their non-Aboriginal counterparts in urban schools. A common theme in teachers' complaints is the lack of time in a day, a week, a term or a year to get through the curriculum. Teachers in this study identified time as a limitation to how long students had to complete learning because students had to learn English at the same time as learning subject area content through English. In a conversation about the pace of classroom learning, CR recognised teaching and learning has a pace that must

be maintained if students are to complete the curriculum within the prescribed timeframe of a school year of 40 weeks. In this episode, CR explains how she had to change the pace of learning for students to experience success:

> CR: Like I've tried to make it like as short lessons as possible and routine as possible. We do the same thing every day. I've massively slowed down what we're learning so like last year I was doing 10 sight words a week with like my high performance class and even my normal class we started doing that. This year we're doing five words a fortnight because we're just massively slowing down 'cause the kids that I've got this year that I also had last year, I saw them tune out when we were going at the pace that worked for the more switched on kids.

(Transcript 19, Episode 149)

CR highlights her choice to either maintain the 'regular' pace of teaching and lose the attention of her students or slow down the pace of teaching and ensure most students experience success and confidence as learners. When CR chose to slow down the pace of teaching she realised students would not be exposed to the curriculum content anticipated by the education system. CR indicates the regular teaching pace resulted in no-one learning, explaining that students' experiences at 'the bottom of the class for the last four years' had damaged their confidence as learners. CR's observations of her students and their responses to her teaching informed her she had to make a professional decision to either focus on student learning success or on an institutional expectation to have the curriculum covered in a specific time frame. She chose the former.

### Limited learning progression (1)

One episode directly related to student learning progression reveals many factors not related to English as an Additional Language that influence progression. During Term Three, a term notorious for very low student attendance due to ceremonies and the availability of travel by road, LN identified factors other than the students' lack of English affecting student learning. LN, who had been teaching in this school for several years prior to this conversation highlighted student learning progression was affected by factors presented in classrooms on a daily basis. LN noted the relationship between a student's literacy levels and their ability to access the curriculum as an influential factor of limited learning progression. LN then recognises student absenteeism as being more complex than students simply being away from the school:

LN: One year [students] might be doing hard stuff because there are a lot of kids in [class] that are really good. But the next year, a kid in that class moves on but he or she is now with a lot of kids that haven't been to school that much and don't have good English; they don't have reading and writing skills. So the teacher has to bring [the program] back for the class. That's why [learning progression is] up and down. It depends a lot on who's in the class and the dynamics of that class. So if there are lots of kids in there who don't know the right way to behave or haven't been to school much, and they don't do reading and writing very well, then it's hard for that teacher to have a program that's going to accelerate their learning; that's going to be… progressive, yeah. It's hard to progress…

R: Okay, yep.

LN: Then there's a lot of different reasons for that. Like ceremonies that are on. Funerals. That's another big one. They go and visit family somewhere else. Like kids from here will go and visit family at …. or …. or anywhere and because they're visiting family over there, they don't go to school there and they're not going to school here. It's important for them to go and visit family but there's a big stretch when they're not at school. Or even if they go to a different school they'll learn something completely different and then they come back here and have to catch up or fit in with whatever program you're running. Those sorts of reasons are why most of the kids don't come I think. But there are also kids who just don't come to school. There are some kids around [the community but not at school at the moment].

R: So you talked about even getting kids to school. So they're not at school for ceremony, funerals, visiting family elsewhere. Then when they come back they've got to catch up or try and fit in with what the learning is… Are all the kids exactly the same?

LN: No because every kid's missed different amounts of school and missed different bits of school.

(Transcript 7, Episode 37A)

This episode highlights a myriad of merging factors inhibiting student learning progression. LN outlines factors such as students' lack of schooling, lack of English, low ability with reading and writing, and behaviours of individual students within the class cohort as occurring simultaneously in a school day. He draws attention to students not coming to school because they are required to attend to ceremonies and funerals,

and visit families in other places. Student absences result in students being unable to connect with the teaching and learning in the classroom that has continued during their absence. LN further highlights individual students missing different amounts of school and different parts of school resulting in a patchy learning journey. Most teachers experience a classroom situation in which 27 students each have a patchy learning journey; a far cry from the institution's expectation that students be at expected academic benchmark levels for their year level. The institution does not anticipate the majority of a class having little English, low literacy and numeracy levels compounded by sporadic student attendance and inappropriate classroom behaviours.

Mismatch between home and school life (2)

Two episodes related to a mismatch between student school life and home life. For local Aboriginal students, there is a marked difference between what people say and do at home and what people say and do at school. While white students generally share the language and culture teachers use in a school, Aboriginal students in this community, do not have the benefits of shared language and culture with the teacher. Discussing the alignment between school and home practices, EB made comparisons between students who demonstrated benchmark achievement in her class and those who didn't. EB noted that while some students had started to write their own name and learn English orthography, other students were yet to do so:

> EB: But even some of my (school sector) kids who I would say are at some of the [curriculum] levels [for that age group], are starting to write their name, and know the letters, have English as their first language or, and/or, they have help at home. They have print at home. They see the parents do [literacy]. They've been exposed to books. They're practising at home. You know they write, sit down and write with mum and dad. Those sorts of things. The ones who aren't where they should be, English is their, I don't know, 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th [language]. It's not their main language. It's not what is spoken at home. They're not exposed to books. They're not encouraged to do the work themselves. I have the mums sit there and do the work for the kids; even dot painting today. One of the mums was doing it and I said to the child, 'I want YOU to have a go.' Mum went, 'Here.' The kid went, 'No.' So [mum] kept doing the picture.

(Transcript 29, Episode 229)

EB identifies the role of adults in supporting English development and engagement with print literacies. Student observations and discussions with parents led EB to make links between school success and home practices. EB carefully articulated that one of the students progressing as anticipated spoke several languages at home. One of those languages was English with parents supporting this child's print literacy development. All of the students whose parents reinforced school learning at home were reaching expected academic benchmarks. In contrast, EB noted that students for whom English is not the main language, is not spoken at home and who are not exposed to print in the home are not at benchmark level. EB acknowledges there is a mismatch between home and school language and literacy practices and a mismatch between how mothers support their children with learning. During her time in this community, EB was informed by parents, assistant teachers and pre-service teachers that a mother's role is to support her child whenever her child asks her. EB found that differences between the teacher and family's understandings of success resulted in children applying home practices in the classroom instead of school learning practices.

Teacher concerns about student attendance and participation (13)

Thirteen episodes related to teacher concerns about student attendance and participation at school. The common thread linking episodes in this category was students not being either physically or cognitively present during lessons.

Attendance is inconsistent (4)

Four episodes related to students' inconsistent attendance defined as student absence being unpredictable. During a conversation with LN, the topic of student attendance was broached as a concern often raised by teachers. When I suggested many students are absent at the end of the week, LN quickly pointed out that attendance patterns are inconsistent:

> R: So there might be kids who are away every Thursday, Friday and you know it.
>
> LN: Well no. There's a group of kids in every class who come all the time and there's a group of kids who don't come very often. Those kids who don't come very often… won't be the same days. It's either Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday. They're not here or they'll come one day of the week or they'll come two days of the week.

(Transcript 7, Episode 37B)

LN identified inconsistent attendance as a better descriptor of student attendance patterns than simply noting student absenteeism. Student absenteeism is often cited in the literature as impacting on students learning but, following LN's lead, generalisations of absenteeism do not have the same meaning as inconsistent attendance. He also noted that every class has a core group of students who attend regularly and a group of students who often don't come to school. LN later spoke about how the unpredictability of student attendance negatively affects the regular attenders' learning, the maintenance of class routines and the progressive delivery of teacher programs.

Unstable class cohort (1)

Throughout this study, all teachers talked about the daily fluctuations in class sizes and the number of name changes on their class rolls. Unstable class cohorts are such an issue in remote contexts they are colloquially referred to as 'the revolving door' of the classroom. One episode provided an extreme example of the ongoing problem of unstable class cohorts experienced by all teachers. At the start of Term Four in 2011, POD 2 teachers came together in one of the POD 2 classrooms to discuss planning for the term. POD 2 teachers had been working together since the end of Term Two to ensure they all knew what each other was doing in their classrooms so they could support each other as a group. POD meetings were generally held on a Tuesday or Wednesday in alternate weeks to staff meetings. At the beginning of the meeting, JW came into the classroom quite flustered. As JW sat down, the rest of POD 2 stopped their conversation and focused their attention on him. He exclaimed, "I don't know where to go. The 14 kids I've got this week I don't know from a bar of soap" (JW, Transcript 13, Episode 83).

JW began his week expecting his usual group of students. He had been given his usual class roll and had planned to teach the students the next stage in the curriculum. When the students came to class, JW did not know any of them. His regular attenders had disappeared either going to homelands, to ceremony, to Darwin or simply staying at home. The new students had returned from homelands, ceremony or Darwin, or had simply decided to come to school. To further exacerbate his dilemma, JW's assistant teacher was absent from school attending to ceremony business leaving JW with no classroom support. When JW tried to deliver the intended curriculum he had planned

for the students he usually taught in his classroom, he was unable to as all 14 irregular attenders lacked the prior learning. Because Term Four is usually a time when teachers are preparing to write report cards for Semester Two reporting, JW became flustered because he realised he was going to have to report on these students in approximately five weeks time but had not yet established where they were at in their learning journey. While JW's experience is extreme, in that he had a completely different group of students in front of him, the experience of not knowing students and having to cater for their learning is a frequent occurrence in this school.

During Terms Three and Four (from July until December), students are expected to participate in ceremony or cultural business that often takes them from school from several days to several weeks. Usually, no notice is given to the school or teachers regarding the families involved. When parents do attempt to notify teachers, there are usually several ceremonies occurring at any given time to which students' and their families' are expected to attend. There is no mobile phone reception beyond the boundaries of the township and no electricity to charge phones when camping in the bush. When these 14 students came to JWs classroom, JW had to keep the planning he had done in case the students for whom he had intended his program returned to school. JW also had the additional workload of assessing these 14 students to identify where they were at in their learning and then develop a new program with accompanying resources to attend to their learning needs.

Attendance does not equate to participation (2)

Two episodes were related to student attendance not equating with student participation. Australian truancy laws and attendance strategies in remote Aboriginal schools highlight the importance attributed to students being at school every day. Attendance is one of the key factors considered when identifying students from troubled backgrounds because poor attendance correlates with students being 'at risk' in their home life. During this study, teachers frequently expressed concern about poor student attendance and participation. In the final interview, the teachers discussed the relationship between student attendance and participation in school and student learning. The teachers stressed student attendance was not enough. Although a student is physically in the classroom, there is no guarantee they are engaged in the learning process:

> LN: In [this community] attendance has less of an affect than what home is like. If home's good and they attend 50-60% maybe they're going to be doing better than someone who… There's a few kids you all know who attend all the time because they don't like being at home so they come to school. But there's no support at home. There's nothing, not a lot of learning going on even though they are at school every day. They're here because it's better than home. These kids aren't going to go as well as kids who come to school on and off but who have a good stable home life.
>
> If you get the kids to come every day as a stand-alone thing and just to focus on attendance [changing student academic outcomes] is not going to work.
>
> (Transcript 29, Episode 247)

This episode reflects how isolating student attendance as the main aspect of student participation in school draws attention away from more pertinent questions such as 'Are the students cognitively engaged when they are here?' LN's observations of the relationship between school attendance and home life belies the common assertion by teachers and the education system that attendance will of itself improve learning outcomes. Further, as LN asserts, addressing student attendance in isolation from other factors impacting a student's life carries a degree of risk in misunderstanding why students aren't progressing in their learning, and of not identifying or providing more complex forms of support that some students need.

Teacher concerns about student behaviour (20)

Twenty episodes were directed at teachers' concerns about student behavior. The common thread between these episodes was students demonstrating behaviours extremely different to mainstream behaviours either in ferocity, frequency or the number of students exhibiting a behavior at any one time. Teachers were unanimous in their concern that these behaviours had a significant impact on student learning.

Community issues spilling into the classroom (1)

One episode related to community influence affecting student behaviours in the classroom. Because they were new to this context, RH and BZ were talking to me about interruptions during lesson time. After noting that students walk past their windows and yell into their classrooms, RH recalled one incident in which a student ran from the classroom and returned with an adult:

> RH: I had one incident where there was teasing in the classroom and a child picked up scissors and left the classroom then came back with an angry adult. So that was all very, very different and it just electrified the children for the whole day.
>
> (Transcript 24, Episode 188)

It is common practice within the community for upset children to seek the aid of a family member. Family members are usually close by at work, at home or conducting personal business nearby. On this occasion, the student armed himself with a pair of scissors before retreating from the classroom to go and get an adult family member to return with him and fix his problem. RH had no idea what the adult said as the adult communicated in a local language but noted that the class was "electrified" for the rest of the day. The white teacher is expected to be instrumental in student safety, especially in the classroom. As a new teacher and not understanding the adult's language, RH did not step in to prevent the parent from directly communicating with students. Incidences in which local parents intrude into classrooms without first consulting the white teacher are an irregular occurrence in this school but when they happen, they are usually very loud. RH is fortunate that the incident stopped at one parent coming to growl at students. Had other students reacted negatively to the angry adult, they, too, could have called on their adult family members to defend them thus continuing a swathe of abusive exchanges between adults who uncompromisingly defend their children against other families. When outbreaks of inter-family fighting occur, community meetings are initiated by senior elders from the appropriate clan groups to talk through issues and put an end to vicious cycles of verbal, and sometimes physical, abuse. As RH had little understanding about what the adult said, it is difficult to determine if the teasing caused a problem or was a repercussion of a community problem. Either way, it demonstrates the common practice of children seeking aid from an adult family member regardless of their role in an altercation. It is to be noted that adults also engage in the practice of seeking aid from adult family members who are deemed as having higher power or authority. The practice of adults getting another adult family member to help them in an altercation has been known to take place in the school when an Aboriginal staff member feels attacked by a white staff member, irrespective of the white staff member's role, position or authority.

Violence towards others (4)

Four episodes were related to students exhibiting violence towards others in the classroom. Lateral violence is a common feature of many contemporary remote Aboriginal communities, which experience social issues such as crowded housing, poor health and high unemployment. Lateral violence is harmful behaviour directed towards other members of the same group. In this community, students bring family intolerances into the school and classrooms. Additionally, students' usual response to any perceived threat is fight (violence) or flight (escape).

In Darwin and Palmerston, there are specialised centres attached to schools where students with particularly violent behaviours are taught. There is no similar program for particularly violent students in this community. NTDET has not allocated a specialised position to this school and, even if there was a position, there is no one in the school qualified to take the role. There is a school counselor in the school; however, this person supports individuals and families with many issues, resulting in teachers having to attend to behaviours in the classroom with the support of the AP or other 'buddy' classes. Buddy classrooms are partnerships between teachers where students displaying persistently undesirable behaviours can go for 'time out' of their classroom context. Because teachers cannot leave their class due to duty of care responsibilities to all students, the buddy class is reliant on another adult from the classroom, usually the assistant teacher, to accompany the student to the buddy class.

At the time of this study, POD 2 had approximately 14 disruptive and violent students who had been an ongoing problem in Semester One. The teachers in POD 2 had negotiated with each other to redistribute students into their three classes according to student attendance, academic performance and behaviour. As a large man with numerous years of experience with students with special needs, JW volunteered to teach the students who consistently displayed disruptive behaviours that inhibited other students from learning. While this was not an ideal situation, the teachers were re-allocating students across POD 2 to enable maximum learning for the majority of the students. At the beginning of Term Four, JW reported the scale of violence in his classroom:

> JW: Yesterday afternoon when I had no-one, one boy in my class fought with every other kid. We had punches. We had chasing around the room. [student] is not my only problem. We focus on [student] but he's just one of many.

(Transcript 13, Episode 90)

JW's account of student behaviours in this episode was not unusual in the school during the study. Students typically talk and gesture to each other in language, that is, in their clan language. The teacher is often unable to predict when a violent eruption is about to take place and struggles to find out what caused fights and arguments. Assistant Teachers (including pre-service teachers) are usually able to tell the teacher what was going on in the community between families, reprimand students when they use inappropriate words or gestures that precede a fight, and discuss violent episodes with students. Teachers in other sectors of the school, particularly those with children aged 6 years and under, have reported being punched, bitten, scratched, kicked and verbally abused when they have tried to intercept violence directed at other students and at parents. During this study, most teachers came to accept these behaviours as part of their job, often not reporting incidences. Rather, teachers typically made the decision to coach students, and if necessary, their parents, to develop other less violent and abusive behaviours. JWs account highlights the breakdown in the buddy system and the learning environment when he is alone in a classroom that is particularly prone to disruptive and violent behaviours. This episode also illustrates the stress placed on the teacher when dealing with students' disruptive and violent behaviours without appropriate support.

Student not coping with school structures (1)

Continuing on from discussions about violent student behaviours, POD 2 began to discuss possible options for addressing the behavioural issues of JW's class. All of the teachers were concerned about how to establish a culture of success in JW's classroom that supported students to develop more appropriate school behaviours. Student A was identified with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder soon after this episode. JW strongly suspected this was the case and had instigated Student A being assessed, but the process was so complex it took over a year for Student A to finally be diagnosed and medicated:

> NC: [Student A] should be on half-days. Other schools, schools in mainstream they have kids on half-days.
>
> R: I thought that was a possibility; talk about a modified program?
>
> JW: You can't 'half-day' my whole class.

CR: (Student A is) making the decision not to. You know what I mean? I know it's not easy. I'm not saying it's in any way easy but I am saying [Student A] is different from the kids with no school behaviour.

NC: He's got the behaviours.

JW: (Student A is) sucked in by the 'no school' behaviours 'cause he has no self-control. So when every other kid goes off. I feel sorry for (Student A) 'cause he can't control himself.

NC: Yeah. I think he should definitely be on half-days. Definitely.

(Transcript 13, Episode 93)

While the teachers identified the issues and a possible solution, they were reluctant to approach school leadership for several reasons. Firstly, school leaders emphasised increasing student attendance, not limiting student attendance to half-day attendance. Secondly, JW identified that not all students in his class had the same issues indicating the need for individual education adjustment plans. Students demonstrating special needs such as behavioural issues, learning disabilities or physical disabilities are identified through a rigorous referral and assessment process before being allocated a label which then directs how the school supports the student. This process leads to the production of an individual education adjustment plan (EAP) and is created through careful mediation between family, specialist school staff, specialist professionals such as occupational therapists and speech pathologists and the classroom teacher. Teachers can only proceed with individual education adjustment plans when a student has been identified with a specific disability. The identification and diagnosis process takes, on average, a semester to complete, if appropriate visiting specialists such as education psychologists, pediatricians and special needs advisors are available. Earlier in this POD 2 meeting, JW indicated that Student A had not been diagnosed with a disability because the process for identification was still in progress. It is necessary to note that students who do not have appropriate school behaviours are not considered by the institution definitions to have a disability even though students' inappropriate behaviours disable teaching and learning in the classroom. Even if all students in JW's class were on education adjustment plans, the workload for developing, implementing and reviewing would be additional to the standard requirements of teachers in regular schools.

Thirdly, JW is concerned about the repercussions for him and his students if his students are identified as attending school for half a day. Students are entitled to 32 hours and 5 minutes instruction per week with primary teachers required to teach their class for 30 hours and 5 minutes per week (less 2 hours per week for non-contact time during which students receive specialist lessons such as PE, music, library or art). A reduction of hours in a school day would mean students miss out on aspects of the curriculum and the teacher would be required to make up the teaching time elsewhere within the school.

Lastly, all of these concerns, while significant to the POD 2 teachers, especially JW, hinge on the discretion of the Principal to approve and thereby begin the process of adjusting the standard school day and on the availability of the Student Support Team to support the development of adjustment plans. In the event of the Principal supporting JW's class to attend school for half-days, substantial paperwork would need to be provided to NTDET who could, at any point, bring the Principal's decision into question and withdraw the Principal's support.

### Destruction and theft (1)

A recurring concern raised by teachers in passing comments rather than focused conversations was about students taking or destroying learning resources. When teachers didn't carefully monitor the number, condition and storage of resources, learning resources quickly diminished often disrupting learning activities. In one conversation about student behaviours in the classroom, JW identified the workload created by students not knowing how to interact appropriately with classroom resources:

> JW: I mean really, I can spend hours … when you go home and make stuff for what? They just grab all the things I've made. They mixed them up. They broke them. I've got to start again. I haven't got hours in the day.
>
> (Transcript 13, Episode 94)

In this episode, JW identifies the amount of time he spends on the endless cycle of making resources at home, introducing them to students during learning activities then having to reorganise resources and remake resources when students destroy or lose parts of the resource.

Because purchased resources are expensive and rarely meet teachers' exact requirements in the teaching and learning process, teachers spend many hours making resources. Students destroying and taking resources immobilises lessons because the teacher no longer has the teaching and learning tool. A destroyed, taken or incomplete resource is frustrating for teachers as it interrupts the teaching and learning cycle and creates more work for the teacher who then has to begin the resource finding/making process again usually in his/her own time. Resource finding/making is not a task that can be assigned to assistant teachers because they do not have the skills to make resources for the classroom.

In this school, all rooms are locked when the teacher leaves and stationery is stored in lockable cupboards with the teacher, senior staff or grounds-staff being the only people with access to keys. Stationery is generally unavailable in the community. Because most children do not have access to stationery and resources used in the school, they become attractive items to acquire from classrooms and take home. When lockable storage is not available to teachers, they experience angst about how to ensure their belongings are secure. Teachers are encouraged to keep money and personal belongings on their person or in lockable secure cupboards in their classrooms. When students take resources, teachers experience a sense of betrayal that students cannot be trusted. Further, teachers cannot go to the local shop to replace even small, inexpensive items because items are not sold in this community and can take weeks to months to arrive after being ordered online. To replace an item not available in the community proves a time consuming and costly exercise.

### Behaviours preventing learning (19)

Nineteen episodes were related to student behaviours preventing learning. During the final interview, teachers clearly identified how students develop avoidance strategies. In this episode, FT highlights how masterful students become at avoiding hard work in the classroom and the teachers' role in this learned behaviour:

> FT: If these kids don't understand what's happening and we can say that's largely what happens, we're creating avoidance strategies and they're REALLY good at it. And we set it into play really early and they just get better and better and better and keener at it.
>
> EB: Yep.

R: Until they just don't show up.

FT: Well…

EB: I can see it starting at preschool.

FT: You know you can sort of understand it. You know. [Acting in the role of the student] "These people come in, they do funning things, they talk in a funny way. They do that work completely opposite [to how Aboriginal people do it]. I will just say this and they will leave me alone. Oh! That's a good idea! Let's do that!" And it just works.

EB: [also acting in the role of the student] or "I'll pretend I can't hear them". Or "I'll just, you know, go and play with something else, ignore them" (laughs).

LN: Copying work is a biggy. They're not engaged.

EB: Or look into your face for the answers.

(Transcript 29, Episode 278)

The intended curriculum is not reaching the students therefore the students are learning strategies to avoid situations of discomfort and developing expertise in avoidance rather than expertise in the curriculum.

*Stage Two: Elements of teacher practice with local employees*

The dominating elements of teacher practice with local students are identified in Table 21. 'Sayings' convey the ways teachers talk and think about students and their practices with students. 'Doings' convey teacher activities with students. 'Relatings' convey how teachers relate to students. Although teachers displayed a range of sayings, doings and relatings with students, I synthesised episodes of teacher talk to identify the orders and arrangements influencing teacher practices with students.

As identified in teacher practices with families and local employees, teacher practices with students are immediately challenged by language differences. Teacher communication with students is hindered by linguistic differences and teacher lack of knowledge about the students' world. Teachers are unable to explain new concepts by relating to students' experiences because they lack knowledge of students' experiences. Disparity between how students know and act in their home life and how students are expected to come to knowledge and act in their school life underlie many of the

challenges experienced in teacher practices with students. Disparity between home and school impacts teacher practice with students demanding teachers utilise more time to attend to student schooling behaviours, and student health and wellbeing needs before they can draw students into teaching and learning espoused by the school.

Table 21 Teacher ways of talking, doing and relating with students

| Elements of practices | Examples |
|---|---|
| Sayings | Teacher are immediately challenged by teacher and students language differences.<br>Teachers think there is discordance between institution expectations of student learning and the learning students can cope with in their current life situation.<br>Teachers think students should not be progressed to the next year level until they have attained C grades.<br>Teachers think students' parents need help to provide their child with basic needs to improve health, wellbeing and access to schooling.<br>Teachers think school requires more skilled and knowledgeable staff in conjunction with more realistic teacher-student ratios to ably support students demonstrated needs. |
| Doings | Teachers prioritise student wellbeing before attending to learning.<br>Teachers stipulate school practice to students and reward conformity to school practice.<br>Teacher practice is immobilised when students do not conform to school practice. |
| Relatings | Teachers care deeply for their students and worry they are unable to escape the current cycle of social disorder they observe within the community.<br>Teachers thirst for more knowledge about their students so they can better relate to their students in order to provide a more relevant and successful education. |

Families and local employees have limited knowledge and understanding about the western culture underpinning teacher talk, actions and ways of relating just as teachers have limited knowledge and understanding about local aboriginal culture underpinning student talk, actions and ways of relating. When students present specific behaviours in the classroom, teachers lack knowledge to make informed decisions about how to

respond. Neither the community nor the institution is forthcoming in proactive ways to support teacher/student relationships in the classroom.

Teachers lack time to learn about the world students live in, decreasing opportunities for teachers to make fast connections between curriculum and what students already know, and preventing the creation of a learning environment that students can relate to. This is further compounded by teachers' lack of time with students, due to students' poor and sporadic attendance, to learn about their world. Students learn the curriculum via progressively planned and implemented lessons designed by the teacher. When students miss lessons, learning progression becomes stilted and haphazard. When students have missed different parts of the learning sequence, the learning environment quickly becomes complex with teachers trying to cater for learning gaps of up to 27 individual students rather than several definable and manageable learning journeys.

Teacher ignorance of students' lives and time constraints limit teacher ability to draw relationships between what students know/do in their life and new concepts and ways of working presented in the curriculum. Many life experiences assumed in the curriculum have not been experienced by students, requiring more lesson time for teachers to explain new concepts. Additionally, because the teacher lacks knowledge to make direct links between the curriculum and student life, much of the curriculum remains 'school only' business and is not necessarily retained for future learning.

Teacher use of time in preparation for and during classroom learning is often rendered useless because student time is caught between cultural demands of ceremonies and funerals and being at school. Students have little choice when parents and caregivers take them to social and cultural events. The institution has not addressed differences between school and cultural time demands resulting in teachers having to live with the consequences of students not being at school.

When students do attend school, teachers feel they are attending to matters that should be in the control of parents such as health and hygiene. Because these matters are not addressed at a higher level between the community and the institution, teachers are addressing health and hygiene with students, hoping their influence will carry into the home.

Teachers' practices with students are the main priority of the institution yet the conditions influencing teacher practices with students are left up to the teacher to address. This institutional arrangement exacerbates the challenges experienced by teachers.

### 5.2.4 Summary of level two, part B findings

Level two findings draw attention to differences between the institution of education and teachers, and the local Aboriginal community. Teacher practices with families and local employees indicate little input from families or local employees into teacher practices in this school. Although numerous attempts are made by teachers to interact with families, there is no formal process enabling teachers to learn about families or to develop a language and approach to engaging families in effective ways. Teacher practices with local employees are sporadic and unpredictable. Drawing on institution process and protocols to engage local employees does not lead to reliable or valuable partnerships with local employees because locals privilege authority from the community over that extended by the institution of education. Teachers did indicate that the pre-service teachers were an invaluable resource because both non-Aboriginal teachers and Aboriginal pre-service teachers had shared understandings about classroom practice and the roles of stakeholders (families, school leaders, teachers, local employees and students). Further, teachers and pre-service teachers valued each other's role and were able to navigate their relationship at an individual level and with the support of a third person, the RITE lecturer.

Teachers' practices with students reveal how the dearth of knowledge and understanding negatively impacts on how teachers teach and students learn. The influence of institutionally established and endorsed processes seem to have little consideration of the idiosyncrasies of this remote Aboriginal community nor of the precise learning needs presented by students. Teacher episodes of talk show that students do not respond in ways that would otherwise be predictable in mainstream schools.

## 5.3 Summary of findings

Findings from level one and level two analysis indicate significant institutional pressure on teachers to conform to standardised school practices evident in all Australian schools

in a community in which families, local employees and students do not share institutionally conceived ways of being, talking and acting in the community or the school. Findings suggest little input into the school and teacher practices from the community. Rather, teacher practices are guided by the expectations of the institution of education with limited constructive input from the community. This study found the consequence of an institutionally loaded model of education in this school impaired teacher ability to provide an effective teaching and learning service. The lack of specific attention given to the circumstances negatively affecting teacher practice has led to a closed loop of sameness which, in this community, comprises very poor student academic outcomes. Teacher practices in this school are positioned between the white institution of education and the local Aboriginal community. Each group has their own perceptions of the role of the school, teachers, families, and students. In the instance of teaching in this remote Aboriginal community school, the unitary mentality of the institution does not fit, highlighting the need for cultural-discursive, material-economic and social–political arrangements shaping teacher practice in this community to be revised with the input from the local community.

In the discussion chapter, Chapter Six, an idealised Third Space is utilised as an indicator of 'what could be' if the school were directed by the outputs from an equal partnership between the institution and community. The discussion chapter draws on the findings of this study (Chapter Five), the context of this study (Chapter Two) and the literature review (Chapter Three) to consider the challenges experienced by white teachers in this remote Aboriginal community school and the reasons teachers experience these challenges.

# Chapter Six. Synthesis and discussion

This study sought to increase the body of knowledge about the challenges that non-Aboriginal teachers experience in schools in very remote Aboriginal communities and why they experience the challenges they do. Analysing the talk of teachers about school related practices demonstrated by community members and by institutional professionals, including their own, has provided insight into why teachers so often feel they are unable to provide effective teaching and learning in a remote Aboriginal community school.

In this chapter, findings outlined in Chapter Five are synthesised and discussed by drawing on the literature. Both research questions are responded to simultaneously. The research questions are:

1. What are the challenges experienced by white teachers in a remote Aboriginal community school?
2. Why do white teachers experience the challenges they do?

The response to the first research question is interlinked with the response to the second question. The reported challenges and the context surrounding the challenges that were outlined in the Findings chapter (Chapter Five) make it possible to discern the "the practice architectures that hold the practice[s] in place" (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014, p. 58). The causes underlying the challenges are found in the clash of the practice architectures of the institution and the community.

In this chapter, I first synthesise the findings from Chapter Five. I then discuss the fundamental reasons why teachers continue to experience the challenges they do in a remote Aboriginal community school.

### 6.1 Synthesis: challenges and apparent causes

In this school, teachers say they are coming here to teach the curriculum to remote Aboriginal students. Teachers expect to carry out their duties of planning and preparing learning programs; ensuring lessons are differentiated to accommodate student backgrounds and abilities; assessing and monitoring student progress in literacy, numeracy and the Australian curriculum; liaising with institutional professionals, non-teaching staff and families; and continuing to develop their professional knowledge and

skills. Teachers also expect students, families, school leadership and institutional professionals to play their part in student education, similarly to their counterparts in other schools. However, teachers begin to realise their expectations and the reality of teaching in this school are far from aligned such that they wonder 'What is going on here?'

The challenges experienced by teachers in this study mirrored Lock, Budgen and Lunay's (2012) findings from their study of 23 teachers in remote schools. Teachers in this study echoed challenges to practice influenced by students' very low academic levels, high incidences of conditions that required specialised knowledge which they did not have and attending to students' basic needs such as food and sleep. Similar to the teachers in Lock et al.'s (2012) study, the teachers in this study were unable to create coherent plans and programs due to sporadic student and assistant teacher attendance. While the teacher talk in this study indicated teachers' high respect for their assistant teachers it also revealed the frustration experienced with the assistant teachers' lack of training and sporadic attendance that made communication and collaboration almost impossible.

Lock et al.'s (2012) conclusion that remote teaching has more challenges than benefits was not arrived at in this study because the question was not asked. Rather, in this study, I developed a sense that teachers wanted to be in this remote community to learn about students' lives while learning how to provide quality instruction suitable to these students in this community. However, Lock et al.'s (2012) observation that teacher stress in remote communities is high is supported by this study.

Pointedly, although teachers felt they became accustomed to the challenges, they expressed frustration and a belief they were set up to fail because they perceived that school leadership did little to alleviate teacher stress. As Heslop (2003) notes, the institution struggles to understand that teaching in a remote community is similar to teaching in another country where "language, culture, religion, society and economy are quite foreign" to teachers (Heslop, 2003, pp. 214-15). This study illustrates, as did the research of Heslop (2003) and Lock et al. (2012), that the challenges to teacher practice are exacerbated because teachers are unaware of the precise nature of the circumstances affecting remote Aboriginal students before their appointment to a remote community school.

Both Lock et al.'s (2012) study and this study found professional development installed by the institution was inadequate. It did not provide much needed support and strategies to help teachers contextualise institutional knowledge to meet the needs of the students in front of them. Teachers wished that the existing generic professional learning which focused on basic cultural induction, popular pedagogic trends and generalised curriculum content were replaced by knowledge and skills necessary for teaching in their remote school. This included professional development on supporting students with high health needs, coping with stressful situations and working collaboratively with the community. Last but not least, they would have valued a thorough cultural induction that directly informed their practice in the classroom.

While the above provides a brief overview of the challenges faced, the rest of this section considers the three main conditions experienced by teachers that were a challenge in themselves and that generated many other challenges. They are teachers' inadequate knowledge about student and community background factors that affect student learning; unsatisfactory professional partnerships necessary to carry out their duties; and standard institution practices that exacerbate rather than ameliorate challenges. To enable easier reading of this chapter, and because the term is that preferred by community members in this context, I use the term 'Binninj' when making reference to members of the local community, as much as is appropriate.

### 6.1.1 Teachers' inadequate knowledge about students and the community

Findings suggest teachers generally take up appointments in this remote community school with very limited knowledge of their Aboriginal students or this remote community. Because the institution focuses primarily on student literacy and numeracy outcomes, Aboriginality and poor attendance as the points of difference between this school and non-remote, non-Aboriginal schools, teachers come to this school assuming they must attend to improving student academic outcomes. To improve remote Aboriginal student academic outcomes, teachers expect to focus on providing explicit teaching for learning and assessing student learning progress and making the school and classroom experience culturally relevant and engaging to increase student participation. But when teachers begin teaching in their classroom, they quickly realise that this is no easy task; there is so much more they need to know about their students and the local Aboriginal community. They quickly realise the fragility of their position on "an island

of western culture in a sea of a completely different culture" (Guenther, 2015b, p. 9). Unable to just attend to teaching for learning and assessing the quality of their teaching by monitoring student learning outcomes, teachers in this study described looking into what is comparable to Rose's "abyss" (2012, p. 69) and finding little to help, but much to challenge them. Teachers concluded that despite focusing on the quality of their teaching (Hattie, 2003, 2009), other factors disrupted the teaching and learning relationship between teachers and students.

Teachers report that many challenges affect their ability to be as effective in this school dominated by Binninj as they are in other non-remote schools where the Indigenous student population is a minority group. The "abyss" (Rose, 2012, p. 69) that teachers enter is the often nonproductive space in which non-Indigenous and Indigenous people come into contact with each other, either directly in school related interactions or indirectly when teachers attempt to include student backgrounds in the curriculum and classroom practices. This study supports Snook et al.'s (2009) argument that "background variables of class, poverty, health in families and nutrition" (p. 96) which are beyond the circle of teacher influence need to be given as much consideration in considering student outcomes as the teacher-related factors promoted by Hattie (2003, 2009). However, this study would suggest that Snook et al.'s (2009) point needs to be expanded to include cultural and societal differences as advised by Diamond (2012) and Schein (2010), and by Service (1975) almost 45 years ago. In this study, clan groups and the institution differ in the structures of power and authority they put in place to attend to the needs of their respective populations (Diamond, 2012). Differences in the structures of power and authority are evident in daily home practices; socio-political relationships between clan groups and between white people and Binninj; communication methods used by Binninj. Knowledge of the cultural and societal mores is essential to at least meet students' basic needs; to be alert to issues that can escalate into violence; and to have a sense of health status including prominent lifestyle and health issues. Without this knowledge, teachers quickly become ineffective or worse, acting or speaking inappropriately in remote community schools.

The lack of insight that many teachers have into student backgrounds leads to frustration. They become frustrated by Binninj practices that take precious time away from what they consider to be core business, that is, attending to student academic outcomes as defined by the institution. Teachers find their time absorbed by trying to

work out what students are saying to them because of language and contextual differences; students being unwilling or unable to engage in teaching and learning in the classroom; struggling to work out what the student can and cannot do; a preponderance of both students and parents seeking teacher assistance to access basic needs; constantly attending to students' personal hygiene; and navigating violent interactions involving students and/or parents and sometimes directed at the teacher. Teachers consistently report that although school leadership is aware of these challenges because they are continually raised by teachers, leadership does little to attend to these 'non-core-practice' issues. Leadership's role in teacher practice is discussed later in this chapter.

Teacher accounts of student lived experiences are consistent with consecutive Social Justice reports by successive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioners (Calma, 2009a, 2009b; Dodson, 2014; Gooda, 2011a, 2011b) presented in Chapter Two. Teachers identified the historic and intergenerational trauma, health inequality for Indigenous people, the over-representation of Indigenous Australians in the criminal justice system, lateral violence within and between families, organisations and the community referred to in the Social Justice reports as being significantly prevalent in this remote Aboriginal community. Teacher accounts of issues experienced by students and their families were captured by QG: "we're struggling because of outside [influences]" (Transcript 24, Episode 189). Students are often unable to close the door on their home life as they step into their school life and poor school attendance is one consequence.

This study showed that teachers' intended practice is continually disrupted by the changing composition of the class. This leads to an inability to predict what challenges will be presented and when. Despite making adjustments to practices and classroom routines, teachers maintain that every day the cohort of children changes which affects the degree by which these challenges impact on what is and is not possible in the classroom. Teachers noted students with some consistent school attendance within their school career develop an understanding of the routines that help them develop learning strategies, attend to hygiene and first aid concerns, and know which behaviours are un/acceptable in class. But, according to this study, even these students struggle at different periods in their schooling career to overcome the entrenched issues evident in most homes in this community. For the most part, children are unable to turn off their worries from home to make use of the full benefit of western education. They

frequently attend school seeking an interruption to their troubled lives rather than attending school as a means to improve their future. Some teachers, not knowing the precise nature of the collective challenges in students' lives call for families to take better care of their children. They call for families to hold community business, such as conflict resolution via community meetings, funerals, ceremonies, hunting and family gatherings on weekends and school holidays. Other teachers in this study wonder how a child with so many challenges has the energy and attention needed to achieve some success in the curriculum. All teachers, in this study, wonder how the institution can insist teachers ensure ALL students, despite their backgrounds, be at the same curriculum level as counterparts not experiencing the same challenges and the same limited resources.

Many students, and/or families, choose to come to school expecting teachers to get them ready to learn and then teach them. Teachers recognised that part of the reason teachers attend to basic first aid and personal hygiene is because clinic hours operate at the same time as school hours. Further, many students come to school without having clothes, sleep or food, knowing the teacher will ensure they are provided. Students, and families, wanting to attend school choose to bring these perceived minor issues to school knowing the teacher has the resources to fix the problem. Similarly, even students who have violent encounters with others are still at school. A common saying in remote communities is that Binninj talk with their feet and this is precisely what teachers have conveyed albeit with heartbreak when a good attendee stops coming to school.

Teacher expressions of shock and frustration at students, and families, demands to help them meet their basic needs are frequently controlled and kept between teachers because they want to be perceived as politically correct and know that challenging Binninj directly will result in poor attendance, trouble with school leadership or, at its most extreme, a one-way trip back to Darwin because Binninj have labelled the teacher as inappropriate for this community. This black mark against a teacher is perceived as being career damaging.

In this study, teacher discussions pertaining to culturally responsive education were minor in comparison to talk focused on social issues pitted against school leadership's emphasis on improving academic outcomes and ensuring the curriculum was delivered

at age/year level appropriateness. For Rose (2012) this would be considered as teaching little about Indigenous culture which is reflective of maintaining the silent apartheid (p. 69) between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people. But, as Rose (2012) acknowledges, teachers are a product of the same silent apartheid that negatively impacts on Binninj students because no time is allocated by school leadership to build teacher knowledge about Binninj culture and society so that teachers can be culturally responsive. Rather, most staff meetings and professional learning sessions are focused on teachers knowing the western curriculum and knowing how to teach the curriculum so that students can compete with counterparts in other schools. Teachers are neither encouraged or supported to provide culturally responsive education despite the literature attesting to the benefits of such an approach for Indigenous students (Perso, 2012; QUT YuMi Deadly Centre, 2014). Rather, this study suggests teachers in this study were themselves colonised into entrenched school cultures via professional sessions in which knowledge and practices were not contested from a Binninj standpoint (Auld et al., 2016). Binninj were only invited to lead professional learning sessions about the community. In these sessions, the community was treated as places and rules belonging to 'out there' offering little guidance about how 'out there' fits or does not fit with 'in here' nor how students and families might bring 'out there' into classrooms and what this would mean for teacher practice. Teachers found sessions about the community interesting but struggled to make connections with curriculum, pedagogy or interpersonal relationships.

### 6.1.2 Unsatisfactory professional partnerships

Teachers expect to develop professional partnerships with members of the local Aboriginal community and other institutional professionals. Members of the local community comprise the ancillary staff within the school and students' family members, particularly the parents and caregivers. At the time of this study, each class was allocated at least one assistant teacher. Amongst the assistant teachers, several were completing their Bachelor of Teaching and Learning: Primary (BTLP) hich required them to work closely with their classroom teacher who acted in the role of teaching mentor. In this community, the parents and caregivers of young children in the Early Years of schooling take a particular interest in the teachers, often accompanying students to the classroom. Frequently, parents stay with young children in the classroom to monitor their child's safety and happiness in the class and school environment.

In all schools, teachers know they will interact with other institutional professionals including school-based colleagues, departmental leaders such as regional directors and specialist support staff, and other educators who provide professional education for teachers. During interactions with other institutional professionals, teachers anticipate discussions to be contextualised and contributive to their teaching practice and professional growth.

With limited knowledge about Aboriginal communities and Aboriginal people, teachers expect to talk to families and Binninj staff about students and the community and to be supported to develop practices effective for teaching Binninj students from this community. Teachers in this study indicated their primary professional partnerships were with school-based staff including school leadership, teachers and assistant teachers and Binninj families. Teachers were able to gain some knowledge about Binninj and student background factors when school leadership imparted selected information to them and when they talked to Binninj families, assistant teachers and pre-service teachers and/or teachers who were experienced in this and other remote contexts. Overall though, teachers indicated their professional partnerships did not provide the anticipated information and support they required to be effective teachers in this context.

The teacher partnership with the assistant teacher is core to quality delivery in the classroom. Teachers anticipate collaboratively planning and teaching with their assistant teacher such that they provide a quality program that is contextualised, culturally sensitive and supports students to achieve academic benchmarks. In this study, teachers indicated partnerships with assistant teachers to be extremely problematic. Teachers coming to this school were told they would be partnered with an assistant teacher who was also a member of the local community. Teachers expected these partnerships to be well supported because they were told by school leaders and, in some instances, by institutional professionals during induction workshops, provided by the NTDET, that the best source of information about the community was assistant teachers. Instead, similar to Sarra and Ladwig's study (2009), teachers found the majority of local employees were ill-equipped for their role, had similar unpredictable, sporadic attendance patterns as students, and were frequently unavailable when teachers needed them most. Teachers believed the burden of managing assistant teachers was passed

onto them because school leadership was not in a classroom with assistant teachers to monitor the comings and goings of poorly attending assistant teachers.

One group of assistant teachers whom teachers found to be good support were those who were studying to become teachers in an onsite delivered teacher education program. The onsite pre-service teachers, who had deep understanding of the social arrangements and practices of clan groups and the community and were gaining insight into those of the institution were the best support for teachers. Pre-service teachers, seeking to learn from their mentoring teachers and being conscious of their frontline role in bringing community and school mores together in ways that made sense to students and families, positioned themselves to support teachers knowing they were inevitably supporting their families.

Martin (2008) describes Aboriginal people's ability to regulate encounters with outsiders, recognising that common interests do much to promote 'other' from outsider to friend. Because teachers and pre-service teachers were brought together for a common purpose, that is, to talk about practices to teach Binninj children, they were willing to negotiate how each should and could relate to the other as they worked closely alongside each other on a daily basis. Both the pre-service teacher and mentor were able to regulate encounters with the other "according to the types and levels of physical, social, emotional, cultural and economic relatedness" (Martin, 2008, p. 9). Declaring their common purpose, which was to teach Binninj children, the pre-service teacher and mentor discussed the physical, social, emotional, cultural and economic factors impacting on student attendance, wellbeing and learning. Discussions frequently led to greater understanding about 'other' and helped to shape how the pre-service teacher and mentor related to each other.

The difference between pre-service and assistant teachers' ability and desire to support teachers was notable in this study. In teachers' reported interactions with assistant teachers, Martin's (2008) regulation of outsiders can be observed. As noted, when Binninj have purposeful buy-in as a partner, they are more likely to support teachers by providing information about student background factors and knowledge of Binninj ways. When Binninj are perceived as ill-equipped such that they become an additional burden for the teacher and perceive themselves as an optional addition to the classroom, they act accordingly. Further, Binninj are perceptive of genuine and disingenuous

efforts to build authentic relationships and are well versed at ignoring or 'othering' due to the high numbers of white people arriving in and leaving the community (Ma Rhea, 2015). The pre-service teacher project revealed Binninj invested interest in Binninj education when Binninj input was valued and respected and Binninj could make direct links between education and family and community advancement.

In a remote Aboriginal community school, the school's relationship with the community is imperative. Surprisingly, there was no policy to direct school interactions with the community. Institutional documents such as NTDET Strategic Plans (Northern Territory Department of Education, 2016b, December, 2011; Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2009) and the school's implementation plan were broad in intent thus relying on leadership interpretation of what 'building partnerships' would mean for teacher practice. Most teachers struggled to develop relationships with families. Those who were able to hold valued conversations with families were either those who were introduced by a significant other, in which case the introducer attested to this person's integrity, or those who developed personal relationships via social events outside of school hours. The few teachers with relationships with families gained insights into student lives that assisted with planning, pedagogy and with supporting students to develop stronger conceptual connections between home and school. Leadership did not enable opportunities for teachers to share their insights thus limiting the opportunities for teachers to learn from each other.

Overall, teachers indicated receiving little support for getting to know families, a task frequently left to them to manage when and if families came to classrooms. Senior Leadership requested teachers conduct home visits, preferably with their assistant teacher and offered support from the Senior Teacher: Attendance and Participation for new teachers. Teachers quickly found the support on offer was frequently unavailable when the Senior Teacher was busy fulfilling core duties and the assistant teacher was absent. After several attempts, teachers often gave up, choosing to focus their efforts on planning, resource making and classroom preparation. Teachers commented on seeing families at the local store and making attempts to make contact but realised this was not the ideal place and understood family reluctance to engage with the teacher in such a public place. Teachers were surprised and annoyed that school leadership failed to offer other avenues to support teacher/family partnerships. Despite the AITSL Professional Standards (AITSL, 2012) requiring teachers to involve "parents/carers in the educative

process" (3.7), being identified by institutional and Indigenous leaders as pivotal in improving educational outcomes for Binninj students (Buckskin, 2012) and knowing the troubles teachers had making contact and building quality relationships with families, there was little or no institutional support. Rather, school leaders, lacking answers, pushed this challenging aspect of practice back onto teachers although there were no reprisals for teachers who failed to involve families in the educative process. Further, the questionable leadership and lack of authentic support could easily be perceived by Wilson (2014), who conducted the Indigenous education review for NTDET, as the institution's abandonment of responsibility to make clear what is required of schools.

All early years teachers acknowledged that family members are a necessary partner to ensure young children attended school and that at this school as in all schools, students and/or parents are loathe to leave each other. For the most part, early years teachers indicated a tolerance of parents, even those who slept in the classroom, if it ensured student attendance and participation in learning activities. However, many parents showed an interest in their child's learning that teachers indicated was intolerable. This is when it disrupted the direct relationship between the teacher and the student. The institution assumes families know what is expected of them when their child is enrolled in formal schooling. Findings in this study indicate otherwise at this school. Particularly in the first three years of schooling, from preschool until the end of Year One, families challenge teacher expectations of how learners should behave. Further, families either cannot or do not ensure students are ready to learn at the highest capacity to reach their full potential.

In the early years, family members who accompany their child to class frequently undermine teacher expectations of students. Although the teacher specifically outlines to students and families who are present in the classroom what students are learning and what they must do to demonstrate learning, they were caught off-guard by family members entering the teaching and learning environment without the teaching and learning discourse. The lack of mutual understandings caused chaos in the classrooms and disrupted teachers' intended curriculum.

One example of contradictory values concerned expectations placed on the learner. Contrary to teachers' knowledge of the learning process, family members emphasised

perfection perceiving ‘getting it right’ as an indicator of success. Teachers identified the need to explicitly model learner’s making mistakes because family members, particularly mothers and grandmothers, would insist that students’ new learning needed to be precise. To meet this end, most family members completed the child’s work for her in the classroom. Because of family support, perceived by teachers as interference, teachers found they were unable to gather evidence of student work, a key factor in assessing student work and in identifying the next step in student learning. They struggled to build the culture of learning in the classroom. While it might seem obvious to simply remove family members from the classroom, mothers and grandmothers will not leave their young child unattended. Any suggestion that the primary caregiver has not met the needs of the child would be perceived as her being remiss in her primary duties and lead to serious consequences. Shared cultural understandings of schooling and learning need to be created to ensure caregiver safety and profess student learning.

Teachers identified the importance of having quality relationships with community members. However, numerous attempts to build relationships with community members were rebuffed or took much longer than anticipated. Teachers identified tensions in their relationships with community members. The presence of strained relations between teachers and community members in the school resonate with Bond’s (2004) study in which elders found teachers to be condescending and contemptuous, and incapable of building relationships with local people. However, in this study, teachers indicated local people ignored teacher attempts to be friendly and interact, instead seeking out the assistant teacher with whom they were more familiar. This study indicates teachers try to build school-related relationships with families but the lack of support and knowledge about ‘other’ makes this difficult. Additionally, teachers are neither rewarded nor penalised for their efforts to build quality relationships with families and can easily blame contextual factors on their inability to build these important relationships. Cases in which teachers were able to build strong personal relationships with families were neither supported nor the result of proactive action taken by school leadership. Because school leadership had little to do with teachers building relationships with families, the extent and quality of teacher and family partnerships were inconsistent across the school. Teachers with partnerships reported numerous benefits, such as knowing how to respond to unusual student behaviours, gaining insight into the resources accessible to students beyond the school gate and knowing where

children were when not at school and reasons for their absences. When teachers with partnerships with families found themselves being interrogated by teachers without family partnerships, they felt the need to protect families because the information was open to interpretation through white lenses without the Binninj standpoint (Auld et al., 2016; Nakata, 2008).

When teacher efforts to engage with families add to teacher workload and frustration, teachers develop measures for limiting their interactions with families thereby creating a situation in which both teachers and families retreat to their familiar First Space.

Teachers who have benefitted from quality relationships with Binninj confirmed the importance of having local people with a good understanding of teacher perspectives and a willingness to support outsiders to know about and build relationships with students and families. Ladwig and Sarra's (2009) finding that the NTDET needed to employ Indigenous employees and ensure they were adequately trained failed to define the meaning of adequate. Furthermore, the narrow scope of Ladwig and Sarra's (2009) review only focused on the structures of NTDET without determining the specific skill sets required by school staff. Greater insight into household and family understandings of the conditions necessary for students to be effective learners capable of reaching their full potential is required.

Just as teachers lack knowledge about the community, teachers in this study perceived the community required specific support to understand school practices and institutional social arrangements. Teachers observed that the tacit agreement usually existing between schools and families seemed to be missing in this community. The teachers perceived that many families needed support to manage the continual challenges in their personal lives, particularly those that frequently played a role in making learning difficult for students. Teachers observed families needed support to develop strategies for reprimanding children in non-violent ways; attending to health and wellbeing in a timely manner; and managing finances so necessary resources such as food and clothing are prioritised. Paradoxically, the situation in which teachers sought insight into family lives so that they could provide effective and much needed support for students and family members to engage in schooling was offset by families loathing to share too much information lest it be used against them under the Mandatory Reporting policy (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2014; Northern Territory Department of

Education, 2015b; Northern Territory Department of Education and Training, 2010b). Trudgeon (2000) recognised Binninj desire to learn more about western culture but not at the cost of Binninj identity or continuing clan culture on their terms. However, the home conditions required to support successful student learning, such as quality sleep, health and nutrition, and a stable family life, anticipated by the institution as being in place for the majority of students, were not present for the majority of students in this school. Teachers perceived families and households required relevant and timely support which was not forthcoming in a cohesive approach. Further, teachers identified the lack of relevant and timely support underpinning many of their frustrations in interactions with institutional professionals.

Institutional professionals provide little relevant and timely support for teachers. When engaging in professional learning, teachers expected learning facilitators such as school leadership and institutional professionals from NTDET Darwin and regional offices to contextualise teacher education. Findings indicate the capacity of institutional professionals to contextualise institutional demands on teachers was limited. Teachers expressed anger and frustration that their time was wasted on professional learning sessions to acquire knowledge they could have, or already had, gained from a government document. Teachers expressed annoyance that their positioning at the bottom of the institution's hierarchy was frequently interpreted as their lacking capacity. One teacher, LN, was vocal in identifying many institution professionals as either being teachers "who couldn't cut it in the classroom" (Transcript 7, Episode 32) or, at the very least, not having to prove they were effective practitioners in remote Aboriginal communities. LN has a point.

### 6.1.3 Institutional practices incompatible with the context

This study found many standard institution practices and expectations were problematic in this remote community school. As already stated, primary teachers and leaders are not specialised teachers of remote Aboriginal students. Engagement with families is perceived by teachers, for the most part, as a component of interacting with students rather than as central to improving remote Aboriginal academic outcomes. Practices that are accepted as doable and expected elsewhere were challenging and sometimes not doable here. These included carrying out duties of planning and preparing learning programs and ensuring lessons are differentiated to accommodate student backgrounds

and abilities; implementing the Australian curriculum; progressing students through year levels according to age; utilising ancillary staff to deliver specific classroom activities and develop resources; and school leaders making judgments about teacher performance based on student performance.

The lack of differentiation between a school year and a curriculum year results in remote Aboriginal students being expected to complete a curriculum year in the same time as English speakers who have had experiences with many curriculum concepts and are exposed to a world where the concepts are embedded within the social arrangements of the society around them. Through the organisation of the Australian Curriculum, (ACARA, 2016c), the institution anticipates students to complete a specific amount of the prescribed curriculum, each school year. The system poorly accommodates remote Aboriginal students who have to learn English and curriculum concepts for which there are no equivalents in their own culture. Further, at the end of each school year, students are progressed to the next academic/curriculum level to ensure students stay with their peer group. Student progression to the next year level for the purpose of staying with their peer group is an example of Maddison (2011) and Lea's (2008) emphasis on the dangers of good intentions. Drawing on the idea of good intentions, Hattie (2009) also makes reference to school practices that have good intentions but do not necessarily deliver anticipated outcomes. Hattie (2009) identified the negative effects of retaining students in a year level rather than enabling progression. While teachers in this study do not openly disagree with Hattie, they identify the unrealistic demands placed on the majority of remote Aboriginal students who learn foreign concepts in the curriculum through a foreign language that is only used in school. Sensitive to the needs of their students, teachers are conscious of students' linguistic and cognitive overload. One of the teachers, CR, observed, "I see what doesn't work for them [unlike last year's students who kept pace with curriculum delivery demands and are now in the high achiever's class]…these kids just kind of went 'I have no idea what you're talking about so I'll sit there" (Transcript 19, Episode 149).

Teachers in this study identified the students for whom the pace of education worked and for those who required additional time and alternative approaches. Teacher emphasis on students requiring more time to learn the school's curriculum could be interpreted as "student lack, remediation and repair" (Luke et al., 2013). Teachers indicated this was not the case. Teachers stated that the right conditions and the right

support were pivotal to student learning. In the current situation, teachers believe students have the intellectual capacity, but that they would require a significant amount of time to complete the mandated curriculum due to the ongoing pressure from the many other factors that undermine students' ability to actively participate in learning.

Teachers recognised many students require more support to address the conditions that prevent teacher effectiveness discussed earlier. In its current form, the system offers no alternative learning pathways for students at this school. Binninj students have the same amount of time to complete their education as students who do not experience the same challenges in households and the community. In urban centres, there is more assistance offered by a wider range of services to support students who come from troubled households. In remote communities, services are limited with support offered to families identified as having the highest need. Determining which families have the highest need is a difficult concept in a community with continual high needs.

The majority of teachers indicated local employees were unable to provide the support anticipated by the institution. Rather, teacher interactions with local employees highlighted the majority of local employees, particularly assistant teachers, did not have the skills and knowledge necessary to perform their duties appropriately. In interactions with assistant teachers, teachers frequently identified assistant teachers not having English or subject knowledge to support student learning. Teachers in this study, concur with Ladwig and Sarra's determination "it is important that all Indigenous staff of NT DET are able to perform their roles with a competence that is commensurate with any other staff member" (2009, p. 41). While Ladwig and Sarra noted that all staff involved in Indigenous Education required training in teaching students for whom English is a second (or additional) language and "tailored training programs for all staff on Indigenous Education and culture" (2009, p. 43) it is implied staff are trained prior to or immediately after employment. The employment of unskilled and inexperienced staff, both teachers and local community staff, suggests the institution isn't as serious about improving education outcomes as it claims; it doesn't have access to appropriately skilled personnel; or it isn't prepared to provide the resources necessary to attract appropriately skilled staff. Employing local people at the school, presents a veneer of Aboriginal faces and people who speak parents' and students' languages but their lack of academic competency suggests the institution is offering a "fake remedy" (Maddison,

2011, p. 9), particularly when these are the people employed in schools to offer the perspective of the community.

As discussed earlier, teachers are rarely trained or experienced in how to teach English as an additional language to students whose worldly experiences are frequently different to those assumed in the Australian curriculum. Teachers don't know what they don't know just as students and families don't know what they don't know. For teachers to then accelerate students under these conditions is unfeasible. Even if teachers were outstanding practitioners, it would not fix the issue of students in this context supposedly being able to complete the same amount of the curriculum in the same amount of time. Further issues arise when teachers begin choosing which parts of the curriculum students will learn.

There is no specialised department or intellectual body within the institution to monitor or manage institutional professionals in this clearly specialised field. Rather than institutional professionals, including teachers, in remote Aboriginal communities being employed because they are highly skilled practitioners and culturally competent to collaborate effectively with community members (Buckskin, 2012; Perso, 2012), the institution employs anyone willing to come to the school.

Choosing to teach in remote schools is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, the lack of specialisation in Indigenous education, particularly for remote, English as additional language speakers who maintain pre-colonial clan practices, creates a situation in which teachers can easily gain employment. Once inside the system, teachers can then build points to gain transfer into regional or urban schools. On the other, teachers have limited knowledge and skills to teach highly at-risk remote Aboriginal students and are highly unlikely to find the necessary support to be effective teachers.

Despite the academic and leader insistence, Aboriginal students require teachers who are culturally responsive (Bishop, 2003; Evans, 2012; Gay, 2010; Lewthwaite et al., 2013; Perso, 2012), the institution's lack of insistence that teachers of Aboriginal students, particularly in remote contexts, have specialised skills and knowledge support Rose's (2012) contention of the maintenance of the silent apartheid. The continuing institution practice of employing untrained and inexperienced institutional professionals to teach and take on leadership roles in education suggests an ongoing liberal rhetoric

(Ford, 2016). Rather than being proactive in efforts to improve educational outcomes, the institution's practices and policies replicate the very culture of inequality they are attempting to address.

Given the abysmal academic outcomes in remote Aboriginal communities, it would be reasonable to expect all institutional professionals, including school leadership at the very least, to be specifically trained for teaching remote Indigenous students. Findings from this study indicate institutional professionals with explicit training and relevant experience are rare. This creates a situation in which teachers, new to community schools, perpetuate the "silent apartheid" (Rose, 2012, p. 67) because of the institution's blindspots when it comes to Indigenous education.

Rather than institutional professionals, including teachers, in remote Aboriginal communities being highly skilled and culturally competent (Buckskin, 2012; Perso, 2012), the institution employs generalist professionals. Further, allowing the Principal and Senior Leadership to direct what teachers learn about indicates the institution is responding to pressure for schools to have more autonomy and is "skirting the issue" (Maddison, 2011, p. 9), of staff being ill-equipped to support the most disadvantaged students (Calma, 2009a, p. 97).

### 6.2 Underlying causes for the challenges experienced by teachers

Teachers are unable to imagine the challenges to their practice, prior to their arrival in the community. Teachers come to this site believing their task to improve student academic outcomes to be a matter of ensuring effective teaching that is culturally responsive to students' Indigenous background. However, the reality is far more complex than fulfilling the AITSL Professional Standards for teachers (AITSL, 2012) and attending to the school's identified concerns of improving student attendance, explicitly teaching the curriculum and monitoring student performance. Teachers find themselves firmly positioned in a in a tug-of-war for legitimacy between the institution of education and local clan groups, each seeking to provide what they perceive as is best for youth. Further, the social arrangements within the school continue to privilege non-Aboriginal categorisation of the world, ignoring Binninj unless it can be comfortably tagged onto an existing social order within the school such as language and culture lessons as a discrete subject area. Currently, numerous Binninj behaviours upset

existing social arrangements within the school, such as focusing on a student who is a family member rather than supporting other students in the class (Journal, Episode 445).

### 6.2.1 Tug-of-war for legitimacy

The relationship between the school and the community in a remote Aboriginal community is dissimilar to other types of Australian communities. Guenther (2015b) aptly captured the current situation of schooling in remote Aboriginal communities as being an "island in a sea of [Binninj] culture" (p. 9). School leaders strive to fulfill the demands of the institution by stringently applying institutional mores, and expecting teacher practices to produce student academic performance comparable with non-Indigenous, non-remote students. In contrast, clan leaders strive to maintain on-going pre-colonial traditions while seeking to benefit from the dominating western society. Student, local employee and family absences from school, in preference for cultural and ceremony business, indicate the tug-of-war between the institution and the clan groups. Many institutional professionals are aware of the tug-of-war that exists between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people but are rarely confronted with the consequences that come from community members choosing the community over the institution. The majority of Australians accept the institution's legitimacy and significance in everyday life as the way to obtain education such that the school's success is judged based on its comparability with other Australian schools (MySchool, 2016). However, this context is not the typical Australian community and the challenges experienced by teachers in this school are not typical of most Australian communities.

Despite the school being over forty years old, the community continues to be suspicious of the school. This community is populated by people with intergenerational distrust of white people, particularly white governments who have a colonial history of imposing discriminatory policies and practices (Trudgeon, 2000) that have challenged the existence of clans, around which Binninj identity is centred (Australian National University, 2008; Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation, n.d.; Trudgeon, 2000). The institution of education established a school in this community at a time when Aboriginal education outcomes were of little importance to the institution and because of continued pre-colonial practices, very few students engaged with the school (Bond-Sharp, 2013). In the 1970s, community leaders were able to negotiate the inclusion of the two dominant languages, Ndjebánna and Burarra under the policy for bilingual

instruction resulting in increased interest in school (Bond-Sharp, 2013). Binninj's expect schools to be the place to learn white classification systems that dominate modern life and learn how to live in the settled community life which has replaced perpetual freedom for "problems with premature death and preventable diseases (and) learned helplessness" (Trudgeon, 2000, p. 165).

The institution of education has evolved to meet the needs of Australian people (MCEETYA, 2008), just as plans and strategies have been designed to support the inclusion of Aboriginal people as Australian citizens (Department of Employment Education and Training, 1989; Education Council, 2015; MCEECDYA, 2010). But the majority of interventions continue to be on the terms of the institution's interpretation of education. The institution continues to demand Binninj to achieve similar levels of success as their non-Aboriginal counterparts (Department of Social Services, 2009). This is often interpreted as providing the same model of schooling although other models such as the Learning on Country (LoC) program (Fogarty et al., 2015, p.103) are challenging the institution's interpretation of a schooling model.

The institution has demonstrated its ability to collaborate with remote Aboriginal communities to reimagine how some aspects of schooling are performed (Fogarty et al., 2015). Sincere efforts of collaboration between the institution and the community for the academic benefit of remote Aboriginal students requires concerted effort and clearly articulated processes between the Australian Government, community development practitioners, educators, and the local community. But the institution has to be willing to share educational authority with Aboriginal clans at the local level. As Pearson (2016) points out, recognising Aboriginal rights, showing respect for Aboriginal knowledge and skills, cooperating and building partnerships is critical in developing the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Australian state. The recognition of Indigenous people as equals influenced the Empowered Communities strategy (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017), a new way of engaging and working with Indigenous leaders and communities, indicating a recognition by Australian governments that Indigenous people need to be included in business that affects them, aligning with what Phillips and Luke (2016) refer to as a relational space. While Phillips and Luke's (2016) relational space is similar to Bhabha's (1994) 'Third Space' theory in that they both draw attention to the need for Australian governments and Indigenous people need to co-create the relational space at the local level so that all

parties are clear about intent, meanings and actions necessary to bring about shared and desired changes.

Rose (2012) contends there is much for non-Aboriginal people to learn about Aboriginal people in this abyss, just as Trudgen (2000) asserts there is much for remote Aboriginal people, who maintain many of their pre-colonial practices, to learn about non-Aboriginal people. For Rose's (2012) abyss to be replaced with a shared space in which both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways are equally valued, respected and utilised, particularly in remote communities where 'both ways' (Harrison, 2008) has been requested by the community (Trudgeon, 2000), the first step is to closely examine the tug-of-war for legitimacy taking place between the institution and the school. For example, the school perceives its role is to ensure students are English literate and numerate and have engaged in the world in ways deemed valuable by non-Binninj people. No Binninj has been invited to peruse or critique the curriculum provided to their children in this school, yet the community is expected to endorse it, albeit tacitly, by the act of ensuring students come to school every day. Similarly, teachers are not informed of Binninj ways that may contest the school's curriculum either conceptually or in terms of the appropriate age for students to require such knowledge.

Children in remote Aboriginal communities are taught two curriculums: the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2016) and the local Binninj curriculum. The Australian Curriculum is taught in school while the, frequently unwritten, Binninj curriculum is taught by clan leaders and families. The ways in which these two curriculums overlap, conflict or contradict each other have not been identified. The Melbourne Declaration (2008) reflects mainstream, non-Binninj values just as school practices and social arrangements, reflect legitimated ways of being in white society. Binninj curriculum is structured and taught differently from the Australian curriculum, reflecting local Binninj values. Child participation with guidance from clan leaders and families in ceremony and cultural business is a legitimate form of education utilised by Binninj. Currently, families, including children often find themselves in a position of choosing between the school and the family, a tug-of-war the school usually loses. The tug-of-war between the school and the family needs to be addressed if student academic and life outcomes are to be improved. In the first instance, institutional leaders and community leaders need to reduce the competition between the school and the family by way of greater alignment between The Australian and Binninj curriculum. The

institution's attempts to align the Australian Curriculum and Aboriginal curriculum are observed in teacher attempts to embed Indigenous perspectives (AITSL, 2012; Department of Education and Training, 2011) yet, as discussed earlier, this approach is highly problematic. The alignment of the curriculums requires leadership at the local level to establish shared values, practices and social arrangements that articulate address the issues that arise when two different groups come together.

This study illustrates the tug-of-war that currently exists between the institution and the Binninj community. In a remote Aboriginal community school, such as the site of this study, the institution and the Binninj community struggle to maintain their legitimacy in the face of competition. At the time of this study, teachers struggled to provide effective teaching because they were both perpetrators and victims of the abyss (Rose, 2012) between First Space and Second Space people. Further, teachers struggled to maintain their identity by applying familiar practices that did not prove effective in the remote Aboriginal community context. Rather than drawing on First Space and Second Space social arrangements to create suitable Third Space practice architectures, stakeholder efforts collided with each other sometimes inadvertently, but sometimes quite deliberately as a way of "marking turf" and maintaining authority and some semblance of authority or privacy.

### 6.2.2 Arrangements for the shared space have not been established

Neither teachers nor community members are able to adequately address concerns because existing social arrangements underpinning school practices have not considered many of the challenges revealed in this study. At face value, this school appears to be like any other Australian school because the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements of the school have been adopted from the institution. However, within the school space, Binninj bring practices that shape and have been shaped by the social arrangements established in and between clan groups. Because the institution and the community comprise markedly different social arrangements, ways of talking, acting and relating by First and Second Space members, this often created tensions between teachers and Binninj. All stakeholders, including school staff and families, are expected to comply with the institution's social arrangements, however, this is frequently a point of contention because the school is physically positioned as an island in this remote Aboriginal community. Tensions frequently arise between

institutional professionals and Binninj when their practices do not comply with each other's sense of right and wrong, which has been shaped by the social arrangements of their respective Spaces. Because teachers are positioned at the boundary between the institution and the community, teachers frequently find themselves in situations in which the institution's 'way of doing things here' conflict with those understood and expected by the community. In these situations, teachers feel trapped, confused and frustrated because they do not know what to say or do or how to relate to 'other' because the school's current social arrangements are inadequate.

Because the social arrangements that shape school practices have been adopted from the institution with little regard to Binninj clan practice architectures, numerous Aboriginal leaders perceive the current model of schooling as an example of the continuing colonial project (Lea, 2008; Maddison, 2011; Rose, 2012). White teachers intent on fulfilling their charge to provide quality teaching for remote Aboriginal students are suffering under the inadequacies of school arrangements shaped by and for non-Aboriginal Australians. The one-sided formation of the school's social arrangements enforced by institutional demands on teacher practice belie the institution's claims of inclusion. Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994), challenges institutional dominance over Indigenous education, arguing that a special kind of negotiation or translation between the institution and the local Aboriginal community must take place to enable both groups to come together constructively; that is, to improve the educational outcomes of remote Aboriginal students.

Findings from this study illustrate the untenable situation in which teachers currently take up practice because the school's social arrangements insist on institutional dominance at the exclusion of local Binninj mores. The exclusion of Binninj mores leads to teachers not knowing what to do when Binninj bring practices to the school that are counterproductive to the arrangements established to help teachers be effective practitioners. Rather than accounting for difference and establishing social arrangements that value all stakeholders, current social arrangements within the school exacerbate rather than reduce the challenges experienced when two different groups come together. Teachers are caught up in an endless cycle in which the institution controls school business and the clan groups control clan business. Students and families bring to the school, clan societal practices based on specific social arrangements that support and are supported by clan practices. The overlap between

institutional and clan practices encroach on teachers' ability to provide effective instruction. Teachers do not understand the social arrangements of the community just as Trudgeon (2000) and critical friends claim, Binninj either do not understand the social arrangements of western society or the school, or do not place value on the demands of the school's social arrangements. In the current situation, teachers are buffeted between an institution intent on all Australian students having access to quality teaching and Aboriginal clan groups unwillingly to acquiesce clan practices that maintain clan distinctiveness and fulfill Binninj needs (Mundine, 2016; Nakata, 2007; Pearson, 2016). The current situation is set up as a clash. A collaborative arrangement would not require acquiescence, as the power dominance/submission model would not be underpinning interactions.

Findings from this study concur with Guenther's findings (2015a; 2015b) that the institution and remote Aboriginal community are on totally different pages in terms of why students should go to school. Kemmis et al. (2014) maintain that the site of practice is crucial because it is within the site "where these arrangements are or are not to be found—where the relevant practice architectures do or do not exist" (p. 56). This resonates with Mundine's (2016) insistence that each clan group and/or community needs to be negotiated with as a discrete nation because what works in one location is not guaranteed to work in another due to the different history, relationships, resources and ensuing practices.

Rose (2012) argues that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people sharing the same space, such as the school, is problematic because non-Indigenous understandings of Indigenous have been built on foundations of white Australia's misnomers, untruths and stereotypes about Indigenous people. This study found that some teachers had tacit beliefs about what families should know and do in regards to their role in their child's education. When teachers' realised parents did not know or act according to the tacit belief, teachers teetered on the edge of blaming parents before recalling all families are different. Rather than allowing teachers' tacit beliefs to be openly discussed, teachers' tacit beliefs were either overlooked or replaced with contextualised knowledge by non-Binninj people. The existence of a cultural/discursive arrangement enabling teachers and Binninj to openly discuss key ideas about resources and roles would have supported both teachers and families to move from the tacit to the tangible.

Supporting Rose's (2012) claim that Indigenous people are overlooked in dialogue about Indigenous ways, this study found, for the most part, teachers find it difficult to access authentic information about local Binninj people because social arrangements within the school, at the time of this study, did little to actively include Binninj voice. As noted by Auld et al. (2016), essentialist concepts of culture and ensuing teacher and institutional practices need to be replaced with acknowledgement and inclusion of Binninj people who are "actively negotiating space between traditional values and practices and the values and practices associated with Western culture" (p. 169), albeit not as successfully as they could be with the right information (Trudgeon, 2000). The positioning of the pre-service teachers as more than assistant teachers and as trainee teachers was negotiated by me in my school leadership role with school leaders. This positioning was constantly re-iterated to students, families, assistant teachers, teachers and school leadership and supported by my creation of a protective barrier around pre-service teachers.

This study found Balanda and Binninj coming together is more than a matter of two different groups choosing to work together. Effective collaborations require appropriate support that recognises and values the ability of members from the First Space, the institution, and from the Second Space, the community, to resolve issues. This study highlighted the difficulties experienced by a teacher and an assistant teacher who had articulated a shared purpose of teaching their students to write a procedural text for an activity they were to deliver at Under 8's day. The teachers recognised writing was not a common practice in their Aboriginal students' lives. They found it difficult to guide students through the writing process when students wanted to learn by watching and doing, a dominant way of learning during ceremonies. This teacher and assistant teacher partnership provides an example of how difficult negotiating the Third Space can be. Further, their unsuccessful attempts to understand each other's western (the teacher) and Aboriginal (the assistant teacher) ways of learning could come together suggested the need for what I have coined a 'Third Space interlocutor'. This Third Space interlocutor was another person who had insight in both ways of learning and could support the teacher and assistant teacher to understand 'other' perspectives while First Space and Second Space members become familiar with each other's categorisation frameworks (Trudgeon, 2000) and learn to communicate in the enunciative space (Bhabha, 1994).

The willingness to create the Third Space and its accompanying practice architectures must come from both groups. Martin (2008) and Folds (2001) maintain Aboriginal people are well equipped for managing outsider government institutions and people who do not take their demands for equality seriously. Just as institutional professionals, particularly leaders, must desire to share the school space honestly and fairly, Binninj must also show they desire authentic partnership by not reverting to behaviours that manage white people.

### 6.3 Conclusion

The beginning point for Guenther (2015a, 2015b) is to identify the purpose of remote Aboriginal community schools and criteria for educational success. Hattie also makes reference to criteria for success (Hattie, 2009), but Guenther (2015a, 2015b) argues that indicators of schooling success must be readily identified by the community. Similarly to Guenther (2015a, 2015b) and Hattie (2009), Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994) demands borderline encounters between two different groups be clear about their purpose for coming together and the criteria for success. In the context of this study, the institutional and the community stakeholders need to have a shared understanding about the purpose of the school and the criteria for success. To engage in a shared project, BOTH institutional and community leaders are essential actors in devising the explicit terms of agreement that draw on the social arrangements and practices from First Space and Second Space. In its current state, institutional dominance in this remote Aboriginal community school contributes to many of the challenges expressed by teachers.

The challenges experienced by teachers in this remote Aboriginal community school are significantly influenced by institutional and community practices that compete with each other. This study suggests challenges to teacher practice occur when institutional professionals, including teachers, and Binninj utilise practices that are appropriate in their respective Spaces. As an in-between space, this school, at the time of this study, was a place in which the institution and the community engaged in a tug-of-war for legitimacy and actors drew on practices that were suitable in their respective Spaces but frequently led to conflict, confusion and contradiction in the school. Teacher practice was challenged by teachers' inadequate knowledge about students and the community; unsatisfactory professional partnerships; and institutional practices that are incompatible with community practices. This study suggests there is a strong case for the school to be

re-created as a Third Space. By positioning the institution and the community as equal partners in the project of schooling for this remote Aboriginal community, the institution and the community would be able to negotiate, articulate and endorse the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements necessary to enable effective teaching for effective student learning.

# Chapter Seven. Conclusion

This critical ethnography foregrounded the white teacher's voice in a remote community school. As a participating researcher in this study, I gathered data from white teachers practising in situ and recorded observations and reflections in my research journal over a period of two and a half years. Further, this study evolved from a "failed" Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2011; McTaggart, 1989; Wadsworth, 1998) project which indicated that there were underlying causes to the challenges experienced by white teachers in this school. The analysis of the findings used an analytical framework combining Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon's practice architectures framework (2014) with Bhabha's Third Space theory (1994). The analysis indicated that the dominant reasons for challenges to teacher practice in this remote Aboriginal community school are the tug-of-war for legitimacy between the institution and the local Aboriginal community and the lack of social arrangements created to embrace socio-cultural differences between these two groups. This study indicated the current state of social arrangements in this school are dysfunctional. The school's social arrangements, implemented by the institution, are collapsing under the pressure of the Second Space, the local Aboriginal community, pulling against them. Rather than the two groups collaborating because of well-considered social arrangements that build on the strengths of the two distinct groups, the practice architectures guiding the sayings, doings and relatings of the school are in conflict.

In this chapter, I first present a summary of the study to demonstrate the significance of stakeholder practices and the school's social arrangements on teacher practices. I then discuss the contribution of this study to the field followed by implications of this study for the institution of education and policy. Finally, directions for further research are presented before completing this dissertation with a final conclusion.

## 7.1 Summary

To summarise this study, I have developed which serves two purposes. Firstly, it provides an overview of the social arrangements at the time of the study that shaped teacher practice (what is). Secondly, Table 22 shows the possible social arrangements reflective of Bhabha's (1994) Third Space ideal if both the institution of education and the local Aboriginal community were formally positioned as socio-political equals in setting and directing the educational and schooling agenda in this remote Aboriginal

community (what could be). Table 22 enables a comparison of 'what is' with 'what could be' by utilising Kemmis et al.'s (2014) practice architectures framework.

At the time of this study, the 'what is' took two forms. It could be categorised as 'my space/your space' in which the institution and Aboriginal clan groups remained separate, or as an 'in-between space' in which the two groups came together. Each space was determined by how actors from the institution and the community interacted (socio-political arrangements); by how resources were utilised (material-economic arrangements); and by actors' ways of being, through language and ideas, in the space (cultural-discursive arrangements). The 'In-between space' was further categorised into 'awareness things are not right' and a 'glimmer of Third Space'. Within the category 'awareness things are not right', actors indicated, in their talk, something was wrong with existing social arrangements and practices. Within the category 'a glimmer of Third Space', actors attempted to establish new practices and/or social arrangements to address issues such as inequity, exclusion, confusion or tensions that occurred when the institutional employees and the community came together. Together, the three categories of social arrangements at the school indicated the current state of the school was a chaotic mixture of both First Space and Second Space that caused tensions for all members.

Finally, 'what could be' was categorised as a 'Third Space' in which the social arrangements enable authentic, democratic partnerships with the local community. Third Space positions actors from the institution and the community as equal, valued, responsible and accountable for schooling in this community. Within the Third Space, actors collaborate and negotiate their way through tensions that arise from difference to establish social arrangements and practices that meet the needs of this context and this school's stakeholders.

In the first column of Table 22, the practice architectures and practices as used by Kemmis et al.'s (2014) are listed. The practice landscape comprises the purpose or 'project' of the site which, in turn, determines how actors inhabit the site. The practice traditions comprise 'the way we do things around here' indicated by the actors' skills and capacities and their understanding of the school. The values, commitments and norms demonstrated by actors are connected to the perceived purpose of the school. Together, the practice landscape and practice traditions provide the overarching

characteristics of each space. The social-political, material-economic and cultural-discursive arrangements for each space are then described. Even though Kemmis et al. (2014) separate the arrangements, they interrelate. The socio-political arrangements are first described because school practices are most influenced by how institutional employees and the local Aboriginal community relate to each other, or not. The ways in which actors relate to each other is central to the socio-political arrangements. These relatings are influenced by social and administrative roles, responsibilities, functions, obligations and reporting relationships, and can be recognised as actors collaborating or competing for such social aspects as authority and resources. The material-economic arrangements are then described because the resources available to each group and the ways each group utilises resources impacts on how people act and interact within the space. The material-economic arrangements include the 'doings' in the school. The ways in which physical spaces are occupied and the material, human and financial resources made available affect how actors act within the space of the school. Finally, the cultural-discursive arrangements describe actors' language and ideas shaping individual and/or group presence in the space. The cultural-discursive arrangements involve the 'sayings' including where language and specialist discourses come from (texts, policies, professional communities), and who does/not speak the language of schooling fluently.

The practice architectures outlined in the columns titled 'my space/your space', 'awareness things are not right' and 'glimmers of Third Space' provide an overview of the types of social arrangements and practices within the school at the time of this study. The practice architectures outlined in the column titled 'Third Space' provide insight into potential practices and social arrangements that result from democratic collaborations between the institution and the local community. Looking across the row of the three sets of social arrangements enables comparisons between the types of practices and practice architectures from the least collaborative, 'my space/your space', to the most collaborative, 'Third Space'. Comparisons between the descriptions of each space in Table 22 indicate the ineffectiveness of the social arrangements currently being implemented by the institution of education.

Table 22 The current shape of schooling in this remote community compared to what it could be

| **Type of space →** | **What the remote community school was at the time of the study** | | | **What the remote community school could be** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Practice Architectures ↓** | **My space/Your space** | **In-between space** | | **Third Space** |
| | | **Awareness** things are not right | **Glimmer** of Third Space | |
| **Practice Landscape**<br>• Project of the Practice / school purpose<br>• How actors inhabit the site | School is for white education. Ceremony business for clan education. There is no overlap between school and community education models. | Teachers aware of discordance between institution expectations of student learning and the learning students can cope with in their current life situation. | Teacher and/or local teacher* attempts to provide a culturally responsive curriculum and/or pedagogy. Efforts are inconsistently supported. | Balanced Clan/Australian curriculum meets individual and/or community needs and aspirations. This may result in multiple pathways as a response to differentiated aspirations. Assessment standards and notions of educational success reflect this balance. |
| **Practice traditions**<br>• Interactive capabilities of actors<br>• Actors understanding of the school<br>• Skills and capacities actors are using<br>• Actors' values, commitments and norms relevant to purpose of school<br>• 'the way we do things around here' | • Teachers perceived as education experts.<br>• Teachers skilled to teach institution's school model<br>• Ceremonies perceived as disruption to school learning.<br>• Actors in this space disregard 'other's' rules if they don't meet their view of the world or their needs and wants. | • Actors want 'other' to adjust their practices for benefit of students.<br>• Actors find out about each other over time if/when they cross paths or ask another source.<br>• School employs locals in ancillary jobs; professional roles given to suitable 'outside' applicants.<br>• Actors talk about collaborating but are not supported to do so. | • Classes involved in culture activities during school hours.<br>• Actors take a professional interest in incorporating each 'other's' point of view and take steps to build own capacity. | • Contextualised learning occurs in and beyond the school and is taught by the most proficient actor/s; no quick fixes.<br>• Notions of 'other' are arbitrary: all actors positioned as 'other', together in difference.<br>• School norms established via careful negotiations by governance group: e.g. participation in cultural business has been factored into schooling model.<br>• Staff fulfill explicit employment criteria specific to needs of this school.<br>• Mentors induct new employees – process begins before employee takes up tenure.<br>• Staff employed based on balance between student need, staff skill, school purpose, community aspiration. |

*Local teacher can be in-service, pre-service or assistant teacher who identifies with/accepted by the local community as having requisite local knowledge.
#Leadership group comprises highly skilled and experienced institution and community leaders sympathetic to creating the school in the Third Space ideal.

Table 22 Continued

| **Type of space →** | **What the remote community school was at the time of the study** | | | **What the remote community school could be** |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Practice Architectures ↓** | **My space/Your space** | **In-between space** | | **Third Space** |
| | | **Awareness** things are not right | **Glimmer** of Third Space | |
| **Social-political arrangements**<br>• Relatings<br>• Social/ administrative systems.<br>• Collaboration or competition. | • Institution of education dominates school education positioning clan education at the periphery and as community business. | • Attempts to collaborate are undermined by systemic and/or community inflexibility.<br>• Actors bewildered as to why 'other' act/relate in the ways they do.<br>• Family presence in classrooms is problematic.<br>• YuyaBol utilised to support principal's agenda.<br>• Dominant/subordinate relationships between Balanda & Binninj maintained. | • Individuals rely on personal relationships with 'other' to learn aspects of each other's space.<br>• Continual institution and community discussions result in no substantiated changes to social arrangements or practices.<br>• School does not reflect local needs or aspirations. | • Institution and community leaders elect leadership group to negotiate school's social-political arrangements.<br>• All stakeholders accountable to this leadership group.<br>• Collaborative decision-making about student learning trajectory involves family, teacher and assistant teacher.<br>• Actors have a shared purpose and are accountable to effectively fulfill articulated roles. |
| **Material-economic arrangements**<br>• Doings<br>• How physical spaces are occupied.<br>• Material and financial resources. | • Institution controls resources.<br>• Teachers are proficient in English, the language of the school; the community is not.<br>• Binninj believe government has unlimited money. | • Teachers aware Binninj not paid or trained for curriculum related work.<br>• Binninj don't know enough curriculum or English to be a quality interpreter.<br>• Students don't have the necessary resources for effective learning.<br>• Students have incomplete or inaccurate academic portfolios. | • Binninj employed in school to support teachers.<br>• Assistant teachers are the resource expected to support cultural responsiveness.<br>• On-site local pre-service teacher education program. | • Accurate data informs needs-driven resourcing to help actors reach their full potential.<br>• Appropriately trained staff are the most significant resource. |
| **Cultural-discursive arrangements**<br>• Sayings<br>• Where language/ specialist discourse comes from.<br>• Who speaks the language / fluency. | • English spoken by Balanda; clan languages spoken by Binninj.<br>• Policies developed by the institution<br>• Community prioritises clan practices.<br>• Ceremony perceived by school as non-attendance. | • Teacher realises student culture is poorly included in the school.<br>• Binninj provide irregular guidance.<br>• Teacher does the work of other staff.<br>• Non-negotiable Second Space rules enforced by local staff even if they don't make sense to teachers.<br>• Teachers fail to abide institutional rules.<br>• Planning does not equate with what happens in the classroom. | • Teacher tries to accommodate 'other' by talking to Binninj and adjusting practices; wishes there was more time for rigorous conversations.<br>• Teacher and pre-service teacher attempt to bring two cultures together to support student learning (exclusive of institution). | • Non-Aboriginal and Binninj clan practices are equally valued. The purpose of education and criteria for success articulated for this community shapes practices.<br>• Appropriately qualified Balanda and Binninj collaborate for specific purposes. Each actor's role/responsibility is supported in suitable learning communities.<br>• Actor capacity is monitored by the leadership group.<br>• Policies reflect school hybridity. |

In this study, the social arrangements implemented by the institution of education became dysfunctional for two reasons. One reason was that the socio-political, material-economic and cultural-discursive arrangements or practices established by the institution of education did not align with one another, essentially undermining each other. The other reason was that practices brought to the site by institutional employees and community members did not align with the social arrangements implemented by the institution. When institutional employees and community members bring their First Space social arrangements and practices to the school which has established social practices implemented by the institution, some practices fit, some practices sort of fit, and some practices simply do not. Each fundamental reason associated with actor practices and the social arrangements implemented in the school is now discussed utilising an example drawn from the findings. In the following discussion, the misalignment of social arrangements and practices is considered before focusing on Binninj and Balanda actors who bring different practices to the same situation. A situation, in this discussion, is an event or activity associated with schooling in which teachers and members of the local community come together.

The misalignment of the social arrangements and/or practices implemented by the institution of education contributes to this school's dysfunction. When a problem arises in a socio-political, material-economic or cultural-discursive arrangement, the effects of the problem create a ripple effect across the other social arrangements. For example, teachers are expected, as part of the cultural-discursive arrangements, to submit planning at the beginning of each term to show the curriculum content that will be taught, how it will be assessed, and how it will be taught. The ways in which the curriculum is differentiated to cater for individual students must also be outlined, and teachers usually outline the ways in which the assistant teacher will be utilised to support student learning. Pivotal to quality planning, as a precursor to quality teaching and learning, is student academic data collected from the moment the student is enrolled and becomes a member of the classroom. To guide student academic data collection, school leadership provides an assessment overview which includes students' academic expectations according to enrolled year level; dates for NAPLAN (ACARA, 2016g), semester reporting and other data collected by the school; and a checklist to guide material to be included in individual student portfolios. Student portfolios are then utilised by subsequent teachers as a resource to inform student's next learning cycle.

The standard practices just described did not operate effectively in the context of this school.

Students with poor attendance and participation in learning activities comprise a large percentage of the school population. Poor attendance and participation result in incomplete and/or outdated student portfolios. Teachers are unable to use student portfolios to reliably inform planning. Because a core set of data is missing, teachers have to guess where students are at. These guesses are problematic because, in many cases, the teachers do not know the students and have no samples of the students' work. The teacher is unable to connect student current academic capacity with the curriculum or identify the next step in student learning progression.

Planning for student learning progression is further exacerbated by students not achieving year level academic benchmarks determined in the curriculum (ACARA, 2016b). In this school students are progressed to the next year level based on their chronological age rather than academic ability. While it is problematic for a 15 year old to be enrolled in a Year One class, the academic range of Year Six students from pre-schooling ability to Year Six ability is also extremely problematic for teachers.

Cultural-discursive arrangements associated with attempts at increasing student attendance inadvertently exacerbate academic failings in classrooms. Institutional leadership's emphasis on praising and celebrating improved student attendance averts student and family attention from academic success. School leadership actively markets and provides prizes for students who attend a pre-determined number of successive school days, dependent on current attendance patterns and familial issues. Instead of academic success being the primary reason for families to have their children attending school, academic success tends to become only the teacher's business. Students' academic success is reliant on the teacher's ability to create a classroom atmosphere that foregrounds academia. Students and families not motivated by academic success often impede learning for students who are motivated by academic success. In these ways, the purported intent of the school, academic success, is undermined by other cultural-discursive and material-economic resources that teachers are directed to incorporate in their practice.

Another contributor to the school's dysfunction is that actors from the institution and the community bring different practices to the same situation. The following example illustrates incongruity between Binninj practices, influenced by their First Space social arrangements, and the social arrangements implemented by the institution. Material-economic arrangements as indicated in Table 22 comprise people's doings made possible with the resources available to them (Kemmis et al., 2014). In this school, the material, financial and human resources include staff; teaching and learning resources purchased and made by teachers; resources for school determined activities such as the school's library; and school uniforms, stationery and first aid and hygiene resources for students. Because this school is located in a remote Aboriginal community in which Binninj speak languages other than English, English has been included in material-economic arrangements because it is the language used for communication in the school.

Resources provided by the institution limits the school's ability to be flexible with how resources are accessed and utilised. The institution utilises a predetermined formula to resource all government schools. Each school is allocated a base fund for school operations before receiving additional money based on the number of students enrolled in the school at a specific time of the school year. The number of students also dictates the number of staff employed at the school. Within the school's financial arrangements, the institution factors in the employment, transfer and housing of fully qualified teachers. Ancillary staff such as cleaners, grounds-staff and assistant teachers are employed from the local community and are not provided with housing. School leadership allocate staff and funding to school activities outlined in their annual operation plan. In addition to institution provided financial and human resources, the school can apply for grants for programs and families contribute a small portion of welfare payments for each child attending the school for the school's nutrition plan. The institution makes the assumption that quality human and material resources are available to the school. Despite evidence to suggest human and material resources are inappropriate, limitations on financial resources result in the school having to make do with the human and material resources they can access.

In this study, teachers reported inadequate resources and the misuse of resources. Locally sourced staff were inadequately trained and unable to fulfill their school roles. Further, local staff prioritised personal need and clan obligations over employee

responsibilities. Because the school was much better materially and economically resourced than households and the role of school resources was unclear to the community, resources were perceived quite differently between First Space members (teachers) and Second Space members (assistant teachers, students and their families). Teachers were conscious of the limitations of resources, taking care to look after the resources they had because they knew they could not or would not be replaced. Teachers invested much time and effort in caring for and creating the resources needed to provide effective teaching and learning. In contrast, assistant teachers, students and families prioritised immediate personal needs over long-term student learning. Assistant teachers ignored or failed to realise the importance of specific resources in student learning experiences. Families relied on the school to provide their children with much needed resources such as food, stationery, first aid resources or transport home. Teachers felt they were constantly in conflict with assistant teachers, families and students to value the classroom as a place for learning and appreciate the resources the teacher created and provided. Teachers were frustrated that the school's and teachers' efforts were perceived by community members as an unspoken yet constantly anticipated right without appreciating the community's need to contribute resources to their children's education.

Despite knowing they had to report the problems associated with resources, teachers did not carry out appropriate reporting. For example, teacher frustration at the continued regularity of minimal response from school leadership to these issues led them to not report an assistant teacher's inability to fulfill role responsibilities or the misuse of school resources. Teachers observed that school leadership attempts to address school employees' poor role fulfillment and resource management were frequently ignored by employees or portrayed by both Balanda and Binninj staff as being racially motivated. This led them to believe school leadership was powerless or disinterested in resolving these entrenched issues.

Resources provided to this school by the institution of education are inappropriate, failing to meet the needs of the students and negatively affecting teacher practice. The institution and the community are not on the same page in regards to the material-economic arrangements and their role in student academic outcomes. Because the institution and the community bring different practices and understandings about the

ways resources are obtained, accessed and allocated, the material-economic arrangements within the school start to collapse.

When a system starts collapsing, even the people inside it stop abiding by policies and procedures intended to ensure smooth operations. Members of the First Space itself, stopped complying with First Space rules and regulations. Second Space members did not perceive First Space devised consequences for misusing resources or not performing their roles as expected as legitimate by Second Space members. This resulted in a situation in which there were no real consequences for people of the Second Space within the First Space. Second Space people realised the shortcomings of First Space-derived consequences and were able to manipulate situations for their own benefit. First Space school leadership was also a victim of the institution because they were unable to act beyond the scope of institutional policy despite knowing First Space consequences would have little impact on changing Second Space members' behaviours. Additionally, school leadership could only employ local staff because other resources such housing was not available for school employed ancillary staff. School leaders knew local people applying for assistant teacher positions were inadequately skilled, but an adult who shared students' language and culture in the classroom was preferred over no one to support the teacher. As material-economic arrangements collapsed, challenges to teacher practice increased.

This school's potential as a Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) is pivotal to this study. A Third Space is created by people from two different cultural groups who consciously come together for an articulated and shared purpose. Together, actors from each group establish a hybrid culture, the Third Space, by contesting entrenched ideas about 'other', addressing tensions that arise from difference, and negotiating new, hybrid social arrangements and practices that best suit and enable actors to fulfill their shared purpose. By drawing on the characteristics of Bhabha's (1994) Third Space and the findings from this study, Table 22 describes pertinent features of 'what the remote community school could be'.

Significantly, nothing happens in the 'Third Space' school without direct and equitable input from leaders representing both cultural groups. A school leadership group comprising institutional and clan leaders with the authority to act on behalf of their group would need to be carefully selected and endorsed to direct what is and is not

possible in this school. Because difference would be the basis of altering the school model in this context potential arguments that difference would prevent agreement, in the school as a Third Space, would be illogical. The School Leadership team would need to either find a strategy to establish agreement pertaining to practice in this space or agree the aspect in contention remain in its First Space, either with Balanda or Binninj and be outside the school's core business.

First impressions of the Third Space, outlined in the practice landscape and practice traditions in Table 22, would reveal institution employees and Binninj as collaborating to meet a stated and visible purpose underpinning all school business. The schooling model would be developed to specifically meet student, family and community needs while enabling access to high quality education provided by the institution of education. Because not all Binninj households and families have the same need or capacity to access western education, it would be reasonable to envisage a school in which different schooling pathways could be negotiated with families based on individual and family need. For example, families with high academic aspirations, similar to those outlined by the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, 2016) for their children and the necessary home conditions and resources available to ensure daily school attendance would access a teaching and learning model similar to any other Australian school. This pathway could be named 'Pathway one'. Families wishing to maintain strong cultural traditions by way of regular attendance to ceremonies would be able to access a teaching and learning model that enables attendance and participation in both ceremony education and basic school education. This pathway could be named 'Pathway two'.

School norms for each pathway would be carefully negotiated in the range of the social arrangements which would address such factors as curriculum, assessment and reporting, staffing skill-sets including professional learning, material and financial resources, school hours, staff and student transitions into the school and/or school pathways. Significantly, all stakeholders would collaborate with cultural counterparts (for example, institutional with clan leaders; school leadership/support team with community leadership/support team; teachers with parents/caregivers) to ensure cultural balance and communication between institution and community stakeholders. Another example of ensuring democratic positioning of Binninj in school business would be achieved through the implementation of a school curriculum drawing on the institution's Australian curriculum (ACARA, 2016b) and locally produced Binninj

curriculum for the specific use of this school. How these two curriculums would come together would be guided by the schooling pathway, described above, in which the student was enrolled. The level of the Australian Curriculum would need to be carefully negotiated, as would student academic performance standards for both ceremony and school education. While the school would not need to know the precise details of ceremonies, particularly for those deemed as private Binninj business, teachers of both ceremony and school education would need to ensure student outcomes are documented and student learning progression monitored. Matters, of when, where, how and specific purpose of each curriculum would need to be negotiated by institution and clan leaders to ensure the authentic inclusion of ceremony education in the schooling model. This education pathway would also provide families with the required support to access the full benefit of western schooling. This support might include strategies to support student health and wellbeing in the household; specified time frames for attending ceremonies and for attending school; and opportunities to increase curriculum, literacy and numeracy skills and school-learner behaviours. Because the school's leadership group would comprise Balanda and Binninj, Binninj leadership could support Binninj rather than relying on Balanda which frequently reinforces deficit views of Aboriginal people.

Accountability would belong to all stakeholders. Institutional employees, visiting and residing in the community, and community stakeholders, including local employees and families, would be accountable to their presiding authority and each other. All stakeholders would be clear about their roles, responsibilities and accountabilities to students, school and community members and institution and clan authorities. In this way, individuals not fulfilling their role appropriately would be recognised by other First Space members and addressed by school developed policies and procedures. Staffing, school resources and home support would be allocated according to student need, paying particular attention to supporting students to achieve national and/or school determined academic benchmarks.

In its current state, the very practice architectures established by the institution to support and enhance teacher practice became a hindrance to, rather than supportive of teacher practice. However, the glimmers of Third Space suggest First Space and Second Space members are willing to collaborate to resolve issues. This willingness to collaborate in efforts to resolve existing challenges suggests new practice architectures

constructed in the realities of this specific circumstances of this context can be re-created such that they are supportive of teacher practice.

### 7.1.1 Implications for the institution of education

The challenges and disappointments articulated by the non-Aboriginal teachers in this research imply unequivocally that teachers and thus, remote Indigenous students, would benefit from the institution of education establishing remote Indigenous education as a specialised field. Arguably, remote Indigenous education is a complex field of education. Poor academic outcomes continue to plague remote schools and communities with much of the blame being leveled at teachers because they are the direct connection between the school and the community. Research indicates remote Indigenous schools require teachers to be culturally responsive (Nichol, 2011; Perso, 2012; Yunkaporta, 2009); linguistically responsive (Devlin, 2011; Silburn, Nutton, McKenzie, & Landrigan, 2011) able to work effectively with local teacher aides (Cooper et al., 2005; Jorgensen (Zevenbergen), Grootenboer, & Niesche, 2009); able to build strong relationships with community members (Bond, 2004; Buckskin, 2012); resilient in this type of cross-cultural context (Sullivan & Johnson, 2012); aware of the challenges experienced by remote Indigenous children and families; and aware of issues associated with white dominance (d'Arbon et al., 2009; Phillips, 2011; Trudgen, 2000). Added to this, teachers taking up tenure in remote communities also need to be aware of complex Aboriginal politics that shape how they are included and/or excluded from the community (Folds, 1987, 2001; Martin, 2008; Trudgen, 2000). As well as leadership and managerial skills, school and institutional leaders require the same skills as teachers with particular emphasis on the capacity to interact with the local Aboriginal community and to address the multifarious issues that arise from linguistic and cultural differences between teachers and the community.

This study indicates teachers did not have the necessary skills required to teach in a remote Aboriginal community because there was no specific career path demanding teachers have these skill sets. Teachers are expected to learn about remote Aboriginal education from poorly skilled leaders and support personnel, whilst simultaneously accelerating student learning to bring students' academic performance to national academic benchmarks. By making remote Indigenous education a specialised field, such as is the case with music education or special needs education, teachers could begin

training to teach in remote Indigenous contexts while at university. The institution could demand teachers demonstrate the requisite knowledge and a core set of attitudes and skills specific to teaching in remote Indigenous communities which develop from reflective experience in situ.

Families' current life circumstances indicate the need for families, via school learning, to be supported to balance pre-colonial practices with contemporary practices to address current social issues (Calma, 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009a, 2009b; Dodson, 2014; Wild & Anderson, 2007). This study indicates numerous social issues impacting on students' lives affect how students participate in the school, if at all. Currently, teacher practice is affected by many factors beyond their control resulting in expected institutional traditions not working in this school. Because teachers are unable to maintain the standard institutional traditions, they are frequently compelled by institutional leaders to "fix" their practices that might not need fixing. Teachers, as one stakeholder in remote Aboriginal education, are unable to improve the numerous issues impacting on their practice in isolation from other stakeholders.

The study also suggests that teachers and remote Indigenous students and their communities would benefit from the institution of education sharing educational leadership with local community leaders. Rather than separating the institution and the community, the remote Aboriginal community school context requires both the institution and the community to reflect on how current social arrangements support or disrupt teacher practice and, ultimately, student academic learning. Educational leadership in this context requires all stakeholders to reflect on institutional and community traditions that contribute to ineffective teacher practice rather than limiting changes to one stakeholder, the teacher. There is a need for the institution, in partnership with the community, to reflect on the purpose of the school in the context of the community rather than limiting primary schooling to children. By sharing educational leadership between institutional and community leaders, the purpose of the school could be co-constructed and made explicit with specific roles and responsibilities articulated and stakeholders held accountable.

### 7.1.2 Implications for policy

Significantly, this study indicates the need for governments and institutions to improve policies guiding interactions with remote Aboriginal communities. The findings of this

study suggest Rose's (2012) abyss between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australian continues despite claims of being a democratic nation that values Indigenous cultures as part of Australia's past, present and future (MCEETYA, 2008). Colonial dominance, steeped in a belief of white superiority, continues to contribute to the silent apartheid in which institutional perspectives are prioritised over authentic and local Aboriginal voices. Institutional expertise is frequently favoured over the lived experiences and desires of remote Aboriginal clan groups who successfully managed their society long before white settlement. Until addressed, paternalistic positioning of Indigenous people by institutional professionals will continue to undermine reforms and strategies that could generate improvements supposedly desired by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The language used to refer to Indigenous people in current policies continues to position Indigenous as another culture rather than a different nation (Mundine, 2016) thus immediately establishing government and institution superiority. This position of white superiority needs to be challenged by changing to language that reflects Indigenous society and all that implies, that is, as being capable of equal input as, for example, from another nation with whom Australia has negotiated and continues to maintain positive relationships.

The recent 2017 Closing the Gap Report (Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2017) includes the Australian government's acknowledgment that solutions developed 'for', rather than 'by' or 'with' Indigenous Australians have been ineffective. Folds (1987, 2001) and Martin (2008) clearly identify Indigenous Australians' strategies that undermine total white dominance, strategies that have been utilised effectively by community members in the context of this study. As indicated in the Findings chapter (Chapter Five) and the discussion chapter (Chapter Six), the community continues to participate with its children in ceremonies and other cultural activities despite these occurring at the same time as school days. The community also insists on teachers learning specific cultural practices such as poison cousins not being allowed to interact directly with each other and understanding gendered relationships. Indigenous Australians and academics, Indigenous and non-Indigenous (Maddison, 2011; Mundine, 2016; Pearson, 2016; Phillips & Luke, 2016; Rose, 2012), have long called for local solutions to local issues. Currently Australian governments and institutions seek input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples whom they perceive as being able to provide general guidance for the education system. But

generalised principles associated with Indigenous education have not led to desired improvements. Policies would need to be developed at the local level meaning an overarching policy would need to be developed to ensure institution and government leaders develop partnerships at the local level.

Policy is required to ensure all reforms and strategies directed at improving outcomes for remote Indigenous people are established through equal input from institution and community leaders. Indigenous Australians perceive themselves as nations in their own right (Mundine, 2016) and expect to be respected and regarded democratically (Pearson, 2016) by meeting equally with institutional leaders to counter liberal rhetoric (Ford, 2016) that does little to challenge good but misguided intentions (Lea, 2098) or fake remedies (Maddison, 2011).

Entrenched institutional practices currently favour institutional viewpoints over Indigenous viewpoints of how issues can be resolved. This conventional practice contributes to institutional employees, such as teachers, being set up to be ineffective practitioners because they seek to impose supposed 'community supported' solutions onto people who have had little to no real input in effecting change in their own lives. Language, cultural and societal differences between First Space and Second Space members create situations in which social arrangements and practices or each space are not readily accessible or understood by outsiders. In this context, Aboriginal people do not understand non-Aboriginal practices just as non-Aboriginal people do not understand Aboriginal practices. Trudgen (2000) explains that people in remote Aboriginal communities do not understand the complex language of policies and government reforms or the complex politics of governments and institutions. When the institution favours institutional professional viewpoints without authentic inclusion of Aboriginal viewpoints, tensions between the two groups are exacerbated rather than resolved. Recognising tokenistic gestures and further exclusion from having input in effecting change, Aboriginal people then turn to long held strategies they use to control institutional employees.

This study supports Folds' (1987, 2011) and Martin's (2008) assertions that remote Aboriginal people, denied equitable and democratic input in social change, utilise strategies to maintain pre-colonial practices as legitimate practices necessary for clan survival. Until new practices, such as those associated with western schooling, are

perceived by the local community as having a legitimate place in their society, Aboriginal people will continue to talk with their feet.

Reforms and strategies directed at improving outcomes for remote Indigenous people need to clearly articulate the roles and accountabilities of the institution, the agency (such as school), the agent (such as teacher) and of the community, family and the individual to achieve intended outcomes. The articulation of who does what is necessary to establish authentic partnerships between all stakeholders and diminish the perception that 'other' is ignorant or corrosive to teacher practice and student learning, supporting individual and group desire to work together. Further, the articulation of the roles and accountabilities of all stakeholders contributes to achieving the intended outcomes because each person and group knows what the other is doing and how their roles fit together and complement each other.

Another role for policy is to ensure negotiations between institutions and community leaders are supported by a neutral partner who has deep knowledge of institution and community desires, social arrangements and practices and is able to support individual and group navigation of such a complex undertaking. Policy also needs to consider financial and material resources to support the development and maintenance of institution and community partnerships *at the local level*.

### 7.2 Contribution to the field

This study makes methodological contributions for using Bhabha's (1994) Third Space theory and empirical contributions to the field of remote Aboriginal education.

Bhabha's Third Space theory (1994) lacks a precise framework to guide members of the potential Third Space to challenge existing social arrangements and describe new ways of working together. The creation of a Third Space is dependent on members of First Space and Second Space being able to attend to the specific characteristics of a space through careful negotiations. To understand what was going on in this remote Aboriginal community school, Kemmis, McTaggart and Nixon's Practice Architectures framework (2014) provided the means to explore the cultural-discursive, material-economic and social-political arrangements shaping teacher practices, expressed in teacher talk about practice and researcher observations, in this school. The Practice Architectures framework (2014) provided the means to locate teachers' sayings, doings

and relatings in the specific social arrangements expected of both the employing institution and the local community. Locating teachers' sayings, doings and relatings within the practice architectures of the school and considering teacher practices in terms of institutional and community practices enabled the identification of what was and was not possible in teachers' work.

Similarly, to enabling articulation of the challenges to teacher practice in the social space of this school, the Practice Architectures framework (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon, 2014) provided the means to describe the social characteristics of the remote Aboriginal community school as the idealised Third Space. The discussion generated from this study about challenges to teacher practice in this remote Aboriginal community school were made possible by comparing the current state of the school with the Third Space ideal. The Practice Architectures framework (Kemmis et al., 2014) overlaid onto Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994) provided the *language for enunciation* that Bhabha (1994) views as the most critical aspect for negotiating the Third Space. The language of the Practice Architecture framework (Kemmis et al., 2014) provides the basis for developing the shared language and specification of a Third Space between two different groups. The critical process of creating a Third Space requires members to attend to existing tensions and subjugate existing normative practices to reposition members as equal partners so they can work effectively together for a specific purpose. The language for examining the practice architectures via the sayings, doings and relatings within the shared space enables the tensions and existing normative practices to be identified, challenged and reimagined in the Third Space ideal.

Empirically, this study identified the circumstances undermining effective teacher practice in a remote Aboriginal community school. Despite teachers being cognisant of effective teaching practices (AITSL, 2012; Hattie, 2003, 2009), the complex interplay of factors within and beyond the control of the teacher prevent teachers from realising their desire to be quality practitioners. Teacher reported challenges indicate teachers are poorly prepared for teaching in remote Aboriginal communities and lack pertinent knowledge and skills to provide a culturally responsive education for their students. The institution relies on non-Aboriginal teachers to take up tenure in remote community schools. Teachers indicated they do not know how to teach English to non-English speaking students who have limited literacy experiences in the home and community. Further, teachers indicated that limited knowledge of students' home lives prevents

them from helping students make real connections with the western curriculum (ACARA, 2016). Teachers, unable to link Aboriginal and western practices, are poorly supported by Aboriginal employees and families and institutional employees who are similarly challenged to articulate how the two different cultural groups come together.

At the coalface of education in remote schools, teachers are involved in borderline engagements (Bhabha, 1994) with the Aboriginal clan groups that form the Aboriginal community. Bhabha (1994) argues that when two disparate groups meet at the borderline, such as in the remote community school, the school becomes "a site of in-betweenness" (p. 3) until terms of agreement can be negotiated in a way that creates a shared space. This study suggests the institution of education maintains the markedly colonial beliefs that the community do not understand education or schooling. This belief is supported when institutional professionals observe, without explanation or understanding, community behaviours that maintain distance between students and the school and teachers and the community. Mythologies about 'other' that exist at the site of in-betweenness contribute to the challenges experienced by teachers in this remote community school.

This study suggests institutions installed by Australian governments lack legitimacy for remote Aboriginal people because these institutions, in their current form, directly challenge and undermine clan social arrangements that have been in existence well before colonisation. Despite claims of initiating reforms to address issues experienced by remote Aboriginal people, current institutional social arrangements exclude local voices opting instead to rely on institutional employees, schooled in the practice architectures of education to make appropriate adjustments that enable Indigenous inclusion. But this approach fails to acknowledge Aboriginal people's perspectives, existing social arrangements or practices and therefore positions Aboriginal people as less than non-Aboriginal people and in need of rescuing via the dominant non-Aboriginal education system and its representatives. Rose (2012) labels the separation and segregation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in critical matters such as education as an abyss that perpetuates colonial traditions of non-Indigenous superiority. Teachers are amongst the well-intentioned non-Indigenous people who believe they are positioned to educate students for a better life, but as Lea (2008) argues, good intentions are not enough.

This study suggests the Aboriginal community are equipped with dialogue to satisfy institutional professionals while ensuring their own needs are met. Folds (1987, 2001) and Martin (2008) argue Indigenous Australians are very clear about how to manage non-Indigenous people who strive to act on their behalf, seek to (further) displace Indigenous practices and disrupt clan culture and do not hesitate in ignoring or undermining non-Indigenous practices by carrying on with business as usual. To attend to the multifarious challenges undermining effective teacher practice, both institutional professionals and the Aboriginal community need to bring honesty and integrity to democratic interactions formed in the Third Space ideal. Both institutional professionals and the Aboriginal community need to overcome any desire to manage the other by enabling each other to act on their own behalf to begin shaping the school as a social space in which both groups are equally valid and valued. Developing a democratic social space requires entrenched practices such as managing other to be labelled and altered. The entrenched practice of institutional professionals and the Aboriginal community managing each other and creating an illusion of sharedness will undermine attempts to effectively collaborate and meet both groups' aspirations.

### 7.3 Directions for further research

This study was limited to the challenges experienced by white teachers in one remote Aboriginal community school. The study could be undertaken elsewhere because contexts in which schools are dissimilar to the local community have unique characteristics that present challenges to teacher practice. In saying this, it is anticipated that some of the findings from this study would be replicated in other remote communities bearing similar characteristics to the context of this study in which over 80% of the school's population comprised Indigenous students and the education is designed and delivered by almost all non-Aboriginal people. Remote Aboriginal communities similar to the context in which this study took place are dominated by Indigenous clan social practices maintained by close proximity to traditional lands; students who do not speak Standard Australian English (SAE); students unfamiliar with concepts presented in the Australian curriculum; and an educational landscape plagued by poor student academic outcomes and poor student attendance. But this study only provides one side of a complex story.

While Aboriginal people have spoken out about the shortfalls of western education for remote students (Bond, 2004; Lewthwaite et al., 2015; Trudgen, 2000), the challenges experienced by remote Aboriginal families in ensuring their children are strong in both western and Aboriginal cultures has not been adequately explored. For institutional leaders and community leaders to engage in deliberate discussions that address the challenges to education in discrete remote Aboriginal communities, there is a need to understand the nature of the challenges experienced by community members and the causes of those challenges.

Research should also be undertaken in attempts at generating a Third Space in a remote Aboriginal community school. The Third Space briefly outlined in Table 22 is conjecture. Understanding the process of creating a remote Aboriginal community school as a Third Space (Bhabha, 1994) is as critical as the establishment of the Third Space. For example, insight is needed to understand how the institution and community utilise, or not, the democratic principles espoused in Third Space theory (Bhabha, 1994) to overcome entrenched dominant/subordinate relationships. Another example of possible research is to understand the specific features of Third Space social arrangements if schools are to overcome the challenges that currently prevent effective teacher practice and desired student academic performance.

Further interrogation into the reasons for and consequences of failed Participatory Action Research (PAR) projects would also be beneficial. In this study, despite contextual characteristics leading to the demise of the PAR project, reflections about why the PAR project failed provided clues to the more pertinent issue existing in the school: the challenges experienced by teachers in this remote Aboriginal community school. Had the PAR project succeeded, this study would not have taken place and insight into the lived and untenable situation taking place in this remote Aboriginal community in which teachers currently take up practice would have likely remained concealed. Interrogation into why PAR projects fail has the potential to lead to deeper understandings of taken for granted organisational and participant factors that are often overlooked. This study revealed organisational and participant factors, particularly in a context populated by people in historically dominant/subordinate relationships, that contribute to the failure of strategies that, for all accounts, should work to produce desired results. The failure of PAR, in this context, directed attention to undemocratic

social arrangements and exclusive practices that undermined the very issue it sought to address: effective teacher practice for quality student learning.

### 7.4 Final conclusion

This study suggests the institution's emphasis on teacher practice in the classroom and student attendance to the exclusion of scrutinising systemic and community conditions will not lead to the desired improved educational outcomes. Numerous institutional and community factors prevent teacher effectiveness which, in turn, impacts negatively on student academic performance. The challenges expressed by teachers in this study are unacceptable for teachers and insupportable for students. If not addressed, will continue to undermine student learning and academic performance because the root cause of poor outcomes has not been addressed.

Teachers employed in remote Aboriginal community schools are as much a casualty of inappropriate social arrangements as the students they teach. Neither the teachers nor the students are adequately resourced. The institution's ineffectiveness in this remote Aboriginal community school needs to be examined before devising and implementing more reforms or strategies. Despite committing significant time, resources and institutional expertise to ensuring quality teachers provide quality education for remote Aboriginal students, institution based solutions undemocratically position the local community and teachers. This study shows input from *both* institutional and community members directly associated with this school, adequate training for *both* and consequences not fulfilling school related obligations for *both* are pivotal factors upon which the success of remote Indigenous education relies.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A. Moieties: The relationship between people and country

The concept of the moiety Jowunga/Yirrichinga is best considered in terms of balance. Children belong to their father's clan and moiety which is different to their mother's clan and moeity. When the father is Jowunga, the child is also Jowunga but the mother is Yirrichinga. During Jowunga ceremonies only Jowunga people can attend just as Yirrichinga people can only participated in Yirrichinga ceremonies.

> Each moiety is associated with particular colour and proportions: (Jowunga) colours are darker (red and black) and associated with shortness. (Yirrichinga) colours are lighter (yellow and white) and associated with tallness. For example, the black cockatoo is (Jowunga) while the white cockatoo is (Yirrichinga). The short neck turtle is (Yirrichinga) and the long neck turtle is (Jowunga) (Jawoyn Association Aboriginal Corporation, n.d. para 6)

People are the traditional owners of their father's country and the managers of their mother's country. A Djunguy has authority of their mother's country and ultimate control of the resources assigned to their moiety. If a Djunguy does not carefully manage the resources of his or her mother's country then that resource can become locally extinct leaving people without the valuable resource and reflecting badly on the Djunguy as a leader and resource manager. Historically, any clan member whose lack of knowledge or undesirable behaviours threatened the existence of the clan group and the maintenance of *ROM* was ostracised from the clan group.

In ensuring the greatest care is taken in managing land and resources, clan members align their identity with 'country'.

> Clan members own areas of land and waters in common. The relationship is, however, much more complex than just 'owning', or even 'caring for' the land. (Aboriginal people) often say that they 'come from' the land or that they *are* the land – a difficult concept for non-Aboriginal people to grasp. (United Nations General Assembly, 2008)

All clan members are managers and land owners who learn their roles through a complex education system that continues throughout a person's life. Clan members learn about their mother's country and their father's country by residing on country for

specific parts of their lives directed by ceremonies and requests from their mothers and grandmothers and fathers and grandfathers.

**Appendix B. Skin names**

The gesture of Binninj, usually an employee of the school, giving a skin name to Balanda, usually a teacher at the school, is a significant act of acceptance. When a person is given a skin name, others in the community are able to determine their relationship with the person and act accordingly. Importantly, your mother and the clan group by whom you are named, directs the skin name you are given. Figure 1 and the ensuing account of how I am located on the Burarra Malk provide insight into how kinship is arranged in this clan group. I have selected the Burarra Malk because I was given my skin name by a Burarra woman. I call that Burarra woman my 'sister' and share her skin name 'Bulanyjan'. Following the Burarra account, I provide the Ndjébanna Malk (Figure 2) to illustrate differences in skin names and similarities in kinship arrangements.

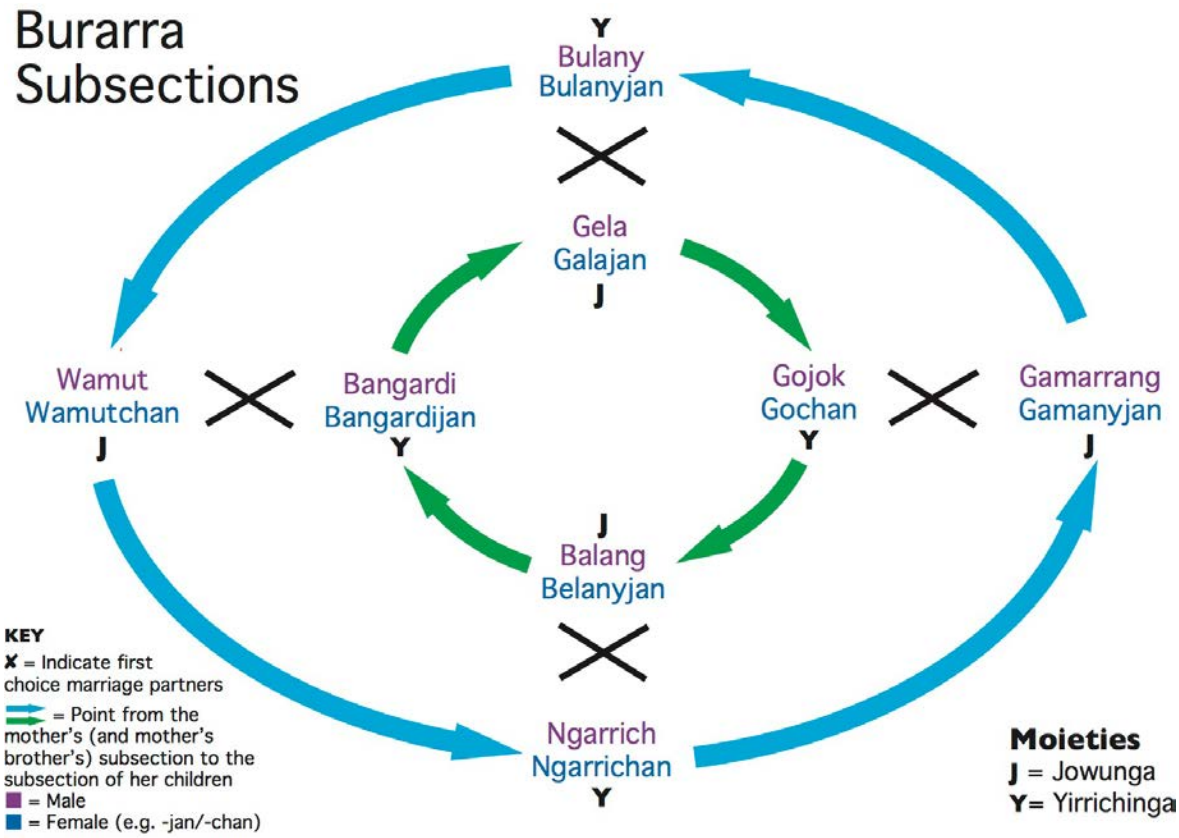



Figure 1 Burarra Malk: Skin group circle

The best way to explain the Burarra Malk chart is to locate myself as 'Bulanjan' at the top of the outer circle. As a female, my male counterpart is 'Bulanj'. He is my brother.

My sister/s all share my name, ‘Bulanjan’. Under my skin name (Bulanjan) and that of my brother (Bulanj) are two other male and female skin names. These skin names are Ndjebánna words that identify the same skin as my Burarra words.

My ‘right skin’ husband can be either ‘Gela’ (top of the inner circle) or ‘Balang’ (bottom of the inner circle). Gela is my first choice husband while Balang is my second choice husband. Traditionally, I would marry my first choice husband however if this was not possible (for example, he had passed away) or truly unpalatable I could choose my second choice husband. Gela and Balang are my only choices for husbands thus rendering all other males as unavailable or ‘wrong skin’.

My children locate their skin name by following the arrow to the left. The direction of the arrow shows what skin name the children will have from the mother’s side. My daughter is ‘Wamutchan’. My sister’s daughter is also ‘Wamutchan’. My sister’s son is ‘Wamut’. I also call my sister’s son ‘Wamut’. Skin names are a ‘calling’ name that traditionally are more commonly used than the name given by your parents eg. Tracey. As Wamutchan and Wamut marry their respective first or second choice partners and have their families, so the cycle continues.

A skin names is a ‘calling’ name that is more commonly used than the name given by your parents eg. Tracey. In classrooms, students often refer to each other by their skin name with students responding more quickly to their skin name than their given name. Teachers coming to this community are quickly given a skin name so they can be located within the local kinship structures. It is important that teachers and other Balanda learn their skin names if they wish to build and maintain respectful relationships with the local community. If a Balanda is not given a skin name this indicates that no-one in the local community is willing to take responsibility for this person.

‘Wrong skin’ relationships are likely to occur when kinship arrangements, as outlined in Malk charts, are unknown or ignored. “Penalties for marriage outside skin were harsh and frequently resulted in death” (Dhimurru Aboriginal Corporation, 2015). Most people continue to marry the correct skin as the wrong skin marriages continue to be frowned upon and frequently lead to the married couple and ensuing children being socially ostracised.

Importantly for teachers in this community, if a Kunibidji person grants a teacher a skin name then the teacher uses the Ndjébanna Malk. The same rule applies for Burarra (as relayed in this appendix) and Kuningku.

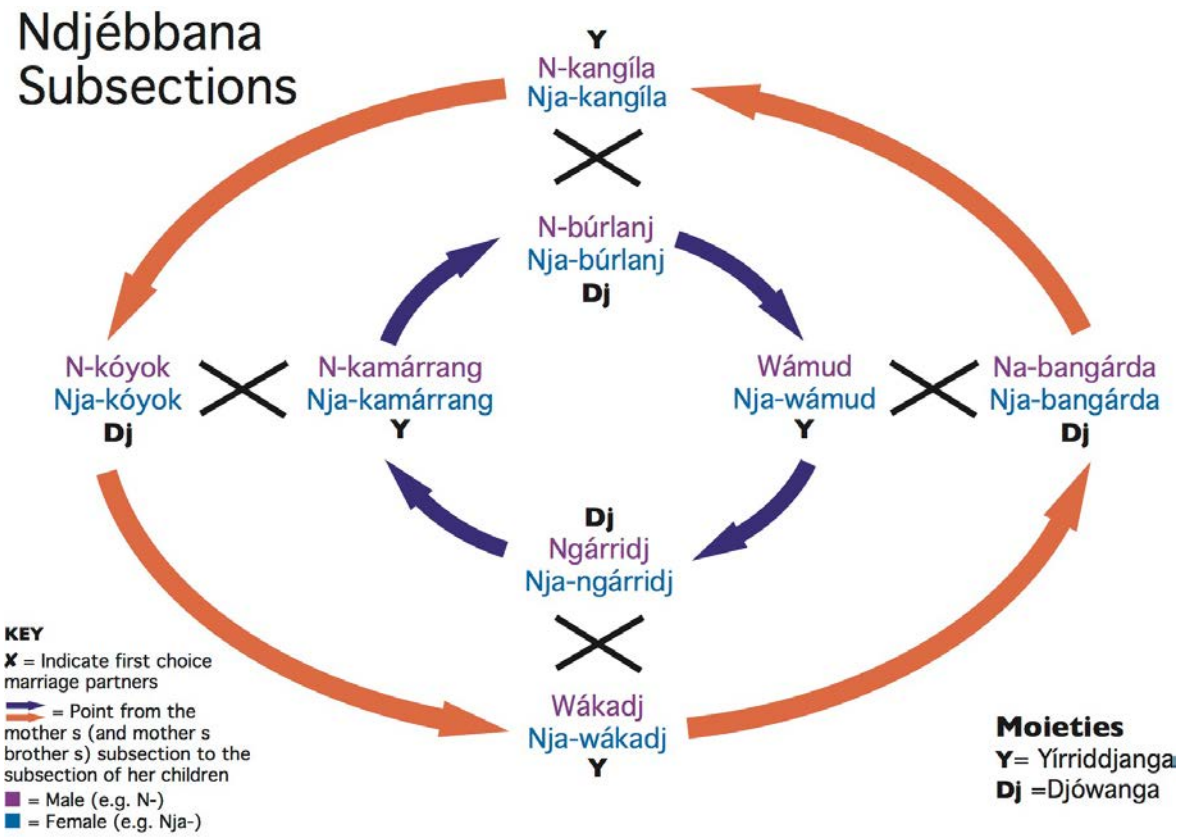



Figure 2. Ndjébanna Malk: Skin group circle

## Appendix C. Poison Cousin

A term commonly used, and thought to be understood by Balanda, is ‘poison cousin’. This term is given to a person of the opposite gender who is potentially an in-law. Poison cousins are not allowed to speak directly to or have physical contact with each other. While ‘poison’ relationships are not literally poisonous they do maintain a level of social order. The poison cousin relationship is upheld with people who have reached puberty, including school-aged students and is enforced in all social situations, including the school, by clan members.

**Appendix D. Conceptual differences in understanding 'time'**

In Term Eight of this study, I was exploring numeracy with local pre-service teachers in one unit of their Bachelor of Teaching and Learning Primary (BTLP) course. During one lesson I had the pre-service peruse the Australian Curriculum subject area of mathematics, noting how concepts such as operations and time became increasingly more complex as we progressed through curriculum levels. I noticed that most of my students got a funny look on their face when we began exploring Year Three onwards. As I tried to engage the pre-service teachers in discussions about how these concepts might be experienced by our students, these same pre-service teachers became silent. At this point in the lesson I changed my strategy by dividing my students into two groups. One group (Group 1) comprised two students who had spent most of their life living in a major city and completing Year 12. The other group (Group 2) comprised students who had spent most of their life in this community although they had attended a Darwin boarding school during Years Nine and Ten about twenty-five years earlier in an era when the education system lacked accountability to Indigenous student learning outcomes. Both groups were asked to write down all the time words and concepts they had encountered in the last few months onto a large sheet of butchers paper. Group 1 produced Table 23 and Group 2 produced Table 23.

I encouraged both groups to continue looking in the curriculum document to prompt their thoughts and to provide the precise language. During the lesson Group 2 kept looking over at Group 1 who were writing rigorously and recalling incidences involving specific mathematical concepts. Whereas Group 1 had a full sheet of time terms, Group 2's sheet had very little.

The next day, we continued this lesson during which I displayed the time terms that Group 1 had recorded (Table 23). I selected a couple of terms that were beyond Year Three and asked group one students to recall situations in which they had used the concepts. I observed group one listening on in interest but remaining silent. I then asked all the pre-service teachers how often these concepts were used by people in this community. The group replied 'never'. As I explored this with pre-service teachers, they revealed Balandas in the community usually did this work for them. We returned to the powerpoint and began deleting words students knew were not used in the community by students or adults (Table 23).

Table 23 Time words and concepts experienced by Group 1

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • Millennium<br>• Century<br>• Decade<br>• Year<br>• Month<br>• Week<br>• Day<br>• Hour<br>• Minute<br>• Second<br>• Millisecond<br>• Past<br>• Present<br>• Future<br>• Monday<br>• Tuesday<br>• Wednesday<br>• Thursday<br>• Friday<br>• Saturday<br>• Sunday<br>• Clocks<br>• AM, PM<br>• Calendar<br>• Gregorian<br>• Sundial<br>• Timer<br>• Stop watch<br>• J, F, M, A, M, J, J, A, S, O, N, D | • Measure<br>• Event<br>• Date<br>• History<br>• Today<br>• Yesterday<br>• Tomorrow<br>• Ages<br>• Dawn<br>• Dusk<br>• Morning<br>• Night<br>• Term<br>• Semester<br>• Season<br>• Spring<br>• Summer<br>• Autumn<br>• Winter<br>• Late<br>• Early<br>• Hourglass<br>• Alarm<br>• Clock<br>• Watch<br>• Atomic<br>• Cycle<br>• Pattern<br>• Equinox<br>• Solstice | • Measure<br>• AEST<br>• When<br>• Duration<br>• Chronology<br>• Elapsed<br>• Calculate<br>• Mayan calendar<br>• Planets<br>• Moon<br>• Sun<br>• Phase<br>• Daylight<br>• Savings<br>• Linear<br>• Cyclical<br>• Space time<br>• Universal<br>• Our of date<br>• Make haste<br>• Time limit<br>• Long time<br>• No time<br>• Temporarily<br>• Crunch time<br>• Kill time<br>• Big time<br>• Stitch in time<br>• Soon<br>• Later | • For the moment<br>• Momentarily<br>• High time<br>• Interval<br>• Show time<br>• Through the ages<br>• Once upon a time<br>• Time and time again<br>• Time line<br>• Time zone<br>• 12 hr<br>• 24 hr<br>• Rotate<br>• Revolve<br>• Daily<br>• Weekly<br>• Fortnight<br>• Fortnightly<br>• Monthly<br>• O'clock<br>• Half past<br>• Quarter past<br>• Quarter to<br>• Ten past<br>• Ten to<br>• From time to time | • Time out<br>• Time again<br>• Time<br>• Synchronise<br>• Ahead<br>• Behind<br>• Big bang<br>• Time travel<br>• Time machine<br>• Time perception<br>• Time management<br>• Schedule<br>• Plan<br>• Tables<br>• Chart<br>• Timetable<br>• Hinder<br>• Period<br>• Chime<br>• Midday<br>• Deadline<br>• Tempo Metronome<br>• Beat<br>• Standard time<br>• Cuckoo<br>• Session<br>• Nostalgia |

As our discussions progressed, the pre-service teachers identified the lack of Aboriginal language or English for more complex time words presented on group one's sheet (Table 22). The pre-service teachers also determined their way of life in the community did not require them to use or rely on terms presented on group one's sheet.

The pre-service teacher then went on to recall how teachers relied on them, as assistant teachers, to translate many of these time words and other concepts for the students. Pre-service teachers identified differences in the way of life between teachers and students led to a lack of understanding of the concepts and no language to enable talk about concepts with students. Pre-service teachers also recalled incidences in which either students or assistant teachers could not explain concepts to white teachers because white teachers did not have the concept in their way of life.

Table 24 Time words and concepts understood and used by the local community

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| • | • | • | • | • |
| • | • | • | • | • |
| • | • | • When | • | • |
| • | • | • | • | • |
| • | • Today | • | • | • |
| • | • Yesterday | • | • | • |
| • Day | • Tomorrow | • | • | • |
| • Hour | • | • | • | • |
| • | • | • | • | • |
| • | • | • | • | • |
| • | • Morning | • Moon | • | • |
| • Past | • Night | • Sun | • | • |
| • Present | • | • | • | • |
| • Future | • | • Daylight | • | • |
| • | • Season | • | • | • |
| • | • | • | • | • |
| • | • | • | • | • |
| • | • | • | • | • |
| • | • | • | • | • |
| • | • Late | • | • | • |
| • | • Early | • | • | • |
| • | • | • | • | • |
| • | • | • Long time | • | • Midday |
| • | • | • No time | • | • |
| • | • Watch | • | • past | • |
| • | • | • | • | • |
| • | • | • | • to | • |
| • | • | • Big time | • | • |
| • | • | • | • | • |
| • | • | • Soon | • | • |
| | • | • later | • | • |
| | | • | | |

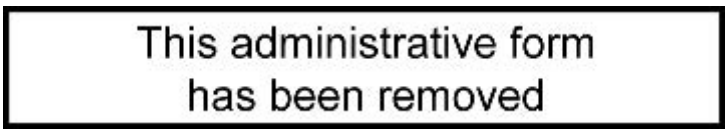
## Appendix E. Differences in social orders and arrangements leading to conflict

In the following account I attempt to explain how differences between Balanda and Binninj communication and social orders. One symptom of colonisation that continually arises in this community as a point of tension is the distribution of resources. While Balanda have a strong system of buy/sell or borrow/return for the exchange of resources, the Binninj way is needs based; people who have enough are obliged to share the resource. It is understood, within Binninj culture, the recipient will pay in kind by sharing their resources at a later date. What is not communicated due to language differences is that in-kind repayment does not precisely mean sharing the same resource. For example, a traditional landowner gives permission for a Balanda to visit his/her country to go fishing. The Balanda believes he/she has fulfilled their part of the deal by asking permission as Australia is a free country and there was no request for payment made at the original exchange. Binnij do not ask for payment at the exhange because he/she believes the Balanda will share some of the fish with him/her or provide another resource such as a tin of flour as payment. It is impolite to ask for payment. When the Balanda does not provide payment, the Balanda is perceived as rude. When the Balanda finds out Binninj is upset (usually through a convoluted process of gossip) the Balanda also takes offence because there was no physical structure indicating ownership and the land owner did not make his/her expectation clear at the start. Additionally, the Balanda often perceives that he/she has to pay approximately $50 for the tin of flour while Binninj lost nothing by the Balanda fishing on his/her land. Additionally, if the Balanda only catches one fish, the Balanda believes $50 is a great expense for one fish which Binninj get for free anyway. While Balanda place value on money, Binninj place value on the resources of country.

**Appendix F. Permission from the School Principal.**

**Appendix G. Permission from Yuyabol, the Maningrida School Council**

**Appendix H. Ethics approval**



**Appendix I. NTDET permission to conduct research**

## Appendix J. Information sheet for participating teachers

### INTERVIEW INFORMATION SHEET

### Teacher interpretation of quality teaching and learning for Indigenous students in remote contexts: A Participatory Action Research

You are invited to take part in a Participatory Action Research project about how registered and assistant teachers interpret 'quality' teaching and learning. This project is aiming to find out what teachers know, do and consider when they make teaching and learning decisions for Indigenous students in a remote context.

This study is intended to

a. provide insight into the underlying elements influencing how a teacher interprets and enacts quality teaching and learning and

*b.* demonstrate the role of Participatory Action Research in remote Indigenous school reform.

The study is being conducted by Tracey Egan and will contribute to her Doctoral Thesis in Education at James Cook University.

Part of this research is for participants to work closely with the researcher to comprehensively interrogate practice to identify your knowledge, skills and perceptions about teaching and learning.

If you agree to be involved in the deep interrogation of practice, you will be asked to have lessons observed and video-taped followed by an interview about the lesson as we view the video-tape to prompt our discussion. The observed and video-taped lesson will be negotiated and should take approximately 40 minutes unless otherwise stipulated by you. The interview, with your consent, will be audio-taped, and should only take approximately 1 hour of your time. The interview will be conducted at a venue of your choice. The questions asked during the interview will focus on what guided you in making decisions about your selected practice. This will include Departmental mandates, school directives, expectations of students, use of data, standards, relationships with teaching staff and students, resources, your experiences and your understanding of your and students' epistemologies.

Taking part in this deep interrogation of practice is completely voluntary and you can stop taking part in the study at any time without explanation or prejudice. You may also withdraw any unprocessed data from the study.

There are no risks associated with the study as it is examining the teacher's core business and aligns with the Maningrida reform agenda.

Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential. The data from the study will be used in research publications, reports and publication in the Doctoral Thesis. You may be invited to co-author research publications and/or co-present at

conferences. This will negotiated with the Principal and is completely voluntary. You will not be identified in any way in these publications unless you otherwise wish to be at a conference in which you co-present.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Tracey Egan, Dr Jo Balatti or Dr Cecily Knight.


**Principal Investigator:**
**Tracey Egan**

**School of Education**
**James Cook University**

**Mobile:** [redacted]
**Email:** [redacted]

**Supervisor Name:**
**Dr Jo Balatti**

**School of Education**
**James Cook University**

**Phone:** [redacted]

**Email:**

**Supervisor Name :**
**Dr Cecily Knight**

**School of Education**
**James Cook University**

**Phone:** [redacted]

**Email:** [redacted]


***If you have any concerns regarding the ethical conduct of the study, please contact:***
[redacted] ***Human Ethics and Grants Administrator, Research Office***
***James Cook University, Townsville, Qld, 4811***
***Phone:*** [redacted]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**Appendix K. Consent forms for participating teachers**

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## Appendix L. Information sheet for senior leadership

### FOCUS LEADERSHIP TEAM INFORMATION SHEET

**Teacher interpretation of quality teaching and learning for Indigenous students in remote contexts: A Participatory Action Research**

You are invited to take part in a Participatory Action Research project about how registered and assistant teachers interpret 'quality' teaching and learning. This project is aiming to find out what teachers know, do and consider when they make teaching and learning decisions for Indigenous students in a remote context.

This study is intended to

a. provide insight into the underlying elements influencing how a teacher interprets and enacts quality teaching and learning and
*b.* demonstrate the role of Participatory Action Research in remote Indigenous school reform.

The study is being conducted by Tracey Egan and will contribute to her Doctoral Thesis in Education at James Cook University.

As a member of Senior Leadership, your team provides guidance to teachers as they navigate the change agenda. The leadership team's understanding of 'quality' and their responses to teachers' interpretation of quality teaching and learning are influential to teacher's interpretation in turn. If you agree to be involved in the study, you will be invited to participate in a focus group comprising the Senior Leadership team. The focus group, with your consent, will be audio-taped, and should take approximately 2 hours per fortnight of your time. The focus group will be conducted at a venue selected for its suitability. The questions asked during the focus group will focus on how your experiences (including school, interests, cultural and social experiences) influence your enactment of your current role as it relates to quality teaching and learning.

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary and you can stop taking part in the study at any time without explanation or prejudice. You may also withdraw any unprocessed data from the study. Please be aware that confidentiality can not be guaranteed during a focus group due to the other participants involved.

There are no risks associated with the study as it is examining the teacher's core business and aligns with the Maningrida reform agenda.

As some people do have problems with reading and writing, you may find some the questions a little distressing. If you do feel upset or distressed in any way, (examples of referral if distressed - 1. please advise the researcher and you will be referred to someone who can help you. 2. the researcher will provide the contact details (of an appropriate counselling service) for you.

Your responses and contact details will be strictly confidential. The data from the study will be used in research publications, reports and publication in the Doctoral

Thesis. You will not be identified in any way in these publications.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact Tracey Egan, Dr Jo Balatti or Dr Cecily Knight


| Principal Investigator: | Supervisor Name: | Supervisor Name : |
|---|---|---|
| **Tracey Egan** | **Dr Jo Balatti** | **Dr Cecily Knight** |
| **School of Education** | **School of Education** | **School of Education** |
| **James Cook University** | **James Cook University** | **James Cook University** |
| **Mobile:** [redacted] | **Phone:** [redacted] | **Phone:** [redacted] |
| **Email:** [redacted] | **Email:** [redacted] | **Email:** [redacted] |


***If you have any concerns regarding the ethical conduct of the study, please contact:***
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***James Cook University, Townsville, Qld, 4811***
***Phone:*** [redacted]


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**Appendix M. Consent form for senior leadership**

This administrative form has been removed

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## Appendix N. Distribution of episodes in the elements of practice within the AITSL Professional Standards for Teachers

| Standard 1 | | Standard 2 | | Standard 3 | | Standard 4 | | Standard 5 | | Standard 6 | | Standard 7 | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Know students and how they learn | # | Know the content and how to teach it | # | Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning | # | Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments | # | Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning | # | Engage in professional learning | # | Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/ carers and the community | # |
| 1.1 Physical, social and intellectual development and characteristics of students | 18 | 2.1 Content and teaching strategies of the teaching area | 3 | 3.1 Establish challenging learning goals | 5 | 4.1 Support student participation | 3 | 5.1 Assess student learning | 10 | 6.1 Identify and plan professional learning needs | 0 | 7.1 Meet professional ethics and responsibilities | 5 |
| | 1 | | 0 | | 0 | | 1 | | 2 | | 1 | | 17 |
| | **19** | | **3** | | **5** | | **4** | | **12** | | **1** | | **22** |
| 1.2 Understand how students learn | 11 | 2.2 Content selection and organisation | 1 | 3.2 Plan, structure and sequence learning programs | 8 | 4.2 Manage classroom activities | 1 | 5.2 Provide feedback to students on their learning | 0 | 6.2 Engage in professional learning and improve practice | 13 | 7.2 Comply with legislative, administrative and organisational requirements | 25 |
| | 0 | | 0 | | 0 | | 0 | | 0 | | 1 | | 24 |
| | **11** | | **1** | | **8** | | **1** | | **0** | | **14** | | **49** |
| 1.3 Students with diverse linguistic, cultural, religious and socioeconomic backgrounds<br>1.4 Strategies for teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students | 64 | 2.3 Curriculum, assessment and reporting | 4 | 3.3 Use teaching strategies | 1 | 4.3 Manage challenging behaviour | 25 | 5.3 Make consistent and comparable judgments | 0 | 6.3 Engage with colleagues and improve practice | 25 | 7.3 Engage with the parents/carers | 15 |
| | 42 | | 2 | | 1 | | 1 | | 3 | | 27 | | 8 |
| | **106** | | **6** | | **2** | | **26** | | **3** | | **52** | | **23** |
| | | 2.4 Understand and respect ATSI* people to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians | 2 | 3.4 Select and use resources | 5 | 4.4 Maintain student safety | 16 | 5.4 Interpret student data | 1 | 6.4 Apply professional learning and improve student learning | 1 | 7.4 Engage with professional teaching networks and broader communities | 4 |
| | | | 0 | | 5 | | 8 | | 2 | | 4 | | 1 |
| | | | **2** | | **10** | | **24** | | **3** | | **5** | | **5** |
| Total number of episodes in each Domain | **136** | | **12** | | **25** | | **55** | | **18** | | **72** | | **99** |

Key: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

**Appendix N Continued**

| 1 | | 2 | | 3 | | 4 | | 5 | | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Know students and how they learn** | **#** | **Know the content and how to teach it** | **#** | **Plan for and implement effective teaching and learning** | **#** | **Create and maintain supportive and safe learning environments** | **#** | **Assess, provide feedback and report on student learning** | **#** | **Engage in professional learning** | **Engage professionally with colleagues, parents/carers and the community** | **#** |
| 1.5 Differentiate teaching to meet the specific learning needs of students across the full range of abilities | 5<br>0<br>**5** | 2.5 Literacy and numeracy strategies | 12<br>17<br>**29** | 3.5 Use effective classroom communication | 1<br>0<br>**1** | 4.5 Use ICT safely, responsibly and ethically | 0<br>0<br>**0** | 5.5 Report on student achievement | 1<br>0<br>**1** | | | |
| 1.6 Strategies to support full participation of students with disability | 1<br>0<br>**1** | 2.6 Information and Communication Technology (ICT) | 2<br>0<br>**2** | 3.6 Evaluate and improve teaching programs | 2<br>0<br>**2** | | | | | | | |
| | | | | 3.7 Engage parental carers in the educative process | 0<br>0<br>**0** | | | | | | | |
| Total number of episodes in each Domain | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Key: First # in each cell: # episodes identified by participating teacher Second #: # of episodes identified by researcher Third #: total number of episodes for this element